Imagined Homelands
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Greater Britain, Imperial Federation, and the Anglo-Saxon World

In the later nineteenth-century, as forms of nationalism rose to prominence in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, cultural coherence often took shape around ideas of race. The “shifting sands between cultural and racial accounts of ‘Englishness,’” which John Plotz describes as characteristic of late-Victorian England, resulted in forms of instability throughout Britain’s colonial spaces.¹ Poetry of the era reflected this instability, moving between pride in colonial identity and pride in an imagined Anglo-Saxon heritage that was thought to link all Britain’s colonies.²

Late-Victorian colonialists in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada worried that nationalist pride would leave them alienated from Britain. The English historian John Robert Seeley (1834–95) did his best to mitigate these concerns in a series of lectures at Cambridge University, lectures eventually collected in his 1883 volume *The Expansion of England*. Urging his fellow Britons to understand Australia and Canada as part of the United Kingdom, held together by “community of race, community of religion, and community of interest,” Seeley contributed to a broader and ongoing debate about “Greater Britain”: an emerging catchphrase for the United Kingdom and its colonies.³ The language of race and blood figures significantly in the rhetoric of Greater Britain, connecting the perceived triumph of Britain to a biological imperative toward expansion: “a population of English blood,” “the English race.”⁴ Seeley and other theorists of Greater Britain imagined a global power unified by race and connected by the modern technologies of steamships and electric telegraph cables: for some, a white English core radiating out to its peripheral spaces; for others, a network of interconnected and equally significant parts.⁵
Sentiment ranged from those wanting the colonies to become independent nations to those endorsing an imperial federation. According to Robert Stout (1844–1930), a Scottish emigrant to New Zealand who served the colony as both premier and then chief justice, the years between 1870 and 1887 saw a shift of sentiment favoring “some form of union” between Britain and her colonies: “the hope is that separation will be prevented.” For Stout, the connections within Greater Britain would be upheld through both race—“the race feeling is strong”—and culture: “Is it unreasonable to expect that people speaking the same language, reading the same books, having the same creeds, and being reared from the same race, may learn to live in peace and mutually assist each other?” One of the primary contributors to the debate, James Anthony Froude (1818–94), put forward the term Oceana in 1886 to describe the global amalgamation he imagined for Greater Britain: not an “empire,” for “the English race do not like to be parts of an empire,” but instead “a ‘commonwealth’ of Oceana held together by common blood, common interest, and a common pride in the great position which unity can secure.” Note that Froude’s three commonalities—blood, interest, and pride—overlap almost completely with Seeley’s, substituting just “pride” for “religion.”

Ideas of Greater Britain and imperial federation found their way into and were to some extent shaped by British and colonial poetry, where the pomp of formal structure—rhythm, rhyme, meter—contributed to the patriotic, nation-building content. Meredith Martin has shown that the connection between poetic form and Anglo-Saxon identity had been firmly established in the early nineteenth century; by the turn of the twentieth century, Anglo-Saxon poetic forms had come to represent “stable English national culture.” That notion of stability was in turn projected out to the world at large and taken up in both colonial and imperial spaces to promote a global Anglo power.

Rudyard Kipling promoted the ideas of imperial federation in his poetry on the Second Boer War. After sailing from Britain to the Cape in April 1898, he pushed for a federated South Africa modeled on the confederation Canada had achieved in 1867. Kipling saw the war as an opportunity for building camaraderie among British and colonial soldiers, camaraderie he anticipated would substantiate an imperial federation. Imagining men from Britain’s colonies together in South Africa, he writes in “The Parting of the Columns”: “Think o’ the stories round the fire, the tales along the trek—/O’ Calgary an’ Wellin’ton, an’ Sydney and Quebec.” The parade of colonial soldiers unit-
ing to defend Britain’s interests in South Africa warmed Kipling’s heart. How “wonderful” it is, he writes in an 1899 letter, to witness “the spectacle of the three Free Nations”—Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—working together to “secure moderately decent Government for a sister people.”

Even more, Kipling believed, those colonial soldiers sharing “stories round the fire” in South Africa would return to their homes in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand with a renewed commitment to Greater Britain and Imperial Federation.

Race is implicit Kipling’s Boer War poems. In Benjamin George Ambler’s Ballads of Greater Britain and Songs of an Anglo-Saxon (1900) it becomes explicit. The volume advocates for a worldwide Anglo community, a community understood to be white, using both rhythm and rhyme to emphasize global unity:

Sons of the old world and heirs of the new,
Gather and listen—the earth hath her song.
This is the saga she singeth to you:
Anglo-Saxons, arise and be strong,
Be ye as brothers in arms and in art,
Clasping your kinsmen from over the sea;
There is no war-cloud shall rend you apart,
If ye stand firm when the dark hour shall be.

Ambler’s volume links Anglo-Saxon identity to a global polity, a worldwide race of “Men and brothers” that will stand strong against the “savage horde.” Poetry from this angle explicitly rallies racialized communal sentiment to political ends, showcasing how verse, to borrow Martin’s terms, was employed as “a disciplinary aspect of the imperial project.”

The language of race worked to unify a disparate Greater Britain, but it also competed in colonial spaces with the language of nation. Colonialists in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were not always as sure that they shared a “community of interest” with the United Kingdom, though many of them wished for such connections. Paeans to imperial federation and Greater Britain competed with rallying cries for Canadian, Australian, and (to a somewhat lesser degree) New Zealand independence. New Brunswick native Martin Butler, for example, in an 1898 volume, Patriotic and Personal Poems, imagined a future Canada that was “great, glorious, free . . . a colony no more.” To the degree that individual colonies articulated their identity in racial terms, they were more likely to identify with their British
roots. Advocates for colonial federation and various forms of new nationalisms, primarily in Canada and Australia, worked to articulate independence from Britain while still identifying racially as Anglo-Saxon. The tensions between nationalism and racial identification help explain why the 1901 Australian parliament, in Australia’s first year as a federated nation, passed legislation that formally inaugurated the White Australia policy, restricting new Australian immigration primarily to whites. Australia’s parliament was in effect asserting that its Anglo-Saxon identification would persist even after achieving independence from Britain.

In what follows, I examine Australian and Canadian nationalism within the broader discourses of race and imperial federation. Becoming independent nations meant overcoming the sense of colonial dislocation articulated by poets like Henry Kendall and learning how to feel at home in lands first occupied by others. This explicitly communal endeavor drew strength from the era’s patriotic verses: works by the Bulletin School in Australia and the Confederation Poets in Canada. As we have seen throughout nineteenth-century colonial spaces, examined in each of the preceding chapters, feeling and genre worked together as poems circulated through communities of readers. The sentimental tradition that enabled early settlers to feel at home developed at century’s end into a variety of nationalist and racist traditions, encouraging readers to imagine themselves united as citizens of newly emerging nations.

We begin with a brief account of Anglo-Saxonism as a global Victorian phenomenon.

**Anglo-Saxon Poetry**

Race and national identity were nearly inseparable concepts in the nineteenth century, as the historian Nell Irvin Painter has shown. Common among Victorian theorists was the idea that the Anglo-Saxons, in Painter’s words, were “respecters of freedom within their brotherhood and natural rulers of other races.” For example, Sharon Turner argued in *The History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1799) that Britain’s “Saxon ancestors brought with them a superior domestic and moral character, and the rudiments of new political, juridical, and intellectual blessings.” Robert Knox went a step further in *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (1850): “Each race has its own ideas of liberty. There is but one race whose ideas on this point are sound; that race is the Saxon. He is the only real democrat on the earth, who combines obedience to the law with liberty.”
Anglo-Saxon origins were used to explain not just Britain’s political successes but its culture as well. The “vague identification of culture with ancestry,” writes John Higham in his classic study of American nativism, *Strangers in the Land* (1955), “served mainly to emphasize the antiquity, the uniqueness, and the permanence of a nationality.”²¹ We can see this extension of race to include culture, and specifically poetry, in Thomas Carlyle’s *Chartism* (1840). Poetry, Carlyle understood, was an important component in the imagined reproduction of Anglo-Saxon culture. Writing in the voice of the faux German academic Herr Professor Sauerteig, Carlyle trumpets the achievements of the Anglo-Saxon peoples both at home and abroad: “Of a truth, whosoever had, with the bodily eye, seen Hengst and Horsa mooring on the mud-beach of Thanet, on that spring morning of the Year 449; and then, with the spiritual eye, looked forward to New York, Calcutta, Sidney [sic] Cove, across the ages and the oceans; and thought what Wellentons, Washingtons, Shakespeares, Miltons, Watts, Arkwrights, William Pitts and David Crocketts had to issue from that business, and do their several task-works so,—he would have said, those leather-boats of Hengst’s had a kind of cargo in them!”²² From the landing of Hengist and Horsa, the original Saxon invaders of England, Sauerteig traces lines of descent not only to British imperialism—the founding of colonies in North America, Asia, and Australia—but also to great military generals (Wellington, Washington), inventors (Arkwright), politicians, pioneers, and poets. That Saxon “cargo,” carried from continental Europe to England in 449, now occupies the world over, from New York to Calcutta to Sydney Cove.

Carlyle’s view was commonplace. Luke Owen Pike opens the first chapter of *The English and Their Origin* (1866) by asserting that “there are probably few educated Englishmen living who have not in their infancy been taught that the English nation is a nation of almost pure Teutonic blood, that its political constitution, its social customs, its internal prosperity, the success of its arms, and the number of its colonies have all followed necessarily upon the arrival, in three vessels, of certain German warriors under the command of Hengist and Horsa.”²³ Like Carlyle, Pike conflates politics, culture, economics, military prowess, and colonial expansion under the umbrella of race; Britain’s Saxon blood, we are led to believe, enabled its unprecedented success on the world stage. In 1849 the *Anglo-Saxon* proclaimed that the “whole Earth may be called the Fatherland of the Anglo-Saxon. He is a native of every clime—a messenger of heaven to every corner of this Planet.”²⁴ Such optimism in the good Anglo-Saxons
brought to the world at large was, according to Reginald Horsman, typical of the period.25

Anglo-Saxonism became an important idea not only for late-Victorian Britain and its colonies but for the United States as well. The rhetoric of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority that fueled the United States’ territorial expansion under the banner of Manifest Destiny also inspired American poetic practice.26 Sidney Lanier, one of the first professors of English at Johns Hopkins University, consistently regarded Great Britain as the origin of all that was great in American culture. Lanier’s identification with British tradition firmly embraced the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, specifically the fantasy whereby white Americans imagined their supposed Anglo-Saxon origins as proof of their being, in Horsman’s words, “a chosen people with an impeccable ancestry.”27

Writing from Baltimore, Maryland, in 1879, Lanier identified culturally as English. He suggests “the remarkable ease with which our English idioms run into the mould of the sonnet.”28 In a later essay on Anglo-Saxon poetry published posthumously in the Atlantic Monthly, he exhorts the “strong, bright, picture-making tongue we had in the beginning of the sixteenth century when the powerful old Anglo-Saxon had fairly conquered all the foreign elements into its own idiom.”29 Identifying here with that Anglo-Saxon tongue, a tongue that in the creation of its own distinct sounds and cadences had pushed out the foreign—and, later in the same paragraph, the alien—Lanier positioned both himself and his American readers as English linguistic subjects, the inheritors of an Anglo-Saxon cultural and literary heritage.30

Lanier’s assumptions about poetry, race, and national identity help make sense of the rhetoric of Greater Britain, which proposed a global network of Anglo-Saxons, connected through race and shared political and aesthetic values. As the nineteenth century reached its close, colonialists loyal to Britain vied with those wishing for Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand political independence. “The Past belongs to Europe,” wrote the Provincial, a Halifax journal, in 1852, “but in Poetry, as in Art, Science, and all the great achievements of civilization, the future belongs to [North] America.”31 Titled “The Poetry of Anglo-Saxon America,” which would seem to link the Canadian provinces firmly with England, the essay nonetheless posits a future “national literature,” which would “keep steadily in view the new and peculiar position” of the British North American colonies: “It was not by a servile imitation of the classic models . . . that Chaucer, Spens[er], and the other
fathers of English song strung together their melodious and highly poetical verses.” This sort of double gesture, asserting a racial connection and a cultural distinction, captures the strain of racial and cultural thinking that divided colonialists at century’s end.

**The Bulletin School, Race, and Australian Federation**

When Australia finally achieved federation on 1 January 1901, the celebrations in Sydney included the singing of “God Save the Queen” and “Rule Britannia.” Politically and financially, Australia would remain firmly tied to Britain until the period following the Second World War. White Australia understood its connections to Britain additionally in terms of race; the Australian from this perspective was a version of the Anglo-Saxon, made stronger perhaps by the harsh realities of life in an often inhospitable climate. “Racism,” writes the labor historian Humphrey McQueen, “is the most important single component of Australian nationalism.”

Racism at the turn of the twentieth century also linked Australia to Britain and the broader imperial federation. Alfred Deakin—the second Australian prime minister, an enthusiastic advocate for the White Australia policy and one of the leaders of the Federalist movement—called himself an “independent Australian Briton,” showing the ease with which even those supporting Australian independence identified as both British and Australian.

Douglas Sladen’s 1888 anthology *Australian Ballads and Rhymes*, published on the centenary of British colonization, makes self-evident the paradox that racism simultaneously fueled both nationalism and attachment to Greater Britain. Sladen (1856–1947), an English-born writer who had lived in Melbourne and Sydney between 1880 and 1884, remained a lifelong advocate for Australian literary culture, and in particular the poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon. *Australian Ballads and Rhymes* was hailed by local Australian papers as the “first Australian Anthology.” Sladen dedicated the volume “to the English of Three Continents” (figure 12), marking his volume as part of the Greater Britain project. In an introductory poem he concludes:

> We are all English, born in one great union  
> Of blood and language, history and song,  
> All English, and to cherish our communion  
> We will present a common front to wrong.

Sladen emphasizes the Anglo-Saxon element in Australia and its poetry. “Separated by oceans from every considerable land,” he writes, “and peoples
from the most adventurous of the colonising Anglo-Saxon stock,” Australia demonstrates “a special love for all verse breathing the spirit of Anglo-Saxon manfulness” (ABR xiii, xviii). The emphasis here on white manliness is far from incidental, given the serious concern throughout the century that Australia’s climate emasculated its white male immigrants.40

The suffering, wilting men of Henry Kendall’s midcentury poetry (discussed in chapter 4) reflect this common anxiety about Australian manliness. Kendall’s poems are absent from Sladen’s volume (Sladen says he failed
to receive permission to reprint them). But in an essay at the volume’s end, Sladen explicitly identifies Kendall’s style as distinct from the late-century Australian poetic mode he hopes to promote. Kendall, he writes,

could paint loneliness admirably well. No one has drawn finer pictures of that aspect of Bush life which is peace or dreariness according as one pines for solitude or pines for society. He has written the most beautiful and the most terrible scenes we have of existence in the depths of the Bush—of the utter forsakenness of the explorer’s fate. . . . But he had little sympathy with the roistering side of the bushman’s nature. His own nature was too delicate, too poetic, too beautiful. This side of Bush life was reserved for men of rougher fibre, more robust and dashing in their genius. (ABR 279)

Kendall’s melancholy does not align well with the boisterous, exuberant poems Sladen clearly wanted to celebrate. More to the point, Kendall’s ambivalent relationship to the Australian landscape—his feeling of not quite belonging on the continent—was anathema to the late-century politics of both Greater Britain and Australian nationalism.

Sladen structured *Australian Ballads and Rhymes* to showcase what he took to be distinct features of Australian poetry. “This volume is essentially the work of people who have meditated in the open air, and not under the lamp,” claims the introduction; “and if its contents often-times want the polish that comes only with much midnight oil, they are mostly a transcript from earth and sea and sky, and not from books” (ABR xiv). One of the volume’s contributors, J. Steele Robertson, echoes and extends Sladen’s claims in a review published in Melbourne’s *Argus* entitled “The Australian Element in Australian Poetry”:

Here is a new land, vast in extent, separated from the older world by unfathomable seas, and containing within its borders every climate but that of the frozen north. Everyone has ample room for the full expression of physical and intellectual energies. Here we have no confinement; no cramping of the faculties in one narrow groove. Here are no effete feudal systems to grind the faces of men, but freedom and equality for all within the bounds of law and order. And this newness, this room, this freedom naturally affect the theme and method of the local poetry. 41

The selections are meant to reflect openness and freedom both thematically and formally, often with the enthusiastically cannonading stanzas that Gordon had popularized and that came to be seen as quintessentially
The “freedom and equality” that Robertson perceives resonates with the language of Anglo-Saxonism we saw in Knox’s *The Races of Men*, quoted above: “There is but one race whose ideas on this point are sound; that race is the Saxon. He is the only real democrat on the earth, who combines obedience to the law with liberty.” Contrary to those who feared the white man would not survive the Antipodean climate, Sladen’s anthology is at pains to show the freedom-loving, democratic Anglo-Saxon having found his natural habitat in the vast expanses of the Australian outback. He is “no effete” but is instead robustly “physical and intellectual.” William Sharp’s “The Stock Driver’s Ride,” reprinted in Sladen’s anthology, captures this sentiment both formally and conceptually: “Thro’ more ranges, thro’ more gullies, down sun-scorched granite ways/We go crashing, slipping, thundering in our joyous morning race” (ABR 176).

In the decade following Sladen’s anthology, two poets emerged as representative national voices: both born in Australia, both depicting the lives and experiences of working Australians with the galloping rhythms that Gordon had perfected, and both invested in the making of a white Australia. Henry Lawson (1867–1922) and Andrew Barton “Banjo” Paterson (1864–1941) published their early poems in Sydney’s *Bulletin*, the journal credited as pushing nationalist sentiment from its founding in 1880 up through the early twentieth century. The *Bulletin* itself put forward Lawson and Paterson as representative Australian poets: “In these two writers,” wrote A. G. Stephens in the February 1896 issue, “with all their imperfections, we see something like the beginnings of a national school of poetry. In them, for the first time, Australia has found audible voice and characteristic expression.” What that “voice” should have sounded like often appeared to be a mix of the progressive and the abhorrent. Christopher Lee notes that the *Bulletin* “was racist, misogynist, socialist, and republican.” The journal, with the motto “Australia for the White Man,” framed its ideal readership, and by extension the ideal Australian, as “white men who come to these shores—with a clean record—and who leave behind them the memory of the class-distinctions and the religious differences of the old world; all men who place the happiness, the prosperity, the advancement of their adopted country before the interests of Imperialism.” These turn-of-the-century ideals broadly reflect what Russel Ward was to call the “Australian Legend.”

Ward’s famous study, *The Australian Legend* (1958), shows the “myth [of] the ‘typical Australian’ ” to be
a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. . . . He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion. . . . He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, and so he is a great “knocker” of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess. He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority. . . . Yet he is very hospitable and above all will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong.47

One sees in these claims the staying power of Australia’s 1890s egalitarianism. That “Jack” is white goes without saying, and Ward’s legend has received apt criticism for leaving out the lives of women, nonpastoral working men, city dwellers, and nonwhites.48 Nonetheless, Ward’s legend essentially reflects the values apparent in the Bulletin of the 1890s, the ideological energy behind Australian federation. These are the values by and large apparent in the poetry of Lawson and Paterson.

Lawson’s first full volume of poetry, In the Days When the World Was Wide and Other Verses (1896), falls roughly, though not entirely, within the parameters of the Australian legend. Lawson’s mother, Louisa Lawson (1848–1920), was the publisher of the Dawn (the first Australian women’s periodical) and one of the great women’s rights advocates of the federation period. Henry Lawson followed suit in being supportive of women’s rights, a view contrary to the Bulletin’s. But even if Lawson is sometimes thought to have “anticipated . . . critiques of the Legend that focus on racial exclusionism, spurious appeals to solidarity, and a sexual division of labour,” as Graham Huggan has suggested, in the 1890s his poems nonetheless were celebrated by those advocating for Australian white male, working-class solidarity.49

Moments of aggressive racism, directed primarily against Asian immigrants, sully poems otherwise focused on the lives of Australian workers.50 William Lane’s journal The Worker had race in mind when it characterized Lawson as having had “a more potent influence on the moulding of our national character and the shaping of our destiny than any politician.” Lane was both a social reformer and a loudmouthed racist, having written an “Asian invasion” novel entitled White or Yellow? The Race War of 1908 AD (1888). The reviewer for his journal argues that Lawson “sympathise[s] truly with the Multitude, and hate[s] truly the brutalising conditions under which they are forced to live.” Lawson “is not a sycophant, nor yet a
lickspittle. The gifts he possesses are dedicated to the service of Truth and Justice.”

The “Truth and Justice” of Lawson’s poetry was imagined by way of a white male community united through their spirit of comradeship. The racial homogeneity of his poetry is for the most part implicit, which has allowed it to be largely overlooked by contemporary readers. Take as an example two stanzas from “After All,” part of the 1896 collection:

The brooding ghosts of Australian night have gone from the bush and town;
My spirit revives in the morning breeze, though it died when the sun went down;
The river is high and the stream is strong, and the grass is green and tall,
And I fain would think that this world of ours is a good world after all.

The light of passion in dreamy eyes, and a page of truth well read,
The glorious thrill in a heart grown cold of the spirit I thought was dead,
A song that goes to a comrade’s heart, and a tear of pride let fall—
And my soul is strong! and the world to me is a grand world after all!52

Lawson’s dawn of optimism, waking up to “a grand world” with a grand future, reflects the aspirations, if not the realities, of the 1890s.53 Christopher Lee suggests that both Lawson’s poetry and Sladen’s 1888 anthology were “well suited to the British market’s desire for despatches on the fate of the Anglo-Saxon race at the colonial frontier.”54 A poem such as “After All” clears imaginative ground for white Australian readers, asserting an almost ontological relationship between Australia’s distinct landscape and emerging nationalist sentiment. One might imagine the “brooding ghosts” of the first stanza to be Kendall’s overheard haunting sounds; these are promptly banished and replaced by a communal “song that goes to a comrade’s heart.”

“For’ard,” a poem about shearers sailing to New Zealand, similarly concludes with a vision of a future utopia of (white) class equality—and, in this case, equality between the sexes as well:

the curse o’ class distinctions from our shoulders shall be hurled,
An’ the influence of women revolutionize the world;
There’ll be higher education for the toilin’ starvin’ clown,
An’ the rich an’ educated shall be educated down;
An’ we all will meet amidships on this stout old earthly craft,
An’ there won’t be any friction ’twixt the classes fore-’n’-aft.

We’ll be brothers, fore-’n’-aft!
Yes, an’ sisters, fore-‘n’-aft!
When the people work together, and there ain’t no fore-‘n’-aft.55

In an 1896 review of Lawson’s volume, Fred J. Broomfield suggested that Lawson was “only strongest when most pessimistic.”56 To read Lawson as pessimistic, however, is to overlook the deep social optimism that, more often than not, redeems Australia’s harshness in Lawson’s accounting of it. An 1896 reviewer for Melbourne’s Age made roughly just this point:

Mr Lawson in many of his verses gives a description of life as it is for men who have to earn their living in the desolate spaces which compose so much of the territory of eastern Australia. The pictures he draws are not cheerful. . . . But when he speaks of prospects at their lowest, and the future at its blackest, of the impotent rage of the social failure and the dull voiceless wrath of the hopeless bushman, he never loses the courage, half cynical, half humorous, which appears to lie at the basis of Australian character as it exists outside the town.57

This strength of character stands out in both Lawson’s poetry and his prose: for example, his short story “The Drover’s Wife” (published first in the Bulletin, July 1892, and one of Australia’s best-known literary works) features a woman left to care for herself and her children alone in the bush. “She is used to being alone,” we are told: “Her husband is an Australian, and so is she.”58 Like “The Drover’s Wife,” In the Days When the World Was Wide offers less pessimism than dogged realism and the belief that strength in the face of adversity will lead to communal, and perhaps national, identity.

That whiteness is a necessary feature of Lawson’s Australian nationalism is obvious even when unstated.59 Just as we do not need to be told that the Drover’s Wife is white, we understand that the various communities of Lawson’s poetry are racially homogenous. More than that: those communities achieve coherent identity through their imagined relation to nonwhite populations, primarily Indigenous Australians and immigrants from Asia. Toni Morrison describes this phenomenon in the context of nineteenth-century America: “distancing Africanism became the operative mode” of those looking to articulate an “American coherence” that had its origins in Europe.60 Like his American contemporaries, Lawson generally avoids noting the nonwhite presence against which he writes, but his work is shaped powerfully by that mostly unacknowledged presence.61 “In a wholly racialized society,” writes Morrison, “there is no escape from racially inflected
language,” and this is surely as true in Australia as it is in the United States. The ideals of community and genre that have been central to this study evolved into racial ideals across Britain’s colonies at the turn of the twentieth century. Or, to put it another way, the implicit racial ideas that had undergirded colonial communities and genres from the beginning became somewhat more legible at this particular historical juncture, as the colonies moved toward forms of national identification. In wanting to believe in their own white racial coherence, Australians of European descent imagined versions of cultural coherence—aesthetic forms—that would reflect that coherence. This, in effect, is the poetic form we now call the “bush ballad.”

Banjo Paterson’s *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses* (1895) offers a similar white fantasy of the Australian bush, in more heroic and optimistic terms than generally found in Lawson. The first edition of Paterson’s volume sold out within a week of publication. Featuring ballads on the riding feats of Australian bushmen, the “success of [the] book,” according to the *Literary Year Book*, “was without parallel in Colonial Literary annals, nor could any living English or American poet boast so wide a public, always excepting Mr Rudyard Kipling.” Son of a lowland Scot who had emigrated to Australia in about 1850, Paterson’s “bush ballads” resonate with both Scottish ballad tradition and Adam Lindsay Gordon’s midcentury verses. Poems like “The Man from Snowy River” are explicitly about the making of Australian legend: “The man from Snowy River is a household word to-day, / And the stockmen tell the story of his ride.” Contemporaries saw in Paterson’s work a “definite Australianness, if such a word may be coined”—this according to the Brisbane *Telegraph*: “a fine, healthy” spirit capturing “every day life, and the characteristic scenery of Australia.” Another review attests that “the volume smacks of the bush” and encourages “a greater appreciation of the charms of things purely Australian.”

Though the reviewers remain vague as to the qualities of Paterson’s “Australianness,” we might understand it first in relation to the terms Sladen set out in the introduction to his 1888 *Australian Ballads*: “This volume is essentially the work of people who have meditated in the open air, and not under the lamp.” The poems of *The Man from Snowy River* capture both formally and thematically the expansiveness of this view, the notion of Australia as vast, open territory, with people there sharing in that vast, open spirit. “Clancy of the Overflow,” for example, shows the drover Clancy moving across an idyllic, expansive outback behind his stock of cattle:
And the bush hath friends to meet him, and their kindly voices greet him
   In the murmur of the breezes and the river on its bars,
And he sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended,
   And at night the wond'rous glory of the everlasting stars. (SR 21)

The next lines of the poem shift to urban Sydney, and Paterson marks that turn with both cramped rhythm and cannonading articulation:

   I am sitting in my dingy little office, where a stingy
   Ray of sunlight strug gles feebly down between the houses tall,
And the fœtic air and gritty of the dusty, dirty city
   Through the open window floating, spreads its foulness over all. (SR 21)

“Clancy of the Overflow” privileges the local, natural landscape as a site for colonial identity. The urban spaces of Sydney, by contrast, constrict and deaden, leaving the “I” of the poem envious of Clancy’s freedom and fancying that he’d “like to change” places with him (SR 22). Paterson was himself a solicitor in Sydney, no doubt longing for the comparative liberty of his childhood in the country. As John Pengwerne Matthews has suggested, Paterson’s work reflects nostalgia for a rural mode of living that in Australia was undergoing radical change: “The old bushman saw the new railways pushing into the areas once only accessible on horseback or by bullock-wagon.”

Paterson also reflects “Australianness” and the values of the Bulletin with his folksy, egalitarian subjects, populated by individuals understood to be white. Like the Drover’s Wife of Lawson’s story, Paterson’s figures come from humble origins and confront hardship, generally overcoming whatever stands in their way. In the federation period such pride in the working man was understood in nationalist terms. This is why the Freeman’s Journal, which advocated for independence from Britain, aimed both to eliminate “all titular distinctions” and “to build up a Federated Australian Republic”; the two aspirations went hand in hand. Paterson does not dismiss British tradition; the Anglo-Saxon connection was too important to white Australia. He instead celebrates the egalitarian qualities he saw as both distinctly Australian and foundational to a broader Australian identity. In the federation period to be an “independent Australian Briton,” as Alfred Deakin called himself, meant identifying as a white Australian of British descent who thrived outside the class structure of the United Kingdom: the connection to Britain was thus more biological than cultural. The “community of race,” Seeley observed in The Expansion of England, was therefore an
imagined racial community that inspired simultaneously Australian nationalism and nostalgic affiliation with Greater Britain.

**Making a Canadian Homeland**

As in Australia, national identification in late-Victorian Canada was a complicated sentiment. Popular Canadian poetry from the period clearly supports the argument that Canadian nationalism grew between the 1867 confederation and the First World War. That same body of poetry also shows that Canada through those decades remained enthusiastically loyal to the British Empire. Racial identification makes partial sense of this apparent contradiction. At least some white Canadians identified with Britain through the logic of blood, as suggested by James D. Edgar’s “This Canada of Ours. A National Song” (1867), composed in the year of confederation:

We love those far-off ocean Isles,
Where Britain’s monarch reigns;
We’ll ne’er forget the good old blood
That courses through our veins;
Proud Scotia’s fame, old Erin’s name,
And haughty Albion’s powers,
Reflect their matchless lustre on
This Canada of ours.

Fair Canada,
Dear Canada,
This Canada of ours!

May our Dominion flourish then,
A goodly land and free,
Where Celt and Saxon, hand in hand,
Hold sway from sea to sea;
Strong arms shall guard our cherished homes,
When darkest danger lowers,
And with our life-blood we’ll defend
This Canada of ours.

Fair Canada,
Dear Canada,
This Canada of ours!
Edgar (1841–99) was a Canadian-born descendant of Scots immigrants, best known as a member of parliament for the Liberal Party. His poem locates the source of Canada’s strength in its British origins, specifically the Scottish, Irish, and English blood flowing through Canadian veins (Wales was understood in the period as racially distinct from the rest of Britain).73 Canada’s strength comes from both that lineage and its more egalitarian politics: one finds in Canada “no baronial halls” (this from an earlier stanza) but instead Celt and Saxon linked “hand and hand.” The historian Phillip Buckner argues that “the notion that Imperial enthusiasm waned as Canadian nationalism waxed is simply not borne out by the evidence.”74 Edgar’s poem suggests that racial thinking was an important component of that continued British loyalty.

By the turn of the century, more complicated perspectives on race had surfaced in Canadian poetry. In a volume entitled Canadian Born (1903), E. Pauline Johnson (1861–1913) offered geography, not biology, as an alternate source of Canadian belonging. Johnson, who also published under the name Tekahionwake, was born to an English mother and a Mohawk father on the Six Nations Reserve in what was then Upper Canada. She writes:

We are the pulse of Canada, its marrow and its blood;
And we, the men of Canada, can face the world and brag
That we were born in Canada beneath the British flag.75

Marrow and blood, which might have been used to distinguish Canadians in racial terms, are here instead metaphors embracing all Canadians born in British North America (“White Race and Red are one if they are but Canadian born,” she writes in her prefatory “Inscription”).76 Johnson’s universalizing of “marrow and . . . blood” suggests a self-conscious challenge to the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxonism. Charles Mair (1838–1927) makes a related point in the introduction to his 1901 edition of Tecumseh: A Drama, referring to “those primitive inter-racial and formative influences which, together with a time-honoured polity, are the source of the Canadian tradition.”77 Both Johnson and Mair were prominent figures in the turn-of-the-century literary scene. Johnson especially was renowned for her poetic recitals in Canada, the United States, and England, which she performed in varieties of native dress and “elegant evening wear,” navigating between her Native American and English backgrounds.78

Johnson and Mair were also each included in William Douw Lighthall’s anthology Songs of the Great Dominion (1889), the Canadian equivalent of
Sladen’s 1888 *Australian Ballads and Rhymes* (the two were published by the same London press). Lighthall’s volume encompasses a range of sentiment: Canadian nationalism, affection for the British Empire, and nostalgic recognition of Canada’s Indigenous peoples. In addition to Johnson and Mair, Lighthall included translations of Wabanaki and Caughnawaga songs, along with other poems addressing Native American culture. Lighthall was a collector of Iroquois masks, and according to Robert Lecker, he thought of Native American culture as a model for “militarist” masculinity and an “imperialist ideal.” By 1889 Native American resistance in Canada seemed largely quashed. Louis Riel, leader of two Métis uprisings in Saskatchewan, had been hanged in 1885; multiple treaties governing land use across the Canadian prairies had been signed. Lighthall’s anthology thus reflects both his own affection for Native American culture and a broader sense among white Canadians that the continent’s Indigenous peoples had been mostly incapacitated. No longer seen as a threat, *Songs of the Great Dominion* absorbs and even celebrates elements of Native American culture.

Even more passionately, *Songs of the Great Dominion* connects the Canadian national project to the British Empire. Lighthall introduces Canada as the “Eldest Daughter of the Empire.” “The Imperial Spirit,” the first section of the anthology, features poems such as Mary Barry Smith’s “Advance of the Empire” and the anonymous “Canada to England,” in which Canadians with “loving hearts and outstretched hands” reach toward the mother country, Great Britain (SGD 7). The anthology’s second section, “The New Nationality,” opens with “Dominion Day,” by Agnes Maule Machar (1837–1927), describing Canada as “the Britain of the West”:

> The English honour, nerve, and pluck,—the Scotsman’s love of right,—  
> The grace and courtesy of France,—the Irish fancy bright,—  
> The Saxon’s faithful love of home, and home’s affections blest;  
> And, chief of all, our holy faith,—of all our treasures best. (SGD 16)

Here again the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxonism bolsters the continued British-Canadian transatlantic relationship, even as the Young Canada movement of the 1880s aspired to inaugurate a specifically Canadian poetic tradition. “Young Canada” drew on Romantic notions of nationality to argue, in D. M. R. Bentley’s words, “that literature, especially poetry, is an essential ingredient of national consciousness and cohesion.” Dewart’s 1864 *Selections from Canadian Poets* had aimed to establish a national literature, to offer what Robert Lecker calls “a concrete symbol of Canada’s rising currency.”
In his “Introductory Essay,” Dewart urged readers to believe “that a Cana-
dian lyric might have as deep and true feeling as those they have most
admired . . . that a Canadian Poet might be as highly gifted as some of the
favourite names who are crowned with the wreaths of unfading fame.”
84
The poets of the Young Canada movement, including Charles G. D. Roberts
(1860–1943), Archibald Lampman (1861–99), and Bliss Carmen (1861–1929),
were born in the decade of confederation, and they saw themselves as part
of an emerging nationalist project. Their explicit intent was to build a na-
tional school of Canadian poetry. The terms of this nationalist project, es-
specially as articulated by Charles G. D. Roberts, were more inclusive than
the terms of Australian nationalism, but race nonetheless remained a cru-
cial, implicit frame.

Born in the town of Douglas, about seventy-five miles northwest of Saint
John, New Brunswick, Roberts was a professor of English and French liter-
ature, and then economics, at King’s College, in Windsor, Nova Scotia.85 He
published his first book of poetry, Orion and Other Poems (1880), at the age
of twenty, followed by In Divers Tones (1886). Roberts has consistently gar-
nered positive scholarly attention, especially for his role as ringleader of the
“Confederation” poets. Bentley calls Roberts a “cosmopolitan nationalist,”
by which he means someone “positioned [both] in and above his provincial
environment.”86 Canadian literature, Roberts believed, existed in necessary
relationship to both British and American literature. He argued in an 1883
lecture, “The Beginnings of Canadian Literature,” that “the domain of En-
glish letters” “knows no boundaries of Canadian Dominion, of American
Commonwealth, nor yet of British Empire.”87 Like Lighthall, Roberts as-
pired toward a Canadian national poetry that yet maintained a multivalent
perspective.

Two poems demonstratively patriotic in tone exemplify Roberts’s double
gesture with respect to race and Canadian nationalism. In “Canada,” pub-
ished in the Toronto Globe (4 January 1886), Roberts writes of “The Saxon
force, the Celtic fire, / These are thy manhood’s heritage!”88 A different view
of Canadian sentiment appears in “Collect for Dominion Day,” also from
1886, which implores instead “Father of unity, make this people one! / Weld,
interfuse them in the patriot’s flame” (DT 1). Bentley suggests that Roberts’s
plea for unity came specifically in response to Louis Riel’s 1885 uprising;89
the year 1885 also marked the completion of the transcontinental railway,
which likely inspired thoughts of interconnectedness. The perspective may
well be that of the victor calling for consensus after a contentious election.
In the aftermath of Riel’s defeat and at a moment of high nation-building sentiment, Roberts implores all peoples to rally behind nationalist sentiment, “the patriot’s flame.” A less explicit but ultimately more powerful version of this triumphalism governs Roberts’s best-known poem, “Tantramar Revisited,” a meditative, loco-descriptive poem originally published in 1883.

Whiteness is as much a feature of “Tantramar Revisited” as it was in the poems of Lawson and Paterson. Just as no one need tell us that Clancy of the Overflow is white, so too the voice of Roberts’s most admired poem emanates from a position of implicit whiteness. London’s Westminster Review noted in 1888 that, while “as a rule, minute descriptions of unfamiliar scenery, interspersed with barbarous names, fail to awaken the interest of untravelled readers, but in the lines headed... ‘Tantramar Revisited,’ we have something very like a poet telling us about a new land.” The poem, in other words, is implicitly colonial in its gaze. From a position of elevation, “Tantramar Revisited” observes a panoramic scene, allowing readers the illusion of an all-encompassing view. In this way, the poem functions very much like London’s visual panoramas, those painted “portal[s] to the rest of the world,” which, Tanya Agathocleous shows, “situated [particular] landscapes within a global whole.”

Roberts also situates his readers in a broader poetic landscape, with references to a range of poetic precursors. Like Fidelia Hill’s “Adelaide,” “Tantramar Revisited” opens with a gesture to “Tintern Abbey”: “Summers and summers have come, and gone with the flight of the swallow.” In setting up a retrospective dynamic, the passing of summers between a youthful version of the poet and the present of the poem’s voice, Roberts distinctly invokes the temporality of “Tintern Abbey”: “Five years have passed; five summers, with the length/Of five long winters!” Metrically, however, Roberts takes readers in a different direction, adapting a form of the hexameter line that in the 1880s would have signaled Longfellow’s Evangeline (1847). William Strong notes that “Tantramar Revisited” alludes to Evangeline not only in its meter but also in its Westmoreland setting, a region between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia near the forest primeval of Longfellow’s poem. Formally, then, “Tantramar Revisited” enacts the broad internationalism of Roberts’s lecture on “The Beginnings of Canadian Literature”; it “knows no boundaries,” looking both across the Atlantic to Wordsworth’s England and south to Longfellow’s America.

“Tantramar Revisited” concerns itself with both time and location: specifically, the present moment and place of the speaking poet, or whoever we
are meant to imagine articulating the poem. I offer the opening fourteen lines (a sonnet of sorts, as readers have often noticed):

Summers and summers have come, and gone with the flight of the swallow;
Sunshine and thunder have been, storm, and winter, and frost;
Many and many a sorrow has all but died from remembrance,
Many a dream of joy fall’n in the shadow of pain.
Hands of chance and change have marred, or moulded, or broken,
Busy with spirit or flesh, all I most have adored;
Even the bosom of Earth is strewn with heavier shadows,—
Only in these green hills, aslant to the sea, no change!

Here where the road that has climbed from the inland valleys and woodlands,
Dips from the hill-tops down, straight to the base of the hills,—
Here, from my vantage-ground, I can see the scattering houses,
Stained with time, set warm in orchards, meadows, and wheat,
Dotting the broad bright slopes outspread to southward and eastward,
Wind-swept all day long, blown by the south-east wind. (DT 53–54)

Roberts describes the passing of time and the changing world before him. More immediately, however, the landscape remains static: “Only in these green hills, aslant to the sea, no change!” With deictic pointing (“Here. . . . Here”), the poem conjures a hilltop on which the poet rests, looking out on the familiar, unchanging scene below: the “scattering houses,” the “orchards, meadows, and wheat.” Roberts’s medial caesurae and balanced alliterations invoke not just Longfellow’s *Evangeline* but the poetics of Anglo-Saxon England, as well. Readers have also tended to overhear throughout Roberts’s poem Swinburne’s style of sonic and rhythmic playfulness. The “vantage-ground” from which “Tantramar Revisited” looks out, then, takes into account both the immediacy of the Canadian Maritime landscape and, in its formal echoing, far distant scenes of Britain and America.

As “Tantramar Revisited” proceeds, Roberts continues to emphasize the play of memory in relation to the Canadian landscape: “How well I remember those wide red flats, above tide-mark / Pale with scurf of the salt”; “Well I remember the piles of blocks and ropes, and the net-reels / Wound with the beaded nets, dripping and dark from the sea!” (DT 55). At the poem’s conclusion, Roberts even privileges memory in favor of immediate experience: “Muse and recall far off, rather remember than see,— / Lest on too close sight I miss the darling illusion” (DT 58). These lines mark an important
shift from what we’ve seen through most of this study. Though structurally the poem recalls works from abroad, Roberts’s subject remains firmly Cana-
dian: memory grounded in the landscape and dwellings of the Tantramar marshes. In this way he distinguishes himself from the Australian-born Henry Kendall, whose nostalgia was for a far-off England he had never vis-
ited, and from both Alexander McLachlan and Thomas Pringle, whose views respectively of Canada and South Africa were tinted always by mem-
ories of their native Scotland. Though Britain plays a part in Roberts’s thinking, the nostalgia of his poetry is for Canada, not lands abroad.

Roberts thus paints the lands around Tantramar eminently as a Cana-
dian homeland. Goldsmith’s *Rising Village* (1825) described the “lonely set-
tler” facing ambivalence “amid a wilderness of trees” and “deep solitudes.” Roberts, by contrast, has the privilege of an unobstructed view. “Here, from my vantage-ground,” he writes, “I can see the scattering houses” and the windswept “broad bright slopes outspread” (DT 54). The poem’s formal and geographical references to *Evangeline* further encourage readers to connect that unobstructed, panoramic view to the clearing of peoples who lived there before: not only the French-speaking Acadians, whose expulsion Longfellow narrates, but the original Mi’kmaq as well. This is a landscape forcefully claimed and now comfortably inhabited, a landscape made white and English-speaking. The voice of Romantic nostalgia that has made “Tan-
tram Revisited” among the more canonical of nineteenth-century Cana-
dian poems emerges from a position of privilege and unquestioned belong-
ing. To the extent that this landscape is a homeland, it has been made so by force.

Also afforded from Roberts’s confident vantage ground is a version of Canadian nationalism unthreatened by the outside world. The title of Rob-
erts’s 1886 volume, *In Divers Tones*, points to the range of themes and feel-
ings explored between its covers. References include not only poets from the English tradition—Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats—but from classical my-
thology as well. Together they form a Western cultural heritage that Rob-
erts understands Canada to share with Greater Britain. If we expand the internationalist scope further, we see Roberts attending consistently to in-
fluences both French—poems entitled “Tout or Rien,” “Liberty (*From the French of Fréchette)*,” and “Rondeau”—and American: an epigraph by Whit-
man for “The Marvellous Work” and two poems on Sidney Lanier. All these coexist with poems on Canadian subjects: for example, “Birch and Paddle,” “The Quelling of the Moose. A Melicete Legend,” and “Tantramar Revisited.”
Roberts’s identification with a broader Anglo culture, and his sense that Canadian culture would develop in necessary relation to both Britain and America, helps explain his affinities for Sidney Lanier. Like Lanier, who believed in America’s Manifest Destiny and its dependence on an Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage, Roberts demonstrates throughout his poetic career his confident inheritance of an Anglo poetic tradition. In his poem “To the Memory of Sidney Lanier,” Roberts writes:

My spirit made swift with love
   Went forth to you in your place
Far off and above.
   Tho’ we met not face to face,
My Elder Brother, yet love
   Had pierced through space! (DT 96)

Roberts identifies Lanier as an “Elder Brother” because he sees both himself and his American counterpart as pioneering national poets writing from within a global Anglo culture. In his 1883 lecture “The Beginnings of a Canadian Literature,” Roberts explicitly cautioned his audience against limiting their poetic imagination to Canadian themes. “Now it must be remembered,” implored Roberts, “that the whole heritage of English Song is ours”—that is, Canada’s—“and that it is not ours to found a new literature. The Americans have not done so nor will they. They have simply joined in raising the splendid structure, English literature, to the building of which may come workmen from every region on earth where speaks the English tongue.”

In this way Roberts set out a future for Canadian poetry grounded, in the spirit of “Tantramar Revisited,” both in a particular, occupied North American landscape and a broad Anglo-Saxon tradition of “English Song.”

Lighthall’s *Songs of the Great Dominion* (1889), discussed above, followed suit in showcasing nationalist panegyrics alongside poems by E. Pauline Johnson, the Native American poet, and French Canadian authors. Lighthall addresses his reader with the confidence of a panoramic, imperial view: “You shall come out with us . . . paddling over bright lakes and down savage rivers; singing French chansons to the swing of our paddles, till we come . . . to moor at historic cities whose streets and harbours are thronged with the commerce of all Europe and the world. You shall hear there the chants of a new nationality, weaving in the songs of the Empire, of its heroes, of its Queen” (SGD xxiv). Like Banjo Paterson riding across the Australian outback, Lighthall traverses vast colonial spaces, encouraging his readers to
join him in his seeming mastery over the land: a self-possessed Canadian homeland situated in relation to the global whole—all of Europe and the world as well.

**Poetry and Imperial Federation at the Battle Front**

The Second Boer War in South Africa, 1899–1902, offered a concrete test of imperial federation just as Australia was transitioning into its new, federated status. After Britain went to war against the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, soldiers from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, among other British colonial spaces, leant their support to the British cause. More than that: those British colonial spaces saw the British cause as their cause, one and the same. The Australian colonies sent troops and also raised the funds to pay for them: about one million pounds, according to England’s *National Review*. Banjo Paterson himself went out to South Africa as a special war correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The war in South Africa allowed for the interaction of colonialists from all Britain’s territories. Among the most significant was the meeting between Paterson, the poet most associated with Australian federation, and Rudyard Kipling, the poet most associated with the British Empire. The former wrote about the encounter in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

> I asked [Kipling] what sort of Government he purposed to put in place of the Boers’.
>
> “Military rule for three years, and by that time they will have enough population here to govern themselves. We want you Australians to stay over here and help fetch this place along.”
>
> I said that our men did not think the country worth fighting over, and that all we had seen would not pay to farm, unless one were sure of water.
>
> “Water! You can get artesian water at 40ft. anywhere! What more do they want?”
>
> I pointed out that there is a vast difference between artesian water which rises to the surface, and well-water which has to be lifted 40ft. When it comes to watering 100,000 sheep one finds the difference.
>
> “Oh, well,” he said, “I don’t know about that; but, anyhow, you haven’t seen the best of the country. You’ve only seen 500 miles of Karoo desert yet. Wait till you get to the Transvaal!”

Paterson delicately suggests to his Australian readers that Kipling may not know anything of farming in a dry land and therefore may not be the best
judge of Britain’s colonial ambitions in South Africa. Those raised to eke out a living from the Australian outback, as Paterson well knew, would have looked with a skeptical eye on the South African desert. Kipling likewise seemed largely ignorant of Australian politics, questioning the colony’s drive toward federation:

“I can’t understand there being so many radicals in Australia. What do they want? If they were to become independent, what do they expect to do? Will they fork out the money for a fleet and a standing army? They’d be a dead gift to Germany if they didn’t. What more do they want than what they’ve got.”

I didn’t feel equal to enlightening him on Australian politics, so I said, “What are you going to do with the Boers if you take their country?”

Paterson knew that Kipling would be averse to pro-federation arguments. Paterson’s reference to South African land as “their country”—the country of the Boers—may also have been a subtle critique of Britain’s possessive tendencies abroad, including their approach to Australia.

Nonetheless, Kipling and Paterson struck up a friendship of sorts, and Paterson’s poems from the Boer front, later published in *Rio Grande and Other Verses* (1902), share sympathies with Kipling’s Boer War poems. Like Kipling’s “The Parting of the Columns” (discussed at the opening of this chapter), Paterson’s “With French to Kimberley” highlights the united efforts of colonial soldiers, in this case under the leadership of British Major-General John French, whose forces overcame the Boers in a protracted siege of Kimberley:

His column was five thousand strong—all mounted men—and guns,
There met, beneath the world-wide flag, the world-wide Empire’s sons;
They came to prove to all the earth that kinship conquers space,
And those who fight the British Isles must fight the British race!
From far New Zealand’s flax and fern, from cold Canadian snows,
From Queensland plains, where hot as fire the summer sunshine glows—
And in the front the Lancers rode that New South Wales had sent.
With easy stride across the plain their long, lean Walers went.
Unknown, untried, those squadrons were, but proudly out they drew
Beside the English regiments that fought at Waterloo.
From every coast, from every clime, they met in proud array,
To go with French to Kimberley to drive the Boers away.97
Paterson was demonstrably proud to see his fellow Australians fighting alongside both colonialists from New Zealand and Canada and the “English regiments,” whose forefathers might have fought Napoleon at Waterloo. Like James Anthony Froude, who saw a global Anglo community united by “common blood, common interest, and a common pride,” and like John Seeley, who wrote of “community of race, community of religion, and community of interest,” Paterson here understands the army at Kimberly to be of a singular “British race.” The “kinship” afforded by that connection overcame the differences arising from geography and experience. Similar rhetoric marks the Boer War poetry of Frederick George Scott (1861–1944), one of Canada’s Confederation poets who fought with the British in South Africa. In “A Hymn of Empire,” Scott suggests the war effort will “bind our realms in brotherhood” and, ultimately, “make illustrious and divine/The sceptre of our race.”

What emerges in the context of the South African war is a collective political and aesthetic tradition understood foremost through the terms of race. From the perspective of poets like Roberts, Paterson, and Scott, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand history would always also be the history of the United Kingdom; all of Britain’s postcolonial spaces share a collective history. Nation and nationalism therefore seem insufficient terms in the context of late-Victorian imperial federation, unable to account for the profound solidarity felt across colonial and postcolonial lines.

Nationalism in Canada and Australia appeared largely indistinguishable in aesthetic terms, and each bore a striking resemblance to Kipling’s imperial poetics. These similarities would have been understood primarily according to the essentializing logic of late-Victorian racial theory, whereby Anglo-Saxon blood inspired modes of aesthetic production throughout the British Empire: a global Anglo-Saxon poetics. From this point of view, the rhythms and rhymes of writers like Roberts and Paterson represented both distinct emerging national sentiments in Canada and Australia and an Anglo-Saxon aesthetic practice whose roots would always be traced back to Britain itself. The collectivity enabled by late-century colonial poetry therefore took its strength from the intertwining logics of genre and race: a set of circulating aesthetic practices and cultural constructs that, across the vast distances of empire, encouraged in colonial readers and auditors the illusion of feeling together as one.