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THE GLOBAL COTTAGE: ENGLISH FORMS IN A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE, 1800-1860

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Abstract: This dissertation examines how literary genre functioned as a technology of containment and racial regulation during the expansion of the British Empire. It argues that aesthetic modes such as the pastoral, the idyll, and the picturesque did not merely reflect national sentiment or nostalgic longing but actively produced visions of Englishness that could be exported, domesticated, and installed across colonized spaces. Focusing on both fictional and nonfictional works by women—including Elizabeth Hamilton’s *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, anonymously authored *The Woman of Colour*, Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush*, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s *A Plea for Emigration*—the project traces how literary genre helped to stabilize domestic ideals, encode imperial ideologies of improvement, and manage the visual and narrative representation of difference. At the center of this history is the image of the cottage and garden: a structure both material and metaphoric that came to represent order, virtue, and national belonging even as it was transposed into radically unfamiliar environments. What unites the women in this dissertation is not a common identity or trajectory, but their relation to the periphery—to the edges of empire, to the margins of genre, to the limits of home. From Olivia Fairfield’s estrangement to Susanna Moodie’s affective projects and Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s assertive print presence—each writer stages a contest with inherited narrative forms. Drawing on postcolonial theory, print culture studies, and visual aesthetics, what emerges across these case studies is not a unified tradition, but a shared iconoclasm, a minor-key resistance to the expectations that character and genre, nation and race, domesticity and belonging will ever neatly align. In a moment still shaped by nationalist nostalgia, aesthetic whitewashing, and the lure of “green and pleasant” land, the stakes of this work

feel ongoing. To study genre as a technology of social regulation—and to watch it fray at the hands of minor, often eccentric, figures—is to glimpse the imaginative labor required to inhabit the world otherwise. These writers do not offer solutions so much as they model alternatives: makeshift grammars for thinking about home, land, and belonging when dominant idioms fall short. In attending to their refusals and improvisations, *The Global Cottage* proposes that literary form is not simply a vehicle for empire's values, but a site of negotiation—a space where the uneven work of world-building is not only visible but thinkable.

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“Of all situations for a constant residence, that which appears to me most delightful is a little village far in the country; a small neighbourhood, not of fine mansions finely peopled, but of cottages [...] a little world of our own, close-packed and insulated [...]; where we know every one, are known to every one, interested in every one, and authorised to hope that every one feels an interest in us.”

Mary Russell Mitford, *Our Village*¹

Genre, Improvement, and the Imperial Aesthetics of Englishness

Written expressly for “the lower orders,” Elizabeth Hamilton’s “little tale” for the “farmer’s inglenook” tells the story of Mrs. Mason, who, having worked for decades as a governess in England, has returned to Scotland “Englified.”² With a desire to “be of use” to her distant relatives in Glenburnie and appalled by lowlanders who “*cou’dna be fash’d*” to keep house and home, Mrs. Mason attempts to improve the cottagers by improving the condition of the cottage (and vice versa).³ Detailing a challenging journey into the glen, the narrator captures the prospect of the lowland village as it comes into Mrs. Mason’s view:

It consisted of about twenty or thirty thatched cottages, which, but for their chimneys, and the smoke that issued from them, might have passed for so many stables or hog sties, so little had they to distinguish them as the abodes of man. That one horse, at least, was the inhabitant of every dwelling, there was no room to doubt, as every door could not only boast its dunghill, but had a small cart tilted up on its end directly before it; which cart, though often broken, and always dirty, seemed ostentatiously displayed as proof of wealth.⁴

¹ Mary Russell Mitford, *Our Village: Sketches of Rural Character and Scenery*, 5 vols, Vol. 1 (London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1824-32), 1.

² Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie; A Tale for the Farmer’s Ingle-Nook* (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne and Co., 1808), 1. Hereto cited *Cottagers*. “Ingle-nook (*n.*): originally *Scottish* (1773-) the nook or corner beside the ‘ingle’: chimney-corner” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, July 2023).

³ *Cottagers*, 98. “Fash (*v.* 1): chiefly *Scottish* and *northern dialect* (1533-) to afflict, annoy, trouble, vex. Also, *reflexive* [...] to take trouble” (*OED*, March 2025).

⁴ *Cottagers*, 99. Although a fictional village, we can assume that the novel is set in the Scottish Lowlands due to the Scots-inflected English spoken by the characters, combined with the marked absence of Gaelic dialogue and set pieces like tartans and clans predominantly featured in works set in the Highlands. The novel’s interest in tenancy and improvement also emphasizes the acute ‘modernizing’ pressures put on specifically Lowland agrarian communities in 1808.

From the broken bridge and rut-filled roads that delay their journey to gardens littered with “dunghills,” weeds and upturned carts, motifs of deprivation are consistently cast as the products of idleness. “And cannot you be fash’d to go to the end of the house to throw out your dirty water,” Mrs. Mason asks on arrival at the MacClarty cottage. “O, we’re used to it,” Mrs. MacClarty replies, “and we never mind it. We cou’dna be fash’d.”⁵ In the chapters that follow, the narrator details endless house- and grounds-keeping tasks that the villagers just “canna be fash’d” to do: “they wadna fash themselves to mend a brig,” “lay paving stones,” wash and dry dishes, “dress and weed” the garden, do their homework (“I hinna gotten my questions”), or “wash [their] hands,” to name just a few.⁶ Vexed by the constant inquiries about sanitation, a flustered Mrs. MacClarty responds: “ane wad think ye was speaking to a bairn.”⁷ “Fastidious” still, the retired governess insists on instilling in the villagers the “habits of industry and virtue.” As the story progresses, Mrs. Mason finds more docile and “willing” subjects for improvement in neighboring cottages; with a notable “desire to please,” the neighboring children promise to “make good servants” in Mrs. Mason’s estimation and thus become the object of her attention in the final chapters of the novel.⁸

Elizabeth Hamilton’s manner of depicting purported sites of deprivation as sites of potential really speaks to the cult of improvement that dominates the period. That these rhetorics of improvement were crystallizing in colonial environments is no surprise. In this, Hamilton joins a longer tradition of moral and domestic reform literature associated with women writers of the

⁵ Ibid., 112.

⁶ Ibid., 97, 101, 108, 117, 124, 152.

⁷ *Anyone would think you were speaking to a child*; Ibid., 153.

⁸ Ibid., 264-7. By novels end, “a useless appendage” at this neighboring cottage had “been converted into a nice scullery, where the washing of clothes or dishes was carried on.” The young girls at the Morrison cottage are so transformed by Mrs. Mason’s instruction that “from the garrets downwards, not a pile of dust found a resting-place, where it might remain unmolested” (289-90).

late 18th and early 19th centuries, particularly the Cheap Repository Tracts (1795-1798) produced by Hannah More and her circle.⁹ These widely circulated pamphlets instructed rural and working classes on habits of cleanliness, thriftiness, piety, and obedience, treating the cultivation of domestic virtues as a matter of urgent national concern. In an era of political instability and revolutionary threat, the management of private life becomes a bulwark against unrest, turning private virtue into a public duty essential to the overall health of the nation.

As a novel and not a tract, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* makes that connection between aesthetic (and literary) ideals and social regulation even more cogent. Hamilton's chapters might be offered as "advice," "useful Prescriptions," "hints," or "receipts" and are titled as such, but the novel's actual tone belies all pretense of gentle suggestion: the narrator's shaming, voyeuristic attention to filth and disarray, combined with Mrs. Mason's relentless didacticism, reveal that improvement is a moral imperative and a national duty that demands the assimilation of "Englified" standards and values. In privileging narrative over didactic form, this 1808 novel exposes how genre itself becomes an active technology, complicit both in the consolidation of aesthetics that naturalize social, colonial, and, by extension, racial hierarchies and in manufacturing affective attachments to an imperial mode of governance.¹⁰

⁹ On reform literature and the tract tradition, see Anne Stott's *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), which situates More's tract writing within a broader project of moral reform and emergent national identity. More recently, Tamara S. Wagner's *Victorian Narratives of Failed Emigration* (New York: Routledge, 2016) explores how the domestic ideals embedded in early tract literature shaped colonial attitudes toward settlement and indigenous populations abroad. For more on how "strategies of surveillance and observation" in More's tracts participate in the "development of omniscient narration," see Emily Rena-Dozier, "Hannah More and the Invention of Narrative Authority," *ELH* 71.1 (2004): 209-227.

¹⁰ In *Scott's Shadow*, Ian Duncan examines the novel's complicity in domestic colonialism, showing how literary form participates in the disciplinary project of "improvement" in post-Union Scotland. Duncan draws on Katie Trumpener's work, which crucially links the romantic novel to British imperial consolidation across both overseas colonies and 'British' peripheries. Both Duncan and Trumpener build on Michael Hechter's foundational but more sociologically framed *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), which first introduced the concept of "internal colonialism" into British cultural studies. See Katie Trumpener, *Bardic*

In the concluding chapter of the tale, the narrator describes an entirely new educational system as instituted by Mrs. Mason and a fresh, tidy, and neatly ordered schoolhouse at the center of the village, with a “railed in” path “border[ed] with flowers and shrubs” and “neat wicker-gates.”¹¹ The description continues:

The bright and clear glass of the windows was seen to advantage peeping through the foliage of the rose-trees, and other flowering shrubs, that were trimly *nailed* against the walls. There the pot-herb flourished; there the goodly rows of bee-hives evinced the effects of the additional nourishment afforded their inhabitants, and shewed, that the flowers were of *other use* besides regaling the sight or smell.¹²

Order, here, offers a ‘natural’ resolution to narrative tension. “Spirited” and “impetuous” at the story’s beginning, nature has now been tamed about the “railed in” schoolhouse: flowering shrubs are “nailed against the walls” and, with the addition of “goodly rows of bee-hives,” those shrubs have been put to “other use” besides ornamentation. The natural order of Glenburnie, much like its reformed social order, requires constant attention, cultivation, and by extension, surveillance. This logic culminates in the lengthy description of Mrs. Mason’s monitorial education system, where pedagogy itself becomes a technique of social engineering. At her instruction, the school has adopted a “monitorial” teaching method, modelled on the method of real-life schoolmaster and reformer, Irishman David Manson (not unlike the colonial system designed and piloted at the same time by Scotsman Andrew Bell in Chennai, India).¹³ Mrs. Mason divides the students into three

Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹¹ *Cottagers*, 290

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.300-1, emphasis original.

¹³ Key figures such as David Manson, Andrew Bell, and Joseph Lancaster pioneered monitorial or ‘mutual’ instruction systems in which older and more advanced pupils supervised and taught younger pupils. David Manson, working in Belfast in the late 18th century, first experimented with non-coercive, peer-based learning models aimed at improving literacy among the working poor. Andrew Bell, after his tenure in Chennai, India, systematized the monitorial method as a tool for both British and colonial schooling, emphasizing strict order, repetition, and a classroom hierarchy. Joseph Lancaster adapted and popularized a version of Bell’s *Madras System of Education*, often removing explicit religious instruction to broaden

distinct orders: “landlord, tenants, and under-tenants” with the teacher as “superior lord” at the top:

The landlord prescribes the lesson which was to be received as rent from his tenants; Each of the tenants had one or two under-tenants, who were in like manner bound to pay him a certain portion of reading or spelling lesson; and when the class was called up, the landlord was responsible to the master, as superior lord, not only for his own diligence, but for the diligence of his vassals. The landlord who appeared to have neglected his duty was degraded to the rank on an under-tenant.¹⁴

This top-down flow of knowledge replicates the structure of labor in a capitalist society, particularly resonant in a Scottish setting so deeply imbricated at this moment in the transition from feudal, local governing structures to a colonial-capitalist system. Within Mrs. Mason’s instituted educational system, the means of moral and intellectual improvement are concentrated at the top, with “the Master, or superior lord” and his “landlords.” That a landlord could be relegated to the under-tenant class for “permitting noise or disturbance” and failing to maintain a well-disciplined community dramatizes how a kind of surveillance discipline becomes the dominant mechanism of control in this social order. That this system is rooted in all manner of restrictive, forceful action is implied by successive images of gates, enclosed land, and “nailed” up flowers.

In this dissertation, I track how literary genre itself comes to stabilize and naturalize emerging social and racial hierarchies under the guise of national aesthetics and, as seen in

its appeal to dissenters and nonconformists. However, Lancaster was accused of plagiarizing Bell’s model, most famously and consistently by S.T. Coleridge, who criticized Lancaster’s system for producing mechanical obedience rather than true intellectual cultivation (not least because he emphasized the benefits of punishment). For more on how “education, like poor relief, became a technology of governance, promoting compliance and self-regulation among those deemed socially precarious,” see Joanna Innes, *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 203. On how these educational theories were shaped by and imposed on colonized peoples, see Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin’s *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009).

¹⁴ *Cottagers*, 292-3.

Glenburnie, narrative resolution. At a moment of rapid global expansion, I argue that literary genres function as technologies of social comprehension: they help readers navigate increasingly complex and unstable social worlds. Crucially, I argue that literary character itself—like genre—emerges as a means of social management during this period.¹⁵ Literary forms did not merely reflect an already existing racial order; rather, they actively participated in the production of racialized types, solidifying stereotypes that would come to seem “natural.” In this sense, character and race are products of genre: both rely on the formal techniques of typification, abstraction, and repetition that genre enables. Across my chapters, I examine how some writers participate in the concretization and proliferation of emerging racial and social archetypes, while others subtly expose the constructed, unstable nature of such categories. By situating literary genre and print culture at the center of a broader cultural history of race and empire, this project recasts the early nineteenth century as a key moment in the aesthetic and political invention of racialization.¹⁶

At the same time, I am interested in how advances in cheap print and illustration practices encourage a more visual style of writing, fostering highly iconographic verbal and visual productions of space. As print and migration expand simultaneously, the image of the home—particularly the quaint, single-family dwelling—becomes an increasingly central and affectively

¹⁵ Deidre Lynch’s *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) provides a foundational account of how “character” becomes a cultural and literary technology in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Lynch shows how character was increasingly understood as a legible surface, thereby making it a key instrument of social legibility and control. My account builds on Lynch’s insights by extending them into the context of racialization and imperial expansion.

¹⁶ Here and across my project, I attempt to respond to the special issue of *Victorian Studies* titled “Undisciplining Victorian Studies,” particularly the introduction written by Ronjaunee Chatterjee, Alicia Mireles Christoff, and Amy R. Wong. Building on Christina Sharpe’s concept of “becoming undisciplined,” the authors argue that Victorian studies must confront its formation through whiteness, liberalism, and imperialism, and reject mere additive models of diversity in favor of reimagining the field’s methodological foundations. They emphasize that the field’s future depends on dismantling inherited disciplinary boundaries and fully integrating the insights of critical race theory, postcolonial studies, and Black studies into its core frameworks. See *Victorian Studies* 62.3 (2020): 369-391.

charged symbol. Building on Elizabeth Helsinger's work on the symbolic power of rural England, I examine how this visual-verbal production of the cottage stabilizes national identity at a moment of accelerating global expansion and entanglement. As Helsinger notes, by the mid-nineteenth century, the public "encounter" "rural life as if it were already a picture, poem, or story"—that is, as a scene composed for aesthetic consumption, rather than as a lived and contested reality.¹⁷ Extending this account of "encounter," we might also think about how the reading public encountered other figures as "already a picture," specifically when thinking about how white colonizing figures encounter different subjects beyond the metropole.

In the section that follows, I examine the visual grammars that shape how place is written, imagined, and made meaningful in this period. By unpacking the convergences and distinctions among the pastoral, idyll, and picturesque, I trace how these aesthetic and affective categories operate in tandem with literary genre and character to produce not only scenes of rural harmony, but technologies of containment. Though often treated interchangeably, each mode encodes a slightly different response to settings and subjects, responses that become crucial to the ideological work of colonization and racialization. Mapping their overlaps and frictions allows us to see more precisely how these visual and narrative conventions contributed to the construction of a global Englishness, organizing perception and feeling in ways that rendered empire legible.

Visual Grammars of Empire: The Pastoral, the Idyll, and the Picturesque

Though distinct in their origins, the pastoral in classical poetry, the idyll in sentimentalized domesticity, and the picturesque in visual art all converge as aesthetic strategies that discipline

¹⁷ Elizabeth Helsinger, *Rural Scenes and National Representation, Britain 1815-1850* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997): p. 121.

landscapes and peoples into familiar hierarchies of English taste and control. *Pastoral* refers to a long-standing literary mode, dating back to classical antiquity, that idealizes rural life as a site of simplicity, harmony, and natural virtue. Building on William Empson's foundational *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) demonstrates how the English pastoral tradition mythologizes rural life, obscuring historical conditions of inequality and turning actual sites of conflict and resistance into nostalgic fantasy. *Idyll*, closely related, tends to describe more intimate, self-contained scenes of rural domesticity. In a recent chapter for a collected volume *The Victorian Idyll in Art and Literature* (2024), Josephine McDonagh and I examined how, in a print culture shaped by the mobilization of global populations, the idyll comes to function as a technology of containment, aestheticizing colonizing-settler violence, dislocation, and dispossession into scenes of refuge.¹⁸ For white settlers like Thomas Pringle and Susanna Moodie, "the idyll provided a representational mode through which to look back to a lost past and forward to a state of organic unity still to be achieved."¹⁹ In our chapter and in this dissertation, I argue that the ideological power of the idyll and its accompanying motifs rests in its capacity to abstract and stabilize, offering imperial readers a vision of "home" that is at once familiar, mobile, and untroubled by history. In this way, the idyll's invitation feels similar to Jayne Hildebrand's recent description of the provincial novel's invitation— "to temporarily inhabit a self-contained virtual world that is not anchored to a specific geographical reference point."²⁰

¹⁸ Charlotte Cary-Beckett and Josephine McDonagh. "Idyll as Refuge: The Settler's Dream," *The Victorian Idyll in Art and Literature: Subject, Ecology, Form*, eds. Thomas Hughes and Emma Merkling. New York: Routledge, 2024: pp. 13-35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁰ Jayne Hildebrand, *Novel Environments: Science, Description, and Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 33.

Where the idyll curates domestic order and the pastoral mourns its loss, the *picturesque* moves more squarely into the realm of aesthetic experience, instituting a specific way of seeing. W.J.T. Mitchell's introduction to *Landscape and Power* (1994) redefines the picturesque as not merely a passive visual category but an active mode of appropriation, a colonizing gaze that turns unfamiliar environments into aestheticized property.²¹ Sara Suleri Goodyear's work on the picturesque in early 19th-century India is especially productive for thinking about the ways in which "threats," in her case "subcontinental," could be converted by white women into watercolours and thereby "domesticated into a less disturbing system of belonging."²² The picturesque, for Suleri, becomes "synonymous with a desire to transfix dynamic cultural confrontation into a still life," not merely a style but a technology of assimilation. W.J.T. Mitchell and Sara Suleri's work on the picturesque helps us see how the themes and affects long associated with pastoral and idyllic traditions are extended and adapted in imperial contexts, where "landscape" becomes an active verb or a way of controlling space and assimilating peoples in the service of England.²³

Throughout this dissertation, these terms are treated as dynamically overlapping modes that collectively help to consolidate visions of "improvement," regulate depictions of rural and colonized spaces, and naturalize the expanding reach of Englishness. Returning momentarily to Glenburnie's cottages and their cottagers: for all Elizabeth Hamilton's professed resistance to idealized depictions and accounts of the rural poor, the novel's final tableau ultimately (and overwhelmingly) submits to the pictorial imperatives of the picturesque. At the end of the novel,

²¹ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994).

²² Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 198–99 (and also, pp. 75–101). Ian Baucom takes up Suleri's 'idiom of the picturesque', reading it as an 'idiom of containment' and 'an idiom of comfort in refusal'. See Ian Baucom, 'Mournful Histories: Narratives of Postimperial Melancholy', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 42 (1996), 259–88 (p. 286).

²³ W.J.T. Mitchell begins the introduction to *Landscape and Power*: "the aim of this book is to change "landscape" from a noun to a verb" (1).

the carts, “which used formerly to be stuck up on end before every door,” have been “now placed in wattled sheds attached to the gable end of the dwelling, and which were rendered ornamental from their coverings of honey-suckle or ivy.”²⁴ With its honeysuckle-draped sheds and orderly, white-washed cottages, the final tableau functions not only as a sign of successful reform but as “Englified” icon.

Even the form of this novel—relatively short and resistant to digression, well-organized into different genres of advice, the emphasis on clarity and progression—functions as literary analogue to the work of social reform and idyllic representation.²⁵ The subtitle of the first edition, “a tale for the farmer’s *inglenook*,” performs the ideological work of the idyll as well, situating the story within a world of domestic intimacy. Snug, safe, and well-contained by (or within) the hearth, the fireside scene of reading evoked by the subtitle leans heavily on the idyll’s affective logic: comfort, enclosure, moral reassurance. In the final pages of *Glenburnie*, these modes converge to present a vision of English rural life that is aesthetically unified, morally complete, and implicitly exportable, ready to be read, repeated, and installed elsewhere.

Beyond the Cardboard House: Resistance, Refusal, and the Racial Imaginary

Even as these modes and motifs promise coherence, their contradictions and exclusions persist. Across my project, overloaded character types and overdetermined scenes or settings are illuminated, relocated, turned upside down; in varying degrees, these aesthetic logics are rejected in pursuit of something more unsettled and *real*, seemingly part of various women writers’ attempts to mitigate the kind of disappointment, disillusionment and disaffection inevitable in expecting to

²⁴ *Cottagers*, 300.

²⁵ The novel was incredibly popular in its day. In fact, it contributed to a new rage for cottage visiting – saw an increased demand for non-fiction like *Ladies Companion for Visiting the Poor* (1813).

encounter a “pretty picture” in the countryside. The kind of disillusionment is tragically and emphatically captured by a much later protagonist, Antoinette Cosway, imprisoned in Brontë’s country-house England:

Then I open the door and walk into their world. It is, as I always knew, made of cardboard [...] I wish I could see what is behind the cardboard. They tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don't remember, but we lost it [...] This cardboard house where I walk at night is not England.²⁶

Antoinette’s lamentation surfaces as haunting reminder of the violence and alienation obscured by the willing myth of the English countryside and the neighboring constellation of images, themes, and modes we call pastoral, idyllic, picturesque. As Gayatri Spivak memorably writes, the “cardboard house” also evokes the literal, material boards that bound the text and imprison Antoinette, an unwilling character in a deceptive story world.²⁷ Certainly, in the 19th-century texts assembled in this dissertation, the disillusionment evades language and feeling this explicit. But it is still there, between lines that anticipate “pure air” and “sylvan scenes,” and speakers who find, instead, something they know not. Their subtle and sometimes sharp departures from the idealized, ‘Englified’ image anticipate the deeper cracks within the tradition of English national culture itself.

These cracks become particularly visible when turning to Raymond Williams, whose seminal work on the pastoral tradition and the rural retrospect both clarifies and elides the ideological reach of these forms, and whose selective inattention to empire has become a central point of departure for postcolonial critique. Raymond Williams criticizes the kind of “willing” misrepresentation that Antoinette condemns in his work George Eliot. In a *NOVEL* article titled “The Knowable Community in George Eliot’s Novels” (1969), Raymond Williams has a problem

²⁶ Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Penguin, 1966): 148.

²⁷ Gayatri Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism, *Race, Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985).

with the “selective, glazing quality” of Eliot’s reading of “Old Leisure” in *Adam Bede*. “Leisure,” she writes, “is gone—gone where the spinning-wheels are gone, and the pack-horses, and the slow waggons, and the pedlars who brought bargains to the door on sunny afternoons [...] Even idleness is eager now—eager for amusement.”²⁸ In the pages that follow, she imagines “Old Leisure” to be “a broad-backed, rosy,” “at ease and good-humoured” type, representative of better days gone by.²⁹ Although Eliot’s tone is subtly ironic, keenly aware that “Old Leisure” is a feudal kind of class figure, Williams takes issue with the wistful nostalgia:

This wretched piece is worth quoting at length only because it has been the cue for a hundred similar ruminations: a sleepy fantasy of the past which has been extended into a kind of history; a personification, using the simplest devices of fiction, which can be composed into a general lie. The terrible thing is that she seems to know what she is doing.³⁰

Williams eventually softens his tone and his take on George Eliot’s sleepy fantasy of the past, her “fine old, dear old lies.” In *The Country and the City* (1973), he offers a re-write wherein Eliot’s “crudely” “comfortable” personification of Old Leisure is defined instead as a “foreshortening,” a “selection,” “a special indulgence” that is simply characteristic of “the modern rural retrospect.”³¹ In the four years since publishing his essay on Eliot’s “knowable community,” Williams’s focus comes to rest not on Eliot’s ideological fiction of sun-kissed apricots and “pleasant seats and homesteads” (*Adam Bede*), what he once sees as a “wretched” irresponsibility on the part of Eliot and her fan Leavis, but rather on something more challenging to pin down—“inattention.” Williams writes:

²⁸ George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, Vol 3, first edition (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859), 283.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 284.

³⁰ Raymond Williams, “The Knowable Community in George Eliot’s Novels” (*NOVEL* 2.3, 1969): 255-268.

³¹ Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 178-9.

Yet there is another leisure, a quiet, of some childhood days, and of a father asleep on a Sunday afternoon, which can suddenly, in inattention, become a whole past and an historical scheme.³²

Reading Eliot in 1969, the violent and harsh realities of working-class labor, on which Old Leisure's comfort and ease depends, rises to the surface for Williams; Old Leisure is both "the roundsman" "who can afford to saunter" and "who has leisure precisely in the sweat of other men's work."³³ What looks like an organic cultural rhythm, Williams argues, depends on the invisibility of labor and the elision of class difference. Returning to Eliot's passage in *The Country and the City* with a softer tone and a more "indulgent" tone, Williams concludes, *in brackets*: "—but can one say it while the smiling reminiscence continues—."³⁴ Can one say what? That the "fine old, dear old lies" are in fact "fine old, dear old lies"? In 1969, Williams names the lie; by 1973, he brackets it off. What is at stake in "smiling as the reminiscence continues"? The bracketed clause performs the very containment he critiques, relegating structural violence to a parenthetical aside while the pastoral scene remains intact.

For all of Williams's concern about the way "sleepy fantasies of the past" are "extended into a kind of history," he too participates in a kind of irresponsible mythmaking, in this case through an imaginative failure to rigorously account for the imperial in his work on English "national" culture. In Gauri Viswanathan's reading of Williams, "his reticence in naming colonialism as a shaping factor in English cultural formation" is interpreted as "a reluctance to consider the economics of imperialism as having a final determining power over culture."³⁵

³² "The Knowable Community," 266; *The Country and the City*, 178.

³³ "The Knowable Community," 266.

³⁴ *The Country and the City*, 178.

³⁵ Gauri Viswanathan, "Raymond Williams and British Colonialism," *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 4.2 (Spring 1991): 47-66, p. 59. Some critics highlight the radicality of William's work in the 1960s and 70s, arguing that an "anti-colonial standpoint becomes unmistakable in the political orientation of *The Country and the City*" as evidenced by Williams's claim that "one of the last models of "city and country" is the system we now know as imperialism." See Kanishka Goonewardena "The Country and The City in the

Viswanathan, like many postcolonial critics, shifts the conversation away from the organic development of literary forms and toward institutional systems—especially education and political economy—through which empire structures cultural life. Hers is a move toward systemic and structural analysis, in which the literary is a terrain shaped by deeply embedded material forces. In this light, Williams’s refusal to grant economic structures full determining power becomes more than a political blind spot—it is a theoretical resistance to treating culture as a secondary expression of base economic conditions. The refusal comes at a cost. In effect, empire and race become a kind of absent presence in Williams’s analysis, profoundly shaping the very social and literary forms he studies yet remaining largely unaccounted for. This critical gap has been a key site of intervention for a generation of postcolonial scholars: Simon Gikandi, Sara Suleri, Ian Baucom, and Lisa Lowe, to name just a few, have all shown how Englishness is not only “shaped and *haunted* by forms of imperial experience and knowledge,” but also constituted through it.³⁶

This postcolonial account of English culture as appropriative, appetitive, manufactured, and uncitational aligns with Katie Trumpener’s argument that Englishness is built, in part, through a specifically *literary* reworking of the Celtic past, where Scotland and Ireland provide the raw

Urban Revolution,” *Implosions / Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*, ed. Neil Brenner (Berlin: JOVIS, 2013): 218-231.

³⁶ Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 6. For postcolonial critiques of Raymond Williams’s national framing in *The Country and the City*, see Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), which shows how the English pastoral was shaped by the racial violence of plantation slavery; Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), which builds on and revises Williams’s social historiography by insisting that England’s cultural formations were always already globally negotiated; and Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), which argues that national culture and liberal, modern subjecthood are fundamentally structured by the global histories of slavery, empire, and racialized labor. More recently, Corinne Fowler has considered how rural nostalgia persists in effacing the histories of enslavement and dispossession that funded and continue to fund celebrated English landscapes. See *Green Unpleasant Land: Creative Responses to Rural England’s Colonial Connections* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press Ltd, 2020).

material for a selective, curated, cultivated English national narrative.³⁷ For Trumpener, the language of improvement first takes root within Britain, especially in Scotland post-Culloden. As Ian Duncan has also shown, novels like Hamilton's *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* become the blueprint for colonizing-settler writers, wherein all manner of social and racial difference are represented as ultimately redeemable and assimilable through aesthetic discipline and moral education.³⁸ Trumpener and Duncan's works are especially central to my thinking about how an expressly English national identity coalesced through the appropriation of literary genres, characters, and styles of the so-called "Celtic Fringe." To these claims, I add and emphasize that Englishness was formed through acts of literary appropriation, containment, publication, circulation, and republication, and that that Englishness is enforced and policed by the formal grammars of genre and aesthetics constellated in this project's introduction.

If postcolonial critics have illuminated how Englishness is not simply imagined at the imperial center but manufactured, then literary works from the periphery—or those speaking from and across margins and perceived boundaries—offer equally compelling critiques of these ideological constructions. In what follows, my first chapter turns to one such intervention: the anonymously authored *The Woman of Colour: A Tale* (1808), a novel that at once inherits and overturns the generic devices and character types central to reform literature and colonial travel writing. Where writers like Hamilton seek to absorb difference into legible, tasteful national forms, *The Woman of Colour* mobilizes generic disruption and narrative refusal as strategies of resistance. The epistolary novel provides a crucial starting point for this dissertation's larger argument: that

³⁷ As Katie Trumpener has shown, the taxonomizing impulses of the British literary sphere during this period were intimately bound to an imperial need or desire to regulate and hierarchize difference. See *Bardic Nationalism* (1997).

³⁸ See note 10.

the global diffusion of English literary forms was not met only with absorption or replication, but also with critique, refusal, and reimagining.

I. Peripheral Types: Genres of Refusal and Resistance in *The Woman of Colour*

The Woman of Colour opens this project not because it affirms the logics explored here, but because it exposes and subverts them. Through its inversion of character types and refusal of conventional narrative closure, the novel reclaims familiar literary forms—sentimental fiction, marriage plot, moral reform narrative, travel writing—and turns them against the machinery of English domesticity and colonizing improvement. Contemporary responses to the novel suggest a kind of discomfort with this formal ambivalence: early reviews express frustration with the narrative's lack of resolution and its refusal to conform to the expected arc of redemption and assimilation. At the same time, some critics dismiss certain characters as overly typical or insufficiently developed, revealing how genre itself had already begun to dictate a double-bind expectation for both legibility and novelty. In this sense, *The Woman of Colour* becomes a literary site of generic experimentation, while the critical responses expose how the management of plot and character provide a language for broader social efforts to contain and regulate colonial and racial difference.

This editorial language of expectation and recognition, and its logic of curation and containment, corresponds to the similar work of the publisher. The novel's publishing apparatus—its authorial attributions (in place of the author's name), the reputation of the press, the publication announcements in periodicals, the pricing—all shape how readers were invited to recognize and categorize the text. If literary genre signals what a novel is about, these paratexts help determine where and how a novel belongs. *The Woman of Colour*, however, resists being easily placed. Olivia

Fairfield, our eponymous woman of color, travels from Jamaica to England and passes through a series of conventionally English spaces, from the country house to the rural cottage, only to find that neither fulfills the promised idyll. Instead, both require performances of belonging that she ultimately rejects, displacing the fantasy of English domestic bliss and unsettling the narrative forms designed to sustain it. What connects *The Woman of Colour* to this broader archive, where stillness connotes safety and comfort for white colonizers (Suleri), is its insistence on movement as a kind of critique.³⁹ Olivia's departure from England at the end of the novel does not constitute a failure to assimilate, but highlights instead the inherent power of narrative to represent disruption and resistance and to call attention to alternative ways of being, thinking, and moving through the world.

While *The Woman of Colour* stages a fictional account of Black Atlantic movement and the disillusionments of English rural life, it also belongs to a historical moment of shifting imperial self-definition. Published within one year of the abolition of the British slave trade, the novel emerges from a volatile political landscape, one in which English identity was being urgently reimagined through the language of reform and moral superiority, even as the nation's wealth and imperial infrastructure remained inextricably bound to the continued exploitation of enslaved peoples.⁴⁰ These same logics re-emerge decades later in the white settler writing of Susanna

³⁹ Brigitte Fielder argues that the novel's "epistolary form embeds Atlantic movement and black Atlantic relations into the text." For Fielder, Olivia's ultimate refusal to remain in England aligns her with the "the mixed-race characters of late nineteenth-century antipassing fiction by African American writers, seeming more akin to characters like Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's Iola Leroy than the "tragic mulatta" of abolitionist fiction." See Brigitte Fielder, "*The Woman of Colour* and Black Atlantic Movement," *Women's Narratives of the Early Americas and the Formation of Empire*, eds. Mary McAleer Balkun and Susan C. Imbarato (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016): 171-186, p. 183.

⁴⁰ Parliament abolished the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, but slavery itself remained legal in British colonies until the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. The gap between these two legislative acts marks a crucial period of imperial redefinition, as Catherine Hall and others have shown, during which Britain recast its global identity around narratives of reform and moral superiority. See Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

Moodie, who not only worked closely with Thomas Pringle, the secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, but also served as amanuensis to Mary Prince, the first Black woman to publish a slave narrative in Britain.⁴¹ Taken together, the 1808 novel and the 1830s sketch-writing of Susanna Moodie bookend a period in which Britain reimagines its imperial identity through reformist narratives.⁴² Both works center women narrating displacement and disillusionment, using hybrid forms—epistolary fiction, sketch-writing, memoir—to interrogate the dissonance between moral, aesthetic, or national scripts and lived experience.

II. From Log-Cottage to Shanty: Susanna Moodie's Imprints in the Backwoods of Canada

Moving from Olivia's disillusionment with the English countryside to Moodie's unsettled sketches of life in the Canadian backwoods, the second chapter explores how white femininity adjusts when transplanted to the settler colony and how print itself becomes the site where that recalibration unfolds. *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), which first appeared as sketches in Canadian periodicals before being collected in volume form, was written in part as a corrective to the boosterist, pastoral fantasies saturating contemporary representations of Canadian migration. Moodie's vision is much more ambivalent: the Canadian wilderness is harsh, disorienting, unforgiving, and unruly. In her prose accounts, the backwoods are not a picturesque extension of

2002); Edlie Wong, *Neither Fugitive Nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

⁴¹ For more on *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (London: Westley and Davis, 1831) and abolitionist literature of the 1830s, see Cary-Beckett and McDonagh, "Idyll as Refuge: The Settler's Dream" (2024).

⁴² In between *The Woman of Colour, a Tale* (1808) and *The History of Mary Prince* (1831) and Moodie's own colonial sketch-writing (1830s), a range of literary works, both fiction and nonfiction, engaged with abolitionist themes, often reinforcing narratives of English moral superiority: James Montgomery, *The West Indies, and Other Poems* (1810); Barbara Hofland, *The Barbadoes Girl, or Matilda. A Tale for young People* (1816); Amelia Opie, *The Negro Boy's Tale, a Poem, Addressed to Children* (1824); Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, *The System: A Tale of the West Indies* (1827).

the English countryside but rather a space that must be made and remade through print and publication. Central to this process is Moodie's construction of the Canadian wilderness as a blank, unpeopled space, a landscape emptied of Indigenous presence to justify its transformation. As scholars in Indigenous studies have emphasized, this trope of *terra nullius*—land imagined as empty or ahistorical—serves a key ideological function within colonizing-settler writing: it renders Indigenous peoples peripheral, their presence narratively inconvenient, and their dispossession inevitable.⁴³ Moodie's fleeting, often spectral references to Indigenous figures sustain this logic, casting them as part of a vanishing world that must recede to make room for her family's own survival. Her invocation of a land without history is not merely an ideological convenience; it is a precondition for the kind of personal and professional self-fashioning her narrative undertakes.

Moodie's relentless pursuit of publication, republication, and transatlantic circulation suggests a different kind of improvement narrative, one in which literary production itself becomes a strategy of survival. Drawing specifically on the work of Meredith McGill and Angela Esterhammer, the chapter shows how Moodie adapts the forms of the miscellany and the sketch to produce an iconographic settler persona: the pioneer wife framed by her "shanty door," leaning into the intimacy and portability of English literary forms, especially the domestic sketch and the idyllic rural scene.⁴⁴ Central to this persona is the relocated English cottage—recast as Canadian shanty or log-cabin—which functions not only as their shelter but as a symbol of a locally inflected kind of English domesticity, where the hearth proves just as central and the orderly aesthetic

⁴³ See Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Libby Garvey, "Susanna Moodie and the Erasure of Indigenous Presence," *Canadian Literature* 234 (2017): 45–67.

⁴⁴ Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Angela Esterhammer, *Print and Performance in the 1820s: Improvisation, Speculation, Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

remains. But the chapter also traces how Moodie's domestic imagery is haunted by what it replaces: Indigenous presence, local forms of life, and older modes of poetic authority. As her sketches and poems are extracted, reframed, omitted, or sentimentally reinscribed across British, Canadian, and American print, Moodie's "recollections" become a testing ground for the contradictions of liberal empire and its need to aestheticize displacement and disillusionment.

At the level of theme, *Roughing It in the Bush* is saturated with scenes of land and home improvement: clearing trees, replacing rude huts with log-cabins, taming livestock, the struggle to find and keep decent servants. But materially, it is print itself that performs the most meaningful improvement, expanding Moodie's readership, income, and cultural capital (she has come to be recognized as the 'mother' of Canadian literature, as it were). Her eventual move from the backwoods to a town coincides with a shift in literary ambition: she establishes her own periodical and, through editorial work, recasts herself as a moral and intellectual guide for more isolated emigrants who lack the time and the resources to cultivate their own literary tastes. In this way, Susanna Moodie and her various roles as sketch-writer, businesswoman, and editor, allow her to oscillate between realist representation and more cultivated print performance, between critique and complicity, making her a pivotal figure in this dissertation's argument about how English literary forms were exported, unsettled, and repurposed across the transatlantic world.

III. Plotting Against Pastoral: Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the Pragmatics of Black Belonging

This chapter focuses on Mary Ann Shadd Cary's *A Plea for Emigration; or Notes of Canada West* (1852) as a critical counterpoint to both settler booster literature and white abolitionist discourse. Written and self-published in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), Shadd Cary's pamphlet strategically avoids the nostalgic longing and picturesque re-stylings

typical of 19th-century writings on migration. Instead, it offers a sober, empirical, and politically trenchant appeal to Black Americans seeking refuge. The chapter highlights how Shadd Cary's realist tone and refusal to aestheticize Canada challenge both the utopian tropes of settler narratives and the paternalism of white-led abolitionist movements. Positioning Shadd Cary in dialogue with contemporaries like Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, and Martin Delany, the chapter argues that her rhetorical and material strategies—self-publication, a specific address, and later, pioneering editorial leadership of her own Canadian newspaper *Provincial Freeman*—embody a politics of self-determination rooted in Black print culture. Shadd Cary emerges not only as a compelling writer and editor, but also as a visionary iconoclast who challenges both racial capitalism and the representational regimes of liberal reform.

Shadd Cary's *Plea for Emigration* reframes the conventions of emigration literature by refusing both the aestheticized and 'Englified' landscapes of settler narratives and the sentimental structures that often underwrite abolitionist discourse. Her refusal to ornament Canadian land with idyllic motifs and sentimental appeal marks a deliberate break from the aesthetic protocols that structure white women's emigration literature such as Moodie's. If writers like Elizabeth Hamilton and Susanna Moodie participate in a genre of reformist improvement grounded in imperial futurity, Shadd Cary deliberately sidesteps the pastoral, idyll, and picturesque, offering instead a pragmatic, unsentimental argument rooted in the material needs of displaced Black Americans. Yet her vision is not without its contradictions. Black freedom and protection in British North America, as she frames it, is guaranteed and extended by the British government. In this sense, *A Plea for Emigration* remains tethered to the ideological scaffolding of the British Empire, even as it articulates a radical rejection of white American democracy. Some critics have rightly pointed to the text's silence on Indigenous sovereignty and the threat of displacement caused by Black

settlement, underscoring the incredibly fraught position of Black subjects in this place and at this time.

More recent scholarship reframes Shadd Cary not as complicit in displacement, but as a theorist of dynamic community-building.⁴⁵ This chapter joins these scholars in highlighting how Shadd Cary's attention to education, self-reliance, and the liberating potential of print positions her within an alternative genealogy of diasporic feminist thought. Importantly, this vision of freedom is also grounded in the land, not through idyllic invocation, but through her emphasis on the opportunity to own property and keep one's own home garden and farm. Her attention to garden vegetables (over cash crops) in her pamphlet places her within a longer Black intellectual tradition that sees gardening as a site of dignity, restoration, and racial uplift. This tradition, which would later be taken up by figures such as Booker T. Washington, links material self-sufficiency to moral and political autonomy. For Shadd Cary, the home garden becomes not just a metaphor for self-reliance, but a practical alternative to both abolitionist paternalism and the exploitative economies of plantation slavery.

By situating Shadd Cary's work alongside, rather than apart from, white settler women's writing, this chapter exposes the uneven terrain of imperial literary form, where genre becomes a site of struggle over legibility, recognition, and political futurity. *A Plea for Emigration* neither conforms to the improving aesthetics of the rural idyll nor echoes the utopianisms of boosterism or travel writing; instead, it inhabits a space of generic and aesthetic refusal. It is precisely this refusal that affirms the stakes of this dissertation: that genre is never politically neutral, and that aesthetic form—even at its most unadorned—structures who is seen, who is remembered, and who is granted the narrative space to imagine freedom.

⁴⁵ *Insensible of Boundaries: Studies in Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, ed. Kristin Moriah (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2025).

Dwelling in Disjunction: A Final Note on Method

This project takes inspiration from literary comparatists like Katie Trumpener, Meredith McGill, and Pascale Casanova, whose scholarship models a radical rethinking of literary history—less as a chronology of discrete, original masterpieces than as a field of convergence, circulation, and iteration. Trumpener, as noted, revises the origin story of the British novel by foregrounding its borrowings from the peripheries—vernacular traditions, colonial settings, and hybrid forms that destabilize any singular national narrative. McGill similarly unsettles traditional accounts of authorship and originality, privileging reprinting and textual reiteration as defining features of nineteenth-century literary culture. And Casanova offers a theoretical framework for these insights, charting a “world republic of letters” in which literary value is shaped by transnational dynamics of power and recognition, rather than by internal aesthetic evolution alone. These critics demonstrate that texts long treated as minor or anomalous are, in fact, structurally central to the making of literary modernity—not because they resemble canonical works, but because they make legible the conditions under which literary meaning is generated, transmitted, and contested.

In this spirit, *The Global Cottage: English Forms in a World of Difference* assembles an intentionally unruly archive—*The Woman of Colour*, *Roughing It in the Bush*, and *A Plea for Emigration*—to reflect on genre not as a stable taxonomy but as a mobile, often improvisational strategy for managing social, racial, and geopolitical difference. Each chapter centers on a work narrated by a stranger, a figure marked by geographic and racial or cultural displacement, who must translate inherited literary and social norms across unfamiliar terrain. This is a period shaped by abolitionist rhetoric and legislation, in which the language of freedom was increasingly

mobilized in aesthetic as well as political domains. Across these chapters, genre becomes a crucial site through which both racial difference and the promise of liberation are figured and negotiated.

By centering hybrid, formally unstable texts that blend travelogue, memoir, allegory, and settler narrative, the dissertation foregrounds genre not as a retrospective category of classification but as a dynamic technology: a tool used to manage difference, but also to imagine alternatives. Rather than presenting a comprehensive or representative survey, the chapters work by constellation, drawing together print objects that illuminate how Englishness was scaled, stretched, and aestheticized under colonial conditions. These marginal or mixed-genre works press on the limits of form itself, revealing genre not as a neutral container but as a site of ideological work. There are many other texts that could have appeared in this project. But part of the methodological wager of this dissertation is that what appears peripheral or idiosyncratic—what fails to cohere into a single tradition—is often the most illuminating.

Peripheral Types: Genres of Refusal and Resistance in *The Woman of Colour*

Published in 1808, *The Woman of Colour, a Tale* defies simple generic categorization.¹ With the tale's anonymous authorship and capitalized subtitle, "PACKET THE FIRST," at first glance, the work situates itself within the constellation of canonical British epistolary novels of the mid- to late-eighteenth century. "Packet" does double work here, evoking both the material collection of letters sent from the protagonist Olivia Fairfield to her governess Mrs. Milbanke and the very mail-boats (known as packets) themselves, carrying those letters from the English countryside back to Jamaica. Appropriately, then, the work also incorporates conventions of contemporary travel narratives, but with a difference. Unlike familiar and popular travel narratives that detailed the gentleman's tour through Italy or the antiquarian's travels through Scotland, *The Woman of Colour* centers *and* is narrated by an unconventional female stranger here in England and offers just the type of inverted perspective at home in satire.² As a travelling ethnographer on English soil, she provides a firsthand account of local customs and characters, offering self-described "prolix" descriptions of and anecdotes about the people she encounters.³ Add to this a couple of

¹ *The Woman of Colour, a Tale* (London: Black, Parry, and Kingsbury, Booksellers to the Honourable East India Company, Leadenhall-Street, 1808).

² Examples of the more conventional travel narratives popular throughout the mid-eighteenth- to early nineteenth century abound. One could look to a couple of different examples: the earlier travel accounts through England, Wales, and Ireland by Arthur Young combined detailed agricultural and economical information with social observation (ex. *Tour in Ireland, 1776-1779*). In the wake of Young and many others, John Carr would publish *A Stranger in Ireland* (1806) and *Caledonian sketches* (1807); lacking the rigor of Youngian economy, Carr's works responded to a seemingly ever-present market demand for entertaining "voyages and travels," all the while inciting the critical press: "we have another of Carr's tours, as popular and frivolous as his former ones" (*The Port Folio*, 1807, pp. 37). Fictional ethnographic narratives start appearing late eighteenth century: Elizabeth Hamilton's well-known *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796) saw five editions in its first 15 years in print. Gary Kelly calls Hamilton's fictional travel account an "Oriental" version of the "footnote novel" (a novel form that offers plenty of marginal space for all sorts of extra-commentary). For more on this subgenre, see *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), especially pp. 126-162.

³ *The Woman of Colour, a Tale*, ed. Lyndon J. Dominique (Peterborough, ONT: Broadview Press, 2007), 81. Hereto cited *WOC*.

set-pieces of the National Tale—the tour through a ‘foreign’ country, the marriage plot—and an embedded Gothic tale, *The Woman of Colour, a Tale* reveals itself to be a truly hybrid construction.⁴

This chapter takes seriously the readerly desire to map fiction’s formal terrain at a particularly unstable moment in literary history—the first decade of the nineteenth century—when, as Katie Trumpener notes, the British novel “leaps ahead” and “doubles back,” and the “interplay and friction” between earlier novelistic types amounts to “increasingly enmeshed generic forms.”⁵ In the critical responses to *The Woman of Colour, a Tale*, reviewers oscillate between pleasant surprise and disappointment, impressed by those authorial choices that attend to preexisting patterns and irritated by features that defy novelistic convention. As with this chapter’s opening paragraph, critics and readers alike approach the novel by triangulating it with familiar referents: its plot structure, moral themes, and characters are tested against known coordinates, and its legitimacy and value are often judged by the degree to which the work conforms—or fails to conform—to recognizable forms. Frances Ferguson describes early literary criticism’s self-assigned “task” as “attest[ing] to a work’s success at achieving recognition in the terms in which it asked to be recognized.” In her reading of Jacques Rancière’s seminal *Mute Speech* (1998, trans. 2011), Ferguson emphasizes how the issue for critics was not a text’s “obedience to rules,” but

⁴ Lisa Lowe has written about the similarly hybrid construction of Olaudah Equiano’s “profoundly complex and contradictory” *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African* (1789): “alternately voiced as slave narrative, seafaring tale, protoanthropology, sentimental literature, religious conversion, and abolitionist treatise, it is a hybrid, multivocal collaboration that enlisted and mediated the contradictions of the age to create its first-person autobiographical narrative.” *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 59.

⁵ In the work of Katie Trumpener, we find an alternate origin story for the British novel: borrowing from postcolonial literatures and discourse, this late twentieth-century account of the formation of the novel pushes against the Lukácsian prioritization of chronological authority (and partiality for Walter Scott) and prescribes a way of doing literary history that looks for and to discursive (and by extension, generic) convergence. See Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism* (Princeton UP, 1992), particularly the introduction to Chapter 3: 128-157.

rather “a sense of suitability, of a work’s projection of its understanding of what was appropriate to it.”⁶

In reading both the novel’s paratext—its titlepage and an appended “Dialogue Between the Editor and a Friend”—I argue that at a time when writers and their novels were “loosening [their] grip on generic conventionality,” *The Woman of Colour* explicitly tests these limits of generic “suitability,” proposing instead a different set of narrative commitments.⁷ The novel’s paratext does more than mediate between text and audience; it unsettles the novel’s formal inheritance and marks a shift in what literature could ask of its readers. The friction across the work between expectation and formal choices mirrors a thematic dissonance experienced by the protagonist, Olivia Fairfield, whose journey to England is structured around a profound gap between imagined and actual experience. Olivia is disappointed not only by her betrothed and his family, but by England itself. In this way, the novel stages a multi-layered drama of misrecognition: generic, cultural, and affective. The very tension between surprise and disappointment in critical reception maps onto the protagonist’s own failed fantasies and subsequent disaffection. While the novel’s formal idiosyncrasies (its blend of epistolary, travelogue, and sentimental conventions) and its thematic provocations around race and abolition render it “inappropriate” by the standards of the early nineteenth-century novel, it is precisely this inappropriateness that makes it formally and politically compelling.

⁶ For Ferguson and for Rancière, the breakdown of the genre system is “concomitant” with the rise of the novel, “the genre that repudiates genre.” As the novel loses “contact with the system of genres,” “criticism becomes interpretive,” “imagin[ing] a need to speak for the literature, to be protective of the work, to say that it can’t talk now, that its silence needs to be respected—and that it would, even if absolutely required, refuse to give up that silence.” Frances Ferguson, “Philology, Literature, Style,” *ELH* 80.2 (2013): 323-41, p. 330-32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 333, 330.

I. Paratext and the Politics of Expectation

On the (literal) surface, *The Woman of Colour, a Tale* promises to fall in with the love-intrigue novels of the day. The inscription on the publisher's title page—"by the author of *Light and Shade*, *The Aunt and Niece*, *Ebersfield Abbey*, &c"—invites readers to connect *The Woman of Colour* with other popular novels of the decade [Figure 1.1]. From the outset, the publisher consciously places the 1808 novel in relation to the decade's other popular novels written by women, indicating (perhaps) the work's female authorship while also suggesting a potential kinship between attributed novels. At first glance, this attribution might appear to anticipate the Victorian publisher's "you may also like" logic, a proto-marketing gesture aimed at capitalizing on authorial brand recognition. Yet the reality is more complex: the novels named here are linked not by one single publishing house but by a dispersed network of publishers. Rather than reflecting a coordinated sales strategy, this authorial cluster performs a different kind of cultural work, positioning the text within a recognizable field of sentimental, female-authored novels.

The titlepage points to a system of genre-based recognition, in which the promise of formal and thematic continuity organizes readerly reception. As Gérard Genette argues, the novel's paratext serves as a "threshold" to the text, neither inside nor outside but functioning as a mediating zone that governs how a reader encounters a work.⁸ *The Woman of Colour's* paratext—its titlepage with attribution chain, the publisher's name, the chapter titles, the "dialogue" as postscript—form their own kind of "contract" (Genette) between a work and its audience.⁹ This gesture is crucial

⁸ Gerard Genette argues that a literary work includes not just its narrative content, but everything that frames it—titles, authorial attributions, prefaces, epigraphs, advertisements, even typography. *Paratext* is Gerard Genette's term for the textual material outside the narrative (in his schema, called the "peritext"). Reviews, works by the same author, commentary are also considered paratext (connected by associated and not materially bound with the narrative itself, the term 'epitexts' marks the difference). See *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987), trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

because *The Woman of Colour* depends on the reader's willingness to recognize, and then to reassess, the very conventions it seemingly invokes.

As one of the first novels published by Black, Parry, and Kingsbury, the bibliographic assertion also legitimizes the novel's otherwise anonymous authorship.¹⁰ The opening lines of the *British Critic* review captures how this attribution chain immediately organizes reception:

The writer tells us in his title page, that he is the author also of "Light and Shade," "The Aunt and Niece," "Ebersfield Abbey," &c. &c. What can be the fate of all these books? How soon must they return from whence they came, filthy rags?¹¹

Here, the attribution chain has the opposite effect: it does not ennoble the novel by association but contaminates it through proximity, marking the text as disposable. The reaction is telling. In looking closer at the other novels clustered around *The Woman of Colour*, both on the novel's very title page and in the many literary registers' new publication announcements, the allegedly kindred works are, for the most part, Minerva Press titles.¹² Known as the potboilers of the day, Minerva novels occupy six of the seven examples of "horrid novels" in Jane Austen's Gothic parody *Northanger Abbey* (1818). Despite more recent scholarly efforts to recuperate the tremendous

¹⁰ In his introduction to the 2007 edition of *The Woman of Colour*, Lyndon J. Dominique cites the work of Peter Garside (and others): the list of titles assumes E.M. Foster's authorship, but Garside's extensive research of into the identities of early 19th-century women novelists refutes this claim. Garside explains that some publishers would "boost a novel's credentials [by] extending the list of titles 'by the author' beyond the bounds of veracity." See *WOC*, 69.

¹¹ *The British Critic*, Vol. XXXV (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1810): 299. Although the novel was published in 1808 and the registers announce the publication throughout that year, reviews do not start appearing until early 1810.

¹² From the 1790s through the 1820s, Minerva Press produced more than a third of all novels in London. Minerva Press novels, especially those published under William Lane in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, were wildly popular among circulating-library readers but also quickly became shorthand for what was seen as disposable, formulaic, and overly emotional fiction. At least one of the earlier novels listed in *The Woman of Colour*'s attribution chain (*The Aunt and Niece*, 1804) was a Minerva imprint, while the literary registers of 1808 have *The Woman of Colour* nestled amongst the most recent Minerva titles. In [The Literary Panorama \(1809\)](#), for example, *The Woman of Colour, A Tale* is listed between three Minerva Press works [(1) *Margiana; or, Widdrington Tower, a tale of the fifteenth century, in five volumes*; (2) *The Young Mother; or, Albinia*; (3) *The Old Irish Baronet; or, manners of my country, a novel in three volumes*], in addition to a couple European novels in belated translation.

cultural and commercial significance of the Minerva Press,¹³ its titles have long been dismissed as ephemeral, unserious, and morally suspect—“throwaway literature,” quickly produced and just as quickly forgotten.¹⁴ By affiliating *The Woman of Colour* with these allegedly “filthy” novels, the publisher may have been leveraging their popularity, but at the cost of invoking a form often associated with Gothic excess, melodrama, and overly imitative narratives. This framing matters because it opens up a central tension animating the novel’s form. *The Woman of Colour* trades in readerly expectations shaped by the sentimental and didactic fiction of the decade, only to continually frustrate and exceed them. What the title page promises—clarity, affiliation, belonging—is precisely what the novel proceeds to unravel.

Given *The Woman of Colour*’s “horrid” company, critics expected to encounter a “filthy rag.” The *British Critic* reviewer is surprised, then, to find that *The Woman of Colour* is “by no means illiterate”: “it must be confessed,” he writes, “that this Woman of Colour is by no means [...] without ingenuity of contrivance.”¹⁵ Here, there is praise for the author’s originality, for a well-conceived legal device (the late-father’s will) that will take our heroine from Jamaica to England and back again, an “ingenuous” device that provides enough narrative drive and dramatic

¹³ Considering Minerva Press’s claim to one-third of novels produced in London throughout the Romantic period, it is surprising that William St. Clair offers no more than a few mentions of the press in his seminal (and massive) *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For more generous engagements and/or more recent re-evaluative engagements with Minerva Press and publisher William Lane’s novels, see: See Stephen C. Behrendt, “Publishing and the provinces in Romantic Britain,” *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Neiman, *Minervas Gothics: The Politics and Poetics of Romantic Exchange, 1780-1820* (Cardiff: University of Wales, Press 2019). Elizabeth Neiman and Christina Morin also recently edited a special issue on the Minerva Press and the literary marketplace in *Romantic Textualities*. See: “Re-Evaluating the Minerva Press,” *Romantic Textualities* 23 (Summer 2020), 11-20.

¹⁴ Ann W. Engar “The Minerva Press,” *The British Literary Book Trade 1700-1820, Volume 2*, eds. James K. Bracken and Joel Silver (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1995): 191-197.

¹⁵ *The British Critic* (March 1810): 299

irony to get the story moving.¹⁶ And then, just a sentence later, disappointment: “it is very hard that the poor heroine does not get a husband, for she is made very much to deserve one.” Clever despite its seemingly disreputable “filthy rag” kin, it nevertheless fails to deliver the expected moral and emotional payoff: the marriage that would signal resolution, recognition, and reward. Elsewhere, the novel is faulted for offering too little rather than too much innovation. The *Critical Review* dismisses the “East Indian Nabobs family” for “present[ing] nothing new.”¹⁷ Across both reviews, however, the underlying concern is the same: the novel does not fully comply with the demands of its genre. Olivia Fairfield’s return to Jamaica, unmarried, reads as a failure of assimilation: the author’s failure to assimilate this new literary character into the pre-defined world of the (courtship) novel as promised by the paratext’s attribution chain and the character’s own failure to conform to society’s expectations and normative demands.

That the reviewers so clearly respond to the novel’s deviation from genre expectations underscores the powerful role of paratextual framing in shaping how literary works are received. This friction between paratext and plot, between promise and refusal, does not reflect a failure of form but rather reveals the novel’s critical engagement with the mechanisms of legibility that make texts and characters intelligible in the first place. The novel’s paratextual postscript, a “Dialogue between the Editor and a Friend,” stages, in fact, a miniature reader-response drama that captures the novel’s fraught relationship with genre. The friend’s complaint, “You have not rewarded Olivia even with the usual meed of virtue—a husband,” signals the novel’s failure to fulfill a key sentimental convention: the marriage plot resolution that historically confirms the heroine’s moral

¹⁶ According to her late-father’s will, Olivia must marry her first cousin Augustus Merton or forfeit her fortune; should Augustus refuse Olivia, her £60,000 inheritance passes on to his older brother George (and his wife Mrs. Merton), on whom Olivia would then become dependent.

¹⁷ *The Critical Review, or Annals of Literature* (London: J. Mawman, 1810), 109.

worth.¹⁸ “There is no moral to the work!” the friend insists, echoing a broader anxiety about narrative deviance and generic illegibility.

In staging this exchange, however, “the editor” anticipates precisely the kind of reception Frances Ferguson describes, wherein early literary critics “attested to a work’s success at achieving recognition in the terms in which it asked to be recognized.”¹⁹ The dialogue thus indexes a moment when the novel tests the limits of generic “suitability” and instead proposes a different narrative commitment. Rather than capitulate to the structural promises of sentimental fiction, the novel reframes its refusal of closure as an ethical demand, reorienting the reader’s expectations and sympathies “to look with a compassionate eye towards the despised native of Africa.”²⁰ In this sense, the dialogue does more than mediate between text and audience; it marks a shift in what literature can ask of its reader, in this case to question the generic logics and racial assumptions that determine whose stories are granted narrative resolution, and whose are left open-ended, incomplete, or deliberately unfulfilled.

It is worth emphasizing that in articulating their expectations and in staging a kind of ‘management’ of genre, *The Woman of Colour*’s critics gesture towards the hybrid or protean nature of all novels. Implicit in their critical assessments is the sense that managing literature necessitates classification, a near impossible effort that ultimately highlights the inevitability and pervasiveness of generic slippage. These reviews dramatize the way in which the fundamental slipperiness of genre is registering as a problem by 1808, and the authoritarian tone inhabited by these reviewers anticipate what Jacques Derrida will later dramatize as the authoritarian undertone of all critical

¹⁸ *WOC*, 189.

¹⁹ Ferguson, 330.

²⁰ *WOC*, 189.

discourse about genre.²¹ In their debate about genre's theoretical future in *NLH* in 1986, Ralph Cohen and Dominick LaCapra both challenge Fredric Jameson's dismissal of genre in *The Political Unconscious*, where Jameson casts genre as an outdated and discarded critical category.²² Arguing for its continued relevance, Cohen redefines genre not as a static structure but as a dynamic process, making it amenable to and productive for historical analysis. To this line of thought, Dominick LaCapra notes that resistance to genre-mixing frequently masks efforts to preserve dominant cultural ideologies. As such, the historical mutation of genres reveals shifting patterns of authority and cultural legitimacy. LaCapra cautions: "the seemingly neutral or pragmatic insistence on the need for classification may harbor an unannounced normative and political demand for increased control or vigilance on the level of discursive and social institutions."

LaCapra's word of caution about the "ethico-political incentives" of generic categories emphasizes the stakes of this chapter's central claims—that literary character, like genre, functions as a classificatory system, one designed to make difference legible, to regulate deviation, and to assign social meaning to racialized and gendered bodies.²³ In the early nineteenth century, genre and character do not merely reflect emergent racial ideologies: they actively participate in the work of racialization. If the first part of this chapter explored how early nineteenth-century reviewers attempt to manage *The Woman of Colour*'s generic indeterminacy, what follows considers how race appears in these same reviews as a problem of typological containment. Racial difference is rarely named outright, but it is encoded in the language critics use to describe characters, especially

²¹ Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell. *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980): 55-81.

²² Ralph Cohen, "History and Genre," *New Literary History* 17.2 (1986): 203-218; Dominick LaCapra, "History and Genre: Comment," *New Literary History* 17.2 (1986): 219-221.

²³ "The idea that genre is presently in crisis is [...] reminiscent of the idea that the family is in crisis, and the shoring up of generic categories may well correlate with an ethico-political incentive": Dominick LaCapra, 219.

in their judgments of whether a figure is familiar, fitting, or deserving. In this way, the reviews do more than assess literary merit—they affirm and concretize an emergent system of racial archetypes. And yet, within the novel itself, this very system begins to unravel. Through a series of sharply drawn character sketches, the narrator parodies and destabilizes the conventions that prop up such typologies, exposing them as performative, precarious, and deeply implicated in the ideological machinery of genre.

II. Decoding Characters, Encoding Race

Authorial attributions, publication announcements, recycled tropes, and recognizable devices are just some of a reader's potential generic footholds on the path to interpretation and comprehension. If the first part of this chapter considers the early nineteenth-century critical approach to questions of genre, what follows is an attempt to think through the way in which race also emerges in the reviews as a problem of classification. The history of race is, in many respects, a history of classificatory systems and of efforts to produce, name, sort, and regulate human difference. In the early nineteenth century, this classificatory impulse intensifies across a range of domains: botanists and zoologists refine Linnean taxonomies, geologists establish theories around earth's stratification, philologists begin sorting world languages into hierarchical families, and antiquarians and ethnographers continue to parse civilizations into discrete, often racialized stages of development. These varied disciplines share a commitment to making the world legible by dividing it into stable categories.²⁴ The "scientification" of race that develops across the nineteenth century—through craniometry, phrenology, and eugenics—emerges from the same

²⁴ Roxann Wheeler has shown how racial thinking in the long eighteenth century was shaped not by stable biological markers but through fluctuating and overlapping discourses. Her work underscores the extent to which race in this period was not yet "scientific" in a modern sense but was nonetheless systematized and instrumental in colonial and literary representation. See *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

epistemological urge to codify difference that underwrites antiquarianism, ethnographic writing, and the novel's own typological impulses.²⁵

In their readings of Christina Sharpe and Sylvia Wynter, the editors of a special issue of *Victorian Studies* titled “Undisciplining Victorian Studies” define *racialization* as “the production, hierarchization, and regulation of human difference within a global history of domination, exploitation, and expropriation.”²⁶ In this framework, literary systems like genre and character are instruments of racial management and discipline, no less powerful or consequential than “scientific” theories, legal treatises, or stadial accounts of history. In the section that follows, I argue that literary genre and character are among the key technologies through which race is not merely represented but actively produced, systematized, and made legible in 1808.²⁷ Questions of race are encoded in the reviewer's response to *The Woman of Colour's* characters, a response that

²⁵ Naturalists like Carl Linnaeus and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach extend new authority to racist logics, using craniometry and phrenology (and later, eugenics) to produce biologically determinist theories that equate race with intellectual and moral capacity. Kyla Schuller traces some of this history in *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018). See also: Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Colin Kidd, *Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially Chapter 5: “Monogenesis, Slavery and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Faith,” pp. 121-167.

²⁶ Ronjaunee Chatterjee, Alicia Mireles Christoff, and Amy R. Wong, “Introduction: Undisciplining Victorian Studies,” *Victorian Studies* 62.3 (2020): 369-391, p. 372. Their definition of racialization is informed by Sylvia Wynter's “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument.” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003): 257-337.

²⁷ Recent work by Noémie Ndiaye on early modern performance extends the timeline of racialization practices, tracing how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theatrical cultures across Europe racialized Blackness through repetitive visual and acoustic techniques. Ndiaye introduces the concept of “performative Blackness” to describe these citational practices, which did not merely represent Blackness but produced it as a recognizable identity in the absence of Black subjects. Her emphasis on repetition and scripting informs my chapter's broader argument: that racialization is not only thematic but deeply formal, operating through the recurring mechanisms of literary character and generic convention. *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 18.

affirms and concretizes a system of emerging racialized archetypes. However, in *The Woman of Colour* that same system is revealed to be constructed, parodic, and unstable.

To the present-day reader, the bi-racial character's move from minor role to center-stage marks the most significant departure from conventional eighteenth-century characterization; as such, most (if not all) recent scholarship unequivocally approaches the novel through the category of race and representation.²⁸ In the introduction to the 2007 critical edition (the first modern reprint), Lyndon J. Dominique accounts for his "astonishment" in encountering a free and formidable woman of colour in the archive:

As both Caribbean term and novel title, *The Woman of Colour* was unusual not simply because it announced a free black heroine at a time when they were scarce, but also because it distinguishes this heroine from other contemporary Caribbean heroes in popular literature.²⁹

And yet, despite this "scarcity" of free black heroines, Olivia Fairfield's racial lineage does not get taken up or openly considered in the 1810 reviews. With British involvement in the Atlantic slave trade abolished by an Act of Parliament in the year before the novel's publication, we might imagine that abolitionist discourse finds its way into the reviews; and yet abolitionist language is conspicuously absent from the critical reception. Moreover, Olivia simply "comes over to England" from a place never named or figured in the reviews, despite the novel's constant

²⁸ For Brigitte Fielder, the novel "narrates the movement of race via the movement of the mixed-race woman's body." Like Dominique, Fielder reads Olivia's return to Jamaica, unmarried, as freedom, radical and hopeful. This is about "Black racial uplift." See "*The Woman of Colour* and Black Atlantic Movement," *Women's Narratives of the Early Americas and the Formation of Empire*, eds. Mary McAleer Balkun and Susan C. Imbarrato (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 171-185; "*Theresa and the Early Transatlantic Mixed-Race Heroine*," *African American Literature in Transition, 1800-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 202-226. See also: Sara Salih, *Representing Mixed Race in Jamaica and England from the Abolition Era to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Charlotte Sussman, "Where Will Dido Rest?", *Modern Philology* 118.2 (November 2020), 213-233.

²⁹ *WOC*, ed. Dominique, 21.

invocation of Jamaica and the West Indies.³⁰ This is not to say that the 1810 reviewers (or contemporary scholars) misunderstand the novel; rather, in the early 19th century, we find a different manner of accounting for those questions that we see as specifically racial questions today. Race may not signify in the reviews, but the problem of race is encoded as a problem of character.

Literary historians like Deidre Lynch have already comprehensively detailed how readers of earlier eighteenth-century texts were primed “to use the device of the character” in pursuit of legibility and comprehension.³¹ Building on earlier work by critics like Nancy Armstrong and Catherine Gallagher—who argued that the rise of the novel was deeply entwined with the production of liberal subjectivity—Lynch reorients attention away from interiority and toward what she calls the “economy of character”: a cultural logic that makes character legible as both a literary form and a social type. In this system, character becomes a structure of recognition and a tool of management. Novels like *Roderick Random* (1748), Lynch argues, habituated readers to a mode of character reading that mirrored the classificatory impulses of emerging social and scientific disciplines. In this sense, literary character becomes a modern social technology, teaching readers how to sort, decode, and assign value to individuals based on legible signs. Lynch concludes her work:

This undecidability is in a precise sense the work of literature [...] the literary character’s way of seeming at once self-made, self-expressive, *and* a product of conventions gives readers something to do [...] the undecidability that I have just evoked keeps literature at work.³²

³⁰ *The Critical Review* (May 1810): 108-9; Jamaica and the West Indies are named and conjured close to 30 times in the slim novel’s 140-pages (2007 ed.).

³¹ Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 54.

³² *Ibid.*, 251.

For Lynch, the “*work* of the literary character” is a “socially generative task,” and we can see this in *The Woman of Colour*’s character sketches, wherein character performance seemingly supplies the reader with an up-to-date social rubric of sorts. I want to take this conclusion as another starting point for thinking about what interpretation and (by extension) literary criticism does to and with racialized characters. What are the stakes of this “undecidability”? It seems worth emphasizing that “giving readers something to do” is not necessarily neutral, that the stakes of undecidability might range significantly. Given my claim that genre and character are always already entangled with management and discipline, the undecidability that Lynch points out threatens to quickly become a site of misrecognition, projection, and potentially regulatory violence.

This is clear in the contemporary reviews for *The Woman of Colour*, which perform precisely the kind of judgment Lynch historicizes: they sort characters according to inherited conventions, rendering value judgments that often reinforce normative expectations. In concluding a review that “doubts the morality of this tale,” the critic (*The Critical Review*) offers an assessment of the novel’s characters:

The author has endeavoured to throw into the character of Olivia, a wonderful quantity of magnanimity, fortitude, and religion, and has, in some measure, succeeded. But Olivia is rather too methodisitical.³³ [...] The character of her black servant Dido, is the most natural of any. Mrs. George Merton evinces a malignity, which we trust is unnatural; and the East Indian Nabobs family present nothing new.³⁴

The passage demonstrates how critical assessments of novels often manifest as judgments about the quality and authenticity of the characters. Here, we find the grammar of convention: Olivia is “too X,” Dido is “the most Y,” and the East Indian Nabobs are *just* conventional. That the “character of Olivia” “succeeds in some measure” suggests that she does not fully cohere as a type;

³³ Always speaking in scripture, i.e. like a Methodist, my own clarification.

³⁴ *The Critical Review* (May 1810): 108-9.

she fails as a character because she strains the limits of the categories made available to her. The critique of her being “too methodistical” might suggest an over-identification with moral propriety, a troubling surplus in a mixed-race woman that the critic cannot comfortably accommodate.

More striking still is the evaluation of Dido as “the most natural of any.” The criterion for this assessment is left opaque. If we take “natural” in the eighteenth-century sentimental sense—as synonymous with innocence, simplicity, or authenticity—it is telling that Dido, a Black servant, is rendered legible only through her perceived naivety. But “natural,” in this period, cannot be disentangled from the overlapping vocabularies of emerging racial “science” and other colonial discourse. What appears at first as a gesture of praise—Dido’s “naturalness”—carries the heavy freight of emerging racial typology. That Dido is judged to succeed in her role precisely by not troubling expectations, while Olivia is marked as excessive and overdetermined, reveals how deeply genre and character intersect with race as a system of classification.

This language of ‘natural/unnatural’ should not be taken lightly, particularly given that *The Woman of Colour* was published at a historical moment when “scientific” theories of race were rapidly consolidating into formalized systems of knowledge. This discursive overlap collapses literary aesthetics into “scientific” taxonomy, enabling critics and readers alike to treat Dido’s affective simplicity as a form of racial legibility. Her “naturalness” is not only an affective judgment but a racial one: she fits the expectations of a Black servant because she does not exceed them. This flattening of character into type mirrors the work of polygenetic racial “science,” which sought to collapse human variation into biologically distinct, and hierarchized, groups. As Ian Duncan has shown, the early nineteenth century saw an intensification of polygenetic speculation, particularly in the wake of uprisings in the colonies, which provoked a defensive ideological

backlash among slavery's apologists.³⁵ It is in this context that Dido's "naturalness" must be read: as a signal of compliance with a racial order that both the literary, scientific, and political discourses of the time were actively consolidating. In this way, critical assessments of character serve not just aesthetic functions but regulatory ones—affirming and reinforcing racialized expectations under the guise of literary judgment.

The novel, despite its reviews, resists this emerging notion of racial difference in various scenes across the narrative. One of the most pointed examples of this resistance occurs just after Olivia's arrival in England. In this scene, her uncle, her cousin Augustus (her stipulated husband-to-be, should she claim her inheritance), and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Merton, have all met the ship in Bristol and have temporarily taken up residence in a large house in the most fashionable part of the city, Clifton. After serving Olivia "a large plate of boiled rice" for her first breakfast in the English family home, the cruel Mrs. Merton says: "I understood that people of your—I thought that you almost *lived* upon rice."³⁶ In her account of the scene, Olivia writes in her letter home that "blending her with the poor negro slaves of the West Indies" was designed to "mortify her." "You will believe," she writes, "that *I could not* be wounded at being classed with my brethren." This is just one of many moments in which she asserts solidarity with her "brothers and sisters," all the while remaining "unabashed" and "mistress of herself," thanking Mrs Merton for "studying her palette." Olivia's response reclaims the language of race as affiliation rather than humiliation. In acknowledging kinship with enslaved Black people while remaining "unabashed" and "mistress

³⁵ Ian Duncan has tracked how anti-abolitionist polemic in "reactions to colonial uprisings in India and Jamaica" leads to increasing "polygenetic speculation" in the early decades of the nineteenth century, before "hardening into a racial science in the mid-nineteenth century." *Human Forms: The Novel in the Age of Evolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019): 106-7.

³⁶ *WOC*, 77. In novel quotations, italics are always original to the text itself.

of herself,” she refuses the degradation encoded in Mrs. Merton’s seemingly casual act of domestic hospitality.

While Olivia cannot teach Mrs. Merton and “conquer” her “prejudice,” she can teach her nephew “little George,” who interrupts the breakfast scene to complain that Dido has been kissing him and “dirtying” his face “all over.”³⁷ What follows is a scene of instruction not unlike those common in contemporary children’s tales, wherein the rational governess or loving mother takes the child on lap or in hand, imparting practical knowledge, cultivating a practice of looking and a sense of social responsibility. In texts like Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), the governess figure, Mrs. Mason (as in Hamilton’s later novel), plays a rational and moralizing guide who encourages her charges to “look around,” to behold social realities, and to act charitably not suspiciously.³⁸ These lessons are scripted to demonstrate the rewards of virtue and the superiority of rational observation over instinct or prejudice. The child’s transformation, typically from vanity, impulsiveness, or ignorance toward humility and self-command, mirrors the civilizing goals of Enlightenment pedagogy. Importantly, these scenes rely on asymmetry: the adult imparts knowledge, the child receives it, and the system remains intact.

In *The Woman of Colour*, Olivia takes up this familiar pedagogical structure, placing young George on her lap and staging a test of perception. She asks if he can see a “difference” in their hands. “Mine looks *clean*,” he replies, “and *yours* looks *not* so very dirty.” She asks George to take the “corner of [her] handkerchief” and to try to “rub off” “the coal” on her hands.”³⁹ This is a moment in which Olivia, again, unhesitatingly claims kinship with Dido and with all Black

³⁷ Ibid, 78.

³⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life; with Conversations Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness* (London: J. Johnson, 1788).

³⁹ *WOC*, 78-9.

subjects: “we cannot make *our* skins white, any more than you can make your black.”⁴⁰ The scene of instruction literalizes racial difference in a literal, embodied way, but it also disarms that difference, reframing it as non-hierarchical and immutable. That the scene unfolds in the drawing room of a large English house is no accident: the domestic interior, typically a site for cultivating white bourgeois virtue, becomes instead a space for racial critique.

As the introductory reading of Elizabeth Hamilton’s *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* made clear, scenes of instruction are more than just narrative interludes; they are critical sites where the ideological and affective work of the novel surfaces. As both *The Woman of Colour* and *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* demonstrate, instruction is not only about transmitting knowledge but also about modeling and producing *good character*, in both senses of the term. Didactic scenes, especially those modeled on domestic or reformist genres, aim to cultivate the right kinds of feeling, perception, and social behavior.⁴¹ In *Glenburnie*, these scenes are relentless: Mrs. Mason’s disciplinary vision trains Scottish cottagers to conform to an “Englified” model of improvement, with character reform presented as the necessary predicate for domestic order and, by extension, national health. But in *The Woman of Colour*, the instruction motif is repurposed. Olivia does not ask young George to look with pity on those around him, as the moral tales and didactic stories of the period encouraged. This cultivation of sympathy—at home in the moral tale and absorbed by paternalistic, abolitionist discourse and texts—is not at play in *The Woman of Colour*, where pity

⁴⁰ Lyndon J. Dominique reads moments like these as “courageous acts” that point forward to the political actions of “real” women of color (such as Elizabeth Ann Miller and Mary Seacole), women who “reveal the literal presence of a domestic black female activism in late eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain. See “Spectral and Literal Black Heroines in Eighteenth Century British Literature,” 29-30.

⁴¹ Katie Trumpener’s work is a crucial touchstone here, particularly for thinking about didacticism as a formal strategy that mediates between domestic instruction and imperial governance. In the chapter “Coming Home: Imperial and Domestic Fiction,” Trumpener highlights how women’s domestic fiction, often overlooked as politically marginal, plays an outsized role in “civilizing” narratives. As considered in the introduction, these scenes instruction are presented as familiar and intimate, but they do the work of embedding imperial logics in everyday life. See *Bardic Nationalism*, 161-241.

would only reify an ethnocentric hierarchy that grants whiteness and Englishness superiority over Blackness. No one at Clifton, white or Black, has the power to “make [their] skins” different.

In asking little George to “*prove* the truth” so early in the novel, we begin the English country house sojourn with a scene of racial/radical instruction that initiates the reader, not just the child, into an alternate racial epistemology, one rooted in empirical evidence and personal experience. Young George’s prejudice is “conquered” on Olivia’s lap, through the intimacy of encounter. The physical act of rubbing her skin is meant not to affirm whiteness as the moral and aesthetic norm, but to expose the fallacy of impulsive, surface-level judgements and to demonstrate the futility of trying to erase Blackness. If—as Elizabeth Hamilton’s Mrs Mason makes clear—domestic scenes of instruction aimed to assimilate difference into whitewashed scenes of “Englified” order, Olivia disarms the pedagogical form’s disciplinary purpose by refusing to erase or assimilate Blackness.

The novel, in this way, uses genre against itself: the tropes of the sentimental novel and the didactic scene are co-opted not to affirm white supremacy, but to dismantle its racial logics from within. “I hope,” she concludes, “my sentiments on the abolition will be immediately understood.”⁴² Her invocation of abolition at the end of the scene is strategic and ironic: she leverages the moral capital of the movement not to appeal for sympathy, but to expose how racism persists beneath all its charitable veneer. With Mrs Merton’s cruelty and her young son’s imbibed prejudice laid bare in the opening domestic scene, the novel pointedly comments on the insufficiency of abolition in the year following the Abolition of Slave Trade Act. By drawing attention to the disjuncture between abolitionist rhetoric and social reality, the scene exposes how

⁴² *WOC*, 81.

genre—particularly sentimentalism and didacticism—can be both a tool of regulation and a site of subversion.

Later moments in the novel press further on this tension, focusing less on “proving the truth,” but deploying irony and mimicry to disrupt the coherence of character types and social scripts. As the novel progresses, the regulatory function of character becomes increasingly unstable, its typologies undermined through parody, contradiction, and refusal. The final movement of the chapter takes up this breakdown, tracing how racialized character ceases to operate as a reliable vehicle of knowledge and instead becomes the object of the novel’s most trenchant critique.

III. “Languid affectation” and “die-away ladies”: Englishness on Display

From the early scenes of arrival in fashionable Bristol to their post-wedding London residency, the narrative eventually lands in the “romantic part” of Devonshire.⁴³ This is a welcome relief to the newly-wed Olivia, who “has been rattled over [the] vast metropolis” to “partake in every species of amusement” and who has since grown “sick” of “the plodding track of cent. per cent. and addition on addition.”⁴⁴ In her final London letter, the last letter of her ‘second packet’, Olivia denounces the “affectation,” “vanity,” and “selfish[ness]” of her metropolitan, “mercenary” family, the Mertons, and pens her own “scheme” for “domestic happiness”:

I have got a fine Utopian scheme of domestic happiness in my head, and the *country* must be the birth-place of it. The conversation of my husband, a contemplation of the beauties of nature, the society of rational and well-informed friends; books, music, drawing; the power of being useful to my fellow creatures,—to my poorer neighbours;— the exercise of religious duties, —and the grateful heart, pouring out its thanks to the Almighty bestower of such felicity! Say, dear madam, is such a plan likely to be realized by your OLIVIA FAIRFIELD? ⁴⁵

⁴³ *WOC*, 105.

⁴⁴ *WOC*, 95, 98.

⁴⁵ *WOC*, 99.

Not long after, Olivia reveals that this vision of a blissful country life has been shattered: “all the ceremonials of fashion” have followed them “into retirement.” At the same time, she recognizes the mythic proportions of her pastoral vision: “to form a truly unvitiated and primeval neighbourhood of undisturbed truth, simplicity, and innocence,” she concludes and self-soothes, “we must revert to the golden age, and to the rapt reveries of enthusiastic poets.”⁴⁶ This gesture—acknowledging the constructedness of her own expectations—repositions Olivia not as a failed participant in English domesticity but as a critic of its idyllic promises. Her recognition that rural peace is a poetic fantasy both complicates and sharpens the novel’s wider commentary on the mythic dimensions of English nationhood. While Olivia may momentarily indulge in pastoral dreaming, her disappointment is not resolved through resignation but rather becomes a structuring affect—disenchantment, in this novel, is the point.

From her arrival in England, “the noise, the closeness, and the gloom” far “exceed anything [she] could have imagined.”⁴⁷ *The Woman of Colour* explores the ongoing dislocation, fatigue, awkwardness, and bemusement that arise from being a person of color in a colonial space—one that masquerades as an English idyll but in fact enforces subtle and sustained forms of exclusion. Olivia’s “awkward[ness] and contrain[t]” as she performs the expected “rites of hospitality” for neighbors she “cannot respect or esteem” reframes domestic labor not as a source of moral refinement but as a burden of social performance.⁴⁸ That she is “viewed with no common curiosity,” even in—or especially in—the supposed quiet of the countryside, casts her disillusionment as symptomatic of a larger representational system in which the pastoral scene

⁴⁶ *WOC*, 125.

⁴⁷ *WOC*, 69.

⁴⁸ *WOC*, 127.

itself becomes a kind of racialized theater.⁴⁹

Once settled and “quite at home” in their own country house (appropriately named “New Park”), Olivia and Augustus’s idyllic vision of married domesticity—quiet conversation, walks in nature, the “society of rational and well-informed friends”—is immediately threatened by a new set of social demands; they find themselves almost “exclusively” “devoted to the receiving and paying of visits.”⁵⁰ Here, Olivia “indulges” in a number of cutting asides about the neighboring “lofty villas of Nabobs,” particularly “the Pagoda,” and its “dazzling” residents, a local family recently returned to England having “acquired a very considerable fortune at Bengal”: Sir Marmaduke, Lady Ingot, and their “lisping” son Mr Ingot.⁵¹ In many ways, the Pagoda sketches imitate prevailing derisive accounts of the emerging “nabob” class.⁵² Olivia’s sketches of the Ingots echo a well-established literary tradition, extending back to Samuel Foote’s highly successful play *The Nabob* (1772), in which the figure of the nabob—an Englishman enriched by colonial service—is mocked as tasteless, grasping, and socially unfit.

And yet, long before Foote’s infamous and influential nabob (Sir Matthew Mite), a rhetorical practice of associating “Indian profusion” (the “fecundity” of the soil and “fertility” of

⁴⁹ *WOC*, 107.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *WOC*, 105-8.

⁵² A transliteration of the Persian term for ‘deputy’ (‘nawdb’, or provincial governors in the Mughal empire), ‘nabob’ refers to the EIC company-man, who having made his fortune through morally-suspicious colonialist enterprises, returns to England excessively wealthy and politically ambitious. In his critical definition of the term, Ian Copland suggests that the “harsh contemporary view of the nabob” (as seen in Foote and the caricatures that follow) was “to some extent unwarranted,” considering that half of the 900 “company servants” in India between 1760 and 1790 “perished from disease.” “Nabob,” *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For more on the perceptions of and representations of Anglo-Indians in the century before “Kiplingesque jingoism,” see Renu Juneja, “The Native and the Nabob: Representations of the Indian Experience in Eighteenth-Century Literature,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 27 (1992): 183-98; and Tillman Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

the land) with “deplorable excess” had already cast India as a “morally suspect place.”⁵³ By the time we meet the Ingots, this well-rehearsed “aesthetics of profusion” or “topography of deplorable excess” has furnished a century’s supply of literary tropes and images fit to damn any and all who encounter the Indian landscape. These tropes, which circulate widely across travel literature, satire, and imperial fiction, had been further amplified and codified by the booming market in graphic prints—particularly the visual grotesques of Rowlandson and Gillray, whose work trafficked in caricature’s distortions and easily legible types. Written at the height of graphic satire’s golden age, *The Woman of Colour* plays with and resists the “urge” to “indulge in caricaturing,” moving between Olivia’s “sarcastic observations” in some scenes and an expressed shame in her “unchristian-like vision” in others.⁵⁴ Olivia’s narratorial shame aside, the satirical set-pieces of colonial extravagance are ever present: “good dinners, the turtle, and the curries,” marshalled as a short check list, with few additional details needed.⁵⁵ The stock motifs, the set-pieces, have been assembled.

Just as the table blends West Indian luxury (“the turtle”) with ‘East Indian’ culinary culture into a single scene of colonizing consumption, the “Pagoda” “blends” “every order of architecture,” collapsing imperial styles and geographies into a visual joke. Pointing to any and all tropes and motifs at once, this is caricature in action, a cartoon logic that relies on overdrawn types and sensory excess, but with a difference. Where British graphic satire would typically turn to the Black body as the site of ridicule and humor, Olivia constantly directs critical attention towards the white bodies around her.

⁵³ Pramod K. Nayar has shown how 17th- and 18th-century topographical writings transform into moral topographies, and by extension, these epistolary musings on landscape and aesthetics harden into a colonial ideology that will later call for interventionist action. See “Marvelous Excesses: English Travel Writing and India, 1608-1727,” *Journal of British Studies* 44.2 (2005): 213-238.

⁵⁴ *WOC*, 108, 81, 108.

⁵⁵ *WOC*, 108.

From her first society entrance in Bristol, she resists the stares and insults of “mincing, simpering, lisping” ladies and the “slouch[ing] men,” “these *animals*,” who rather affectedly and foppishly “hang” on “one another’s arm.”⁵⁶ This early scene offers perhaps the only glimpse of and reference to the racial and racist visual vocabulary of contemporary caricature,⁵⁷ and as soon as it does, Olivia removes herself from the line of fire. This scene is one of visual confrontation, but rather than becoming the site of ridicule, Olivia walks offstage and finds a like-minded companion: a “pleasant,” “eccentric” friend with a “talent for satire,” with whom she shares “sarcastic observations on every body.”⁵⁸

As the narrative continues, the visual humor of Rowlandson and Gillray is directed, instead, at the Ingot family, who are presented through caricature’s grotesque juxtaposition of masculine woman and effeminate man: “*My lady* is a masculine woman; very hard-favoured, and of a forbidding countenance [...] the general terror of the females in the vicinity,” while her son, with “delicate fingers warmed in a muff of the finest ermine, almost as large as himself” appears “very effeminate and diminutive.”⁵⁹ The grotesque juxtaposition here recalls caricature’s power to mark and exaggerate the socially absurd, but *The Woman of Colour* reclaims that mode, not to reinforce racial hierarchies, but to destabilize English ones. The novel, then, redeploys theatrical and visual conventions associated with satire and performance—particularly caricature—as tools of critique,

⁵⁶ *WOC*, 85.

⁵⁷ The ball scene opens with the comment, “Come, let’s stare at Gusty’s black princess!,” evoking the satirical tradition of “mock[ing] African women as romantic choices” (*WOC*, 85; Odumosu, 110). For a thorough history of the graphic representation of Black peoples at this time, see Temi Odumosu, *Africans in English Caricature, 1769–1819: Black Jokes, White Humor* (London: Harvey Miller, 2017).

⁵⁸ *WOC*, 86.

⁵⁹ *WOC*, 108-9; in her recent essay on humor and caricature in *The Woman of Colour*, Leigh-Michil George compares Lady Ingot and her son to the figure of the wife and husband as described by Francis Grose in *Rules for Drawing Caricatures: With an Essay on Comic Painting* (London: Printed by A. Grant for S. Hooper, 1788), where “a large masculine woman and a small effeminate man” make for the most “laughable contrast.” See “‘Mind Is Revealed in the Countenance’: Subversive Laughter and Caricature in *The Woman of Colour*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 35.1 (January 2023): 43-64.

offering readers a way to laugh *with* rather than *at* its protagonist, and to see racial and colonial power not as natural but as absurdly constructed and painfully theatrical. If, as earlier sections argue, character operates as a kind of social shorthand—offering readers “something to do” (Lynch)—then caricature reveals the thinness of these representational systems. It makes visible the work of typification by exaggerating its contours, exposing the increasingly grotesque underpinnings of empire, race, and class.

The nabobism of *The Woman of Colour* was dismissed by reviewers for its derivative contours; but the novel’s treatment of colonial excess is far more pointed than such assessments suggest. It is in her first conversation with Lady Ingot that Olivia remarks on what she has hereto only critiqued privately by letter: the “deportment” of English ladies. While Lady Ingot submits that English ladies, or “plants indigenous to the soil,” sit with “hands before them, bolt upright,” Olivia replies:

I have remarked a very different deportment, and seem to have hitherto seen only those who diverge to the contrary extreme—neither stiffened joints, nor limbs have prevented them from reclining and lounging with an air of ease, which I thought quite ‘the rage.’⁶⁰

This is just one of many moments in which the protagonist reveals bemusement at the performative “languishment” of the women she encounters in England. Olivia is not simply noting cultural difference; she is exposing the codified theatricality that governs English femininity. Lady Ingot leaps at the opportunity to comment on “graceful languishment” as an increasingly English or domestic fashion:

“Oh! There are some who have imitated us *East Indians*,” said Lady Ingot, wrapping her shawl around her coarse limbs [...] —“we have had an opportunity of seeing the graceful languishment of Circassian loveliness, unrivalled for voluptuous and attractive elegance; and these degenerate imitators of that luxurious ease, which they have never *felt*, are the greatest treat to us, who see the distorted

⁶⁰ *WOC*, 111.

barbarism of the likeness!⁶¹

Her invocation of direct access to these racialized bodies functions as a claim to authority, a trope pervasive in both ethnographic travel writing and emigration literature. An abiding European, literary fascination with Ottoman court culture and the figure of the slave-concubine underwrites the mythic proportions of Circassian beauty at this time; travel accounts and the fictional tales that follow emphasize the inaccessibility and unknowability of the guarded female body, further rendering the Muslim woman as a public site of curiosity and erotic fascination.⁶² Lady Ingot's claim, *I have seen*, attests to her participation in this practice (and literary genre) of colonializing spectatorship. Unlike the travel narrative however, Lady Ingot marks a third, revealing category of character: neither colonizer (East Indian) nor colonial subject (Circassian loveliness), the white provincial subject—"the degenerate imitator"—mimics colonial aesthetics without proper authorization.

Lady Ingot establishes a hierarchy of white subjectivities, a hierarchy of what it means to be a proper colonizer. The novel repeatedly suggests that Creole "languishment" and "Circassian loveliness" as affect can only be economized when performed by *certain* white bodies. As a self-described "*East Indian*," Lady Ingot can drape herself with the "most superb oriental shawl" with a "fine lace veil descend[ing] almost to the ground." Mr Ingot, "the ["lisper"] youth of fifteen," also appears wrapped in a shawl, wearing a gold hat "ornamented by a plume of feathers."⁶³ But the aping of the colonizer's fashions by the more provincial white characters is regarded as

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Voyeuristic descriptions of "graceful languishment" litter eighteenth-century travel writing, fiction, and poetry, only to become increasingly concretized by the Eastern tales of Byron, Landon, and Hemans in the decade to come. For more on "oriental consumerism," see Nandini Bhattacharya, *Reading the Splendid Body: Gender and Consumerism in Eighteenth-century British Writing on India* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998).

⁶³ *WOC*, 109.

“degenerate imitation” and “distorted barbarism.” Lady Ingot condemns those who imitate her style without her presumed imperial legitimacy.

It would seem, in any case, that domestic and imperial subjects alike are prone to a kind of performative idleness. It is central in fact to the critique Olivia is building that it is not *just* the “nabob” characters that perform this kind of “languid affectation and supine manner.”⁶⁴ Five years before Jane Austen memorably presents the idle Lady Bertram and with her pug in lap, it is Mrs. Merton who lounges with her “pug dog,” “affecting to take no interest or share in the conversation.”⁶⁵ Recounting the first meeting with her family in England, Olivia describes the “affected” Mrs. Merton, who “preceded down the stairs with a languid careless step, which could not have been exceeded by the most die-away lady in the whole island of Jamaica.”⁶⁶ Later, she writes:

[...] a casual observer might have been led to inquire, whether she *had* any legs, for she certainly seems to derive no manner of assistance for them [...] nothing more frequently excited my surprise, and I may add, disgust, than the languid affectation and supine manners of some of our West Indians; but I never saw any one of them who could in the least compare with Mrs. Merton, who seems to have attained the very height of *inaction*.⁶⁷

Here, Olivia’s disgust at West Indian and English woman alike suggests that colony and metropole are not in fact wholly separate spheres and that the perversions and degenerate behaviors and manners of white West Indians are just as (if not, more so) at home on English soil. This equivalence—between the white planter class in the colonies and fashionable English elites—disrupts the prevailing logic of abolitionist rhetoric, which sought to distinguish metropolitan

⁶⁴ *WOC*, 82.

⁶⁵ *WOC*, 75.

⁶⁶ *WOC*, 72-3.

⁶⁷ *WOC*, 82.

civility from colonial brutality.⁶⁸ When Mary Prince writes the abolitionist-inflected conclusion to her *History*, she casts the West Indies as a wholly distinct world: “I have often wondered how English people can go out into the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner.”⁶⁹ This well-established construction of colonies and sites of slavery as a world away rhetorically distances people in England from the violent behavior of colonizers abroad.

The Woman of Colour collapses this spatial and moral distinction. Published in the year following abolition, the novel suggests, instead, that there is very little distance between the “disgusting” behavior of white women in the West Indies, India, and England: all white women display the same bad behavior. That contemporary rhetorical effort to cast the West Indies as a separate zone of self-indulgence and immorality—the dehumanizing impacts of plantation slavery—is undermined by this novel’s cast of lounging white women and “slouch[ing]” men. This cast of white, idle characters confronts the pro-slavery archetype of the lazy, racialized subject (Hamilton’s racialized villagers who “cannot be fash’d” are just one example), suggesting that the pretensions, performances, and affects associated with colonial life are deeply embedded in English domestic culture itself. This is to say that, in *The Woman of Colour*, there’s nothing more English than lolling on the sofa.

In this way, the novel intervenes in and complicates a long history of literary representations of English idleness. Languishment is not a mere vestige of colonial excess, but a recognizable feature of English gentility. From Samuel Foote’s *The Nabob* to Rowlandson and Gillray’s graphic satires, British visual and literary culture had cast the nabob as a figure of overindulgence, effeminacy, and racial contamination. But as *The Woman of Colour* makes clear,

⁶⁸ See Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Slavery and the Politics of Place: Representing the Colonial Caribbean, 1770-1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), especially pp. 165-184.

⁶⁹ Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (London: Westley and Davis, 1831): 23.

these very critiques—when directed at colonial figures—are often blind to their own origins. Literary performances of genteel leisure are well-documented long before the Ingots’ decline, “lounge, and loll, and curvet.”⁷⁰ As early as the seventeenth century, foreign reports comment on the “slothful and self-indulgent” lives of Britain’s inhabitants.⁷¹ Writing in the 1660s, Dutch traveler Samuel Sorbière presents a nation of “idle, sluggish, do-littles”:

This Speed, they make on Horseback, appeared so much the more remarkable to me, because of its been used in a Country where the People are very lazy, which I can very well affirm without Offence; for they do perhaps glory in their Sloth, and believe that true Living consists in their knowing how to live at Ease.⁷²

In this “Country where the People are very lazy,” “glory in their Sloth” becomes a “badge of status,” what Laura Brown has called “an ornament for a class whose male members defined themselves in terms of business.”⁷³ What Olivia’s attention to “languishment” ultimately reveals is that these affective performances—once attributed to the exotic excesses of the colonial periphery—are, in fact, at the core of English domestic life; this is all very much a part of an already-consolidated, already-English and white national character. Far from being incidental, these repeated performances of indolence across English and colonial spaces reveal a white national character whose coherence is not only unstable, but entirely dependent on gesture, costume, and mimicry.

In choosing to emphasize the idleness of various white characters, especially the metropolitan Mrs. Merton, more “die-away” than any West Indian character, the novel reveals how

⁷⁰ *WOC*, 118.

⁷¹ Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 327.

⁷² Samuel Sorbière, *A Voyage to England: Containing Many Things Relating to the State of Learning, Religion, and Other Curiosities of that Kingdom* (London: J. Woodward, 1709).

⁷³ In the century before *The Woman of Colour*, Defoe, Addison, and Steele offer their own moralistic “laments” on the foolish vanity and “false fragility” of the ideal, idle female. See Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Woman and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-century English Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994): 94.

a character-type—like Hamilton’s colonized, uncivilized villager who “cannot be fash’d—can be transferred from a racialized body on to and economized by white bodies—and it *can* be transferred, enacted, and performed by white subjects *because* it is a genre or a type. These English character types are not biologically fixed but generically scripted: modes of being and behaving that attach themselves to bodies through repetition and recognition. This, in turn, dramatizes one of the chapter’s central claims—that literary character, like genre, functions as a classificatory system, one designed to make difference legible, to regulate deviation, and to assign social meaning to racialized and gendered bodies.

The various caricatures that follow the scene of instruction reassert the early disavowal of racial difference by reminding us that both the cultural space of the English country house, “*calculated* for sociability,” and the space of the novel take their form within a theatrical tradition and idiom.⁷⁴ The character of Mrs. Merton suits both the page and the stage, with “such a look of *design*” and “so large a portion of conceit and affectation.”⁷⁵ At the same time, Olivia expresses a “fear” that she “shall find it very difficult to play [her] part as [she] could wish.”⁷⁶ Here, both characters, unconsciously and consciously, point to the scripted or pre-scripted structure of character-acting on stage and page. By extension, the novel’s recurring attention to and repeated (and somewhat repetitive) accounts of the Merton’s and the Ingots’ physicality, their distorted

⁷⁴ In her study of early modern European performance culture, Noémie Ndiaye offers a model for thinking about how racial difference is produced not merely through representation but through what she calls “scripts of blackness”: aesthetic and performative conventions that make blackness intelligible through repetition, citationality, and expectedness. These techniques are not simply theatrical flourishes but formalized practices that helped spectators recognize, identify, and assimilate racial difference within a legible ideological frame. This emphasis on repetition and legibility has clear resonances with the conventions of literary characterization in the early nineteenth century. *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

⁷⁵ *WOC*, 73; Deidre Lynch similarly argues that “what happened on the stage in the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century was not necessarily conceived of as distinct from what transpired on the page.” See *Economy of Character*, 70.

⁷⁶ *WOC*, 83-4.

movements and gestures, “dooms” these characters “to a series of delimited and recurring appearances,” to “inadequate or disjointed expression.”⁷⁷ It is in the narrative’s most satirical of sketches, when caricature’s distinct mode of exaggeration and distortion brings print culture and performance culture into increasingly close relation, that we hear a critique of the constructed nature of both English domestic space and racialized character—equally artificial, equally sustained by print culture’s repetition and circulation.

IV. “This Nut-Shell of a House”: Refusal and Retreat

The novel concludes not with a triumphant resolution but with a quiet retreat to the margins, geographically, socially, and narratively:

MINE is a very snug habitation; it is a thatched cottage on the side of a hill, which commands a noble view of the Wye, and the picturesque country which adorns its windings [...] An humble inhabitant of a lowly tenement like mine, is, however, likely to pass unnoticed, and a woman of colour will not be a courted object [...] I keep myself employed; I endeavour to interest myself in my pursuits; I work in my little garden.⁷⁸

Living in a thatched borderland cottage that “commands a noble view of the Wye,” Olivia embraces the visual grammar of the picturesque, but as a “humble inhabitant of a lowly tenement,” “likely to pass unnoticed,” she refuses the logics of possession and mastery so central to the English picturesque. Rather than accept Augustus Merton or Charles Honeywood, the two figures who could offer her security within the English domestic imaginary, Olivia chooses a life of independence. The marriage plot fails, but not because the character fails to conform; it fails because the character exposes the limits of the form itself. Her final act, then, is one of self-removal: from the English country house landscape, from sentimental resolution, and from the

⁷⁷ See Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 167.

⁷⁸ *WOC*, 158.

performative social roles that have been offered to her and which she consistently refuses to inhabit.

In choosing to leave—first for the borderlands and then, on the final pages of the novel, for Jamaica—Olivia resists the moral scaffolding of the genre she has momentarily inhabited. The “very snug” “thatched cottage on the side of a hill,” a space that might have signified pastoral retreat in more conventional fiction, emerges as her space of renunciation and of refuge. Olivia makes meaning within her “narrow sphere” through modest acts of repair and a politics of care. “I keep myself employed,” she writes. “I work in my little garden; I walk where I see a retired hut of poverty, and I try to do a little good to my fellow beings.” Here, she models an alternative form of political engagement, one that does not rely on spectacle and affectation but on quiet mutuality. The garden, so often a metaphor for cultivated Englishness, is not a scene of imperial control or ornamental order, but a space of daily labor and ethical self-fashioning. This is not the improvement ethic of Mrs. Mason’s Glenburnie, nor the exportable cottage of colonizing-settler domesticity. It is a garden that does not demand visibility or reward, like its gardener.

The final image of the cottage on the hill, its view of the winding Wye, and its unnoticed inhabitants, is deeply ambivalent. Dido’s lament in the novel’s closing scenes—“me know nothing in this England town but disappointments”—emphasizes that this cottage scene proves far from idyllic for both inhabitants.⁷⁹ It is, rather, a liminal site: between nation and periphery, between visibility and obscurity, between genre and its undoing. Olivia walks the edges of the nation, literally and figuratively, and then departs. As it began, the novel ends with dislocation and ambivalence. Olivia’s experience of England is marked by repeated disillusionment: the clamor of Bristol, the artifice of London, the constraints of rural society, and the spectacle of languishing

⁷⁹ *WOC*, 167.

whiteness all fail to offer her a livable narrative. At its conclusion, the novel refuses to redeem Englishness. It grants its heroine neither social recognition nor narrative closure. What it offers, instead, is a life outside the frame: uncourted, unclaimed, uncontained, and then, once again, at sea.

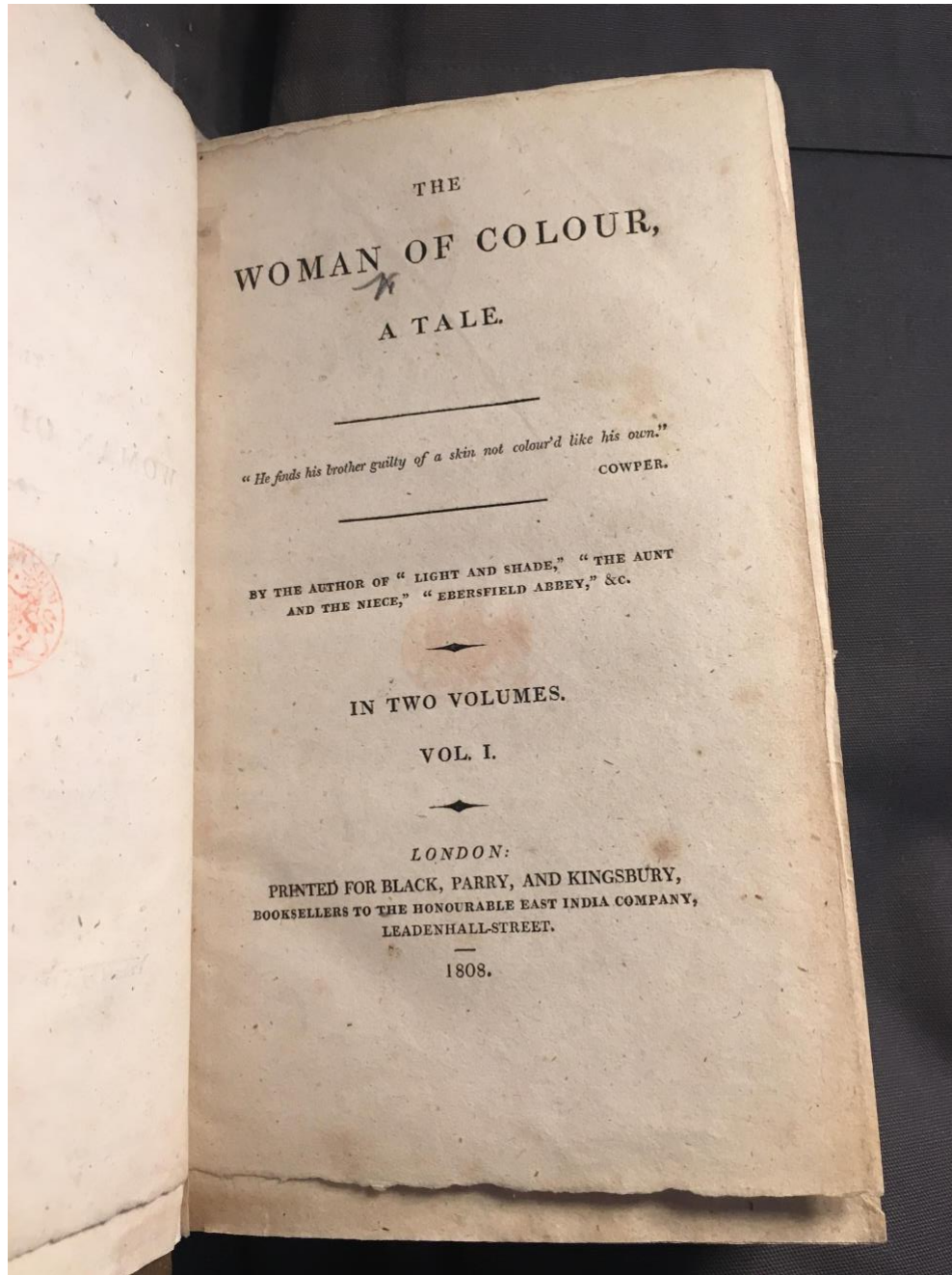


Figure 1.1 Original title page, *The Woman of Colour*, courtesy of the British Library.

From Log-Cottage to Shanty: Susanna Moodie's Imprints in the Backwoods of Canada

Amongst the necessities packed up for farm-life in the Canadian Backwoods, the English writer and settler-colonizer Susanna Moodie includes 100 unbound, uncut copies of her recent poetry collection *Enthusiasm, and other Poems* (1831).¹ Not long after landfall, Moodie begins to circulate her collection, sending *Enthusiasm's* poems back across the Atlantic and to editors in North America, seeking publication where possible.² Only 10 days into her arrival, while temporarily residing at a hotel in Cobourg, their local *Star* publishes a poem taken from the pages of *Enthusiasm*. More industrious still, Moodie had sought publication in local Canadian newspapers in the year ahead of her arrival: two of the collection's poems, in addition to a previously unpublished piece, appeared in that same Cobourg *Star* in the autumn of 1831.³ Forwarding works without any possibility of remuneration, Moodie embarks on a remarkable bid for a new and an increased readership. This important resource—her trove of *Enthusiasms*—moves with her in the years ahead, until finally, over two decades later, *Miscellany* editor Richard Bentley receives her final copy in 1854: "I likewise beg your acceptance of the last copy I possess, uncut, of a small volume of poems, published two months before I left England."⁴

¹ *Patrick Hamilton Ewing Collection* (National Library of Canada), Series 1, Correspondence, No. 81 (14 Feb. 1839, from Susanna Moodie to J.W. Dunbar Moodie), as cited in John Thurston, "'The Casket of Truth': The Social Significance of Susanna Moodie's Spiritual Dilemmas," *Canadian Poetry*, no. 35 (1994), pp. 31-62.

² Many letters (not all), in addition to information relating to Moodie's life and works, were located, collected and edited by Carl Ballstadt, Elizabeth Hopkins, and Michael Peterman: *Susanna Moodie: Letters of a Lifetime* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) and *Letters of Love and Duty: The Correspondence of Susanna and John Moodie* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993). Of the few surviving letters from those early years in Canada, we find Moodie forwarding a copy of *Enthusiasm* to American poet and editor Sumner Lincoln Fairfield, seeking publication in his *American Magazine*. See "Susanna Moodie to Sumner Lincoln Fairfield, January 1835," in *Letters of a Lifetime*, pp. 92-3.

³ *Letters of a Lifetime*, pp. 73-4.

⁴ "To Richard Bentley, January 1854," *Letters of a Lifetime*, p. 147.

Even in this small gesture of carrying books alongside bedding and tools, Moodie reveals a settler-colonial fantasy of cultural transplantation: that English literary form can both survive and somehow improve their lives in the backwoods of Canada. Alongside the transatlantic journey and regional travels of this ever-dispersing stack of 100 copies, I find a writer attune to the practices of and the tensions within modern print culture. Where Chapter 1 traced how *The Woman of Colour* negotiates the aesthetic limits of sentimental form when representing Black subjectivity, Moodie's career reflects a parallel concern from the colonial side: how to preserve a coherent authorial identity—and English cultural authority—within the chaotic networks of transatlantic and colonial print culture. Both writers grapple with what it means to be legible within dominant literary systems, and both confront the ideological labor required to naturalize difference through genre.

Before the 1831 publication of her poetry by subscription and her emigration to Canada shortly thereafter, the young Susanna Moodie (1803-1885), then Strickland, grew up in Reydon Hall, a manor house in Suffolk, where she was educated by her parents and, alongside her sisters, began writing at an early age.⁵ With the help of family friends and her sisters, particularly Eliza and Agnes (later known as the authors of *Lives of the Queens of England*), Susanna's didactic tales, sketches and verses were finding their way into print from as early as 1822. The appointment of a family friend to the editorship of the popular London magazine *La Belle Assemblée* in 1827 brought increased publishing opportunities for the Strickland sisters.⁶ With intentional business trips to London during the years that followed, Susanna would continue to widen her professional network, seeking meetings with and advice from famous literary figures like Mary Russell Mitford

⁵ A wealth of biographical information can be found in the collections of letters cited above: *Letters of a Lifetime* (1985) and *Letters of Love and Duty* (1993).

⁶ From 1827 to 1830, Susanna's works also appeared in *The Athenaeum*, *The Ecclesiastic*, and *The Lady's Magazine* to name a few.

and forging a mentoring relationship with annual editor, poet, and abolitionist, Thomas Pringle. It is through Pringle that Moodie meets both Mary Prince (the Black writer and activist, born into slavery), for whom she serves as amanuensis, and J.W.D. Moodie, her husband.

These biographical details point to an emergent yet reasonably powerful literary circle at home in England, further highlighting what the opening image aims to capture: with well-established literary sisters and editor-friends, perfectly capable of circulating her remaining collections at home, Moodie takes on no small risk in bringing her surplus books to Canada. Her familial and professional circles all had their own networks, with successful subscriptions of their own. Moodie's decision to transit with and to distribute her work on new soil reveals the extent of her ambition to expand her network and to achieve increased access to the apparatuses of print (editors, critics, publishers, etc.), both back home and in North America. But this literary ambition also marks a desire to secure not just circulation but legibility—an authorial presence that could translate across geographies and render unfamiliar spaces intelligible through recognizable forms. As time would tell, the geographical and material realities of life in the backwoods, whereby paper and ink proved incredibly difficult and expensive to come by, made those 100 copies, ready to circulate, all the more valuable. In this sense, Moodie's print strategy participates in a broader ideological project that this dissertation traces: the imperial deployment of English literary forms and motifs, particularly the idyll and the sketch, as techniques of containment, familiarity, and improvement. Moodie's mobilization of her verse across available print networks anticipates the central problem of this dissertation: how English forms circulate globally, transforming unfamiliar and unsettled geographies into scenes of cultural legibility.

I. Portable Forms and Colonial Periodical Culture

To use Moodie's own terms, in "transmitting," "disposing," or "forwarding" her previously published articles, she calls attention to, and capitalizes on, the appetitive state of the press in this period.⁷ Newspaper and periodical editors widely engaged in scissors-and-paste practices, copying and reprinting material from other publications into their own pages (with or without attribution), contributing to an increasingly dispersed global network of news, fiction, verse, and images.⁸ This widespread practice of reprinting proved commercially beneficial for presses in all places and on all scales. Within this decentralized print ecology, as Meredith McGill and Mark Turner have shown, the authorial function is redefined, creating new textual logics organized less around origination than iteration.⁹ In this chapter, I adopt a capacious usage of "periodical" to include magazines, literary annuals, miscellanies, and other serial formats, and I read Moodie as a writer of periodical literature not only in the sense that she was frequently published in such venues, but also because her genre choices, sketch style, and literary persona were very much shaped by the formal and visual logics of the periodical page. Her first two published works, *Enthusiasm, and Other Poems* (1831) and *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), like those that follow, are best understood as curated collections of previously published poems, sketches, and tales—texts produced in, and deeply marked by, the material and ideological conditions of periodical print culture.

⁷ *Letters of a Lifetime*: 92, 61, 49.

⁸ On the proliferation of print in the nineteenth century, see Mark Turner, "Seriality, Miscellaneity, and Compression in Nineteenth-Century Print," *Victorian Studies* 62.2 (2020), pp. 283-294; James Mussell, *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁹ Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Mark W. Turner, "'Collect and Simplify': Serial Miscellaneity and Extraction in the Early Nineteenth Century," *British Writers, Popular Literature and New Media Innovation, 1820-45*, ed. Alexis Easley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024).

In her account of the American culture of reprinting, Meredith McGill shows how, within the same publication, “texts with authors’ names attached” are often printed alongside anonymous and pseudonymous texts, in addition to pirated, or “unauthorized” texts.¹⁰ The “locus of value,” then, shifts from “textual origination to editing and arrangement” as the emphasis on “getting books and periodicals to new groups of readers” takes hold. McGill’s work reminds us that given the scale of “unauthorized reprinting,” readers were not encountering “coherent bodies” of single-authored work and authors’ formal decisions were very much “shaped” by “their profoundly unknowable and unstable audiences.” But for McGill, there is a kind of freedom that comes with leaving behind the presumption that “an author unifies or is unified by his published work.”¹¹ McGill’s insight—that authors’ formal decisions were shaped by “profoundly unknowable and unstable audiences”—is essential to understanding how Moodie negotiates genre not simply as a matter of literary style but as a strategic, ideological practice.

Mark Turner also shows how “striking growth and innovation in cheap print” renders “scissors-and-paste journalism” one of the “defining characteristics of editorial and journalistic practice across the nineteenth century.”¹² He specifically points to the markedly physical language attached to editorial practice in this period—“plundering,” “digging up,” “mining”—as just one way of thinking about the extractive logics shared by print modernity and colonial projects. In Turner’s reading of “extractive” processes, both author and reader are threatened by an ever-

¹⁰ Meredith L. McGill, 39; an international copyright agreement between the US and Britain wasn’t reached until 1891. See *Circulation and Control: Artistic Culture and Intellectual Property in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Marie-Stéphanie Delamaire and Will Slauter (Open Book Publishers, 2021): [Web](#); Stephan Pigeon, “Steal it, Change it, Print it: Transatlantic Scissors-and-Paste Journalism in the Ladies’ Treasury, 1857–1895,” *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 22.1 (2017), pp. 24-39.

¹¹ McGill, 17.

¹² Mark W. Turner, “‘Collect and Simplify’: Serial Miscellaneity and Extraction in the Early Nineteenth Century,” 23. For more on the dynamics of seriality, see also Mark W. Turner, “Periodical Time in the Nineteenth Century,” *Media History* 8, no. 2 (2002): 183-196.

powerful, unwieldy globalized press, while textual material itself is subject to “systemization,” “reduction,” and “abstraction.” His attention to print modernity’s metaphors reminds us of the stakes in what/who gets lost as mass-cultural formats, and print objects more generally, proliferate. For this dissertation, such extractive practices are not just economic or material but aesthetic. Moodie’s work must be understood within a broader imperial project that uses formal containment to render the settler condition intelligible, legitimate, and narratable. Moodie’s editorial persona emerges not as a passive victim of reduction, but as an agent of soft imperial form: managing, adapting, and re-packaging settler experience in ways that reaffirm the racial and spatial hierarchies embedded in the cottage aesthetic made popular by English writers like Mary Russell Mitford.

I am cautious, however, about reading the author-concept, and by extension, Moodie, as a victim of extraction and abstraction. While Turner foregrounds the diminishing agency of authors amid proliferating reprint culture, McGill convincingly reframes the period’s literary ethos as “defined by its exuberant understanding of culture as iteration and not origination.”¹³ In this view, the loss of authorial control is less crisis than opportunity. Reprinting was not only expected; it was often desirable. In Susanna Moodie’s case, her letters reveal as much joy and pride in republication and dissemination, as they do in remuneration. At the very beginning of her career, she would refer to the favorable reprinting of her literary annual contributions by the provincial press as proof of why editors should publish her new stories and poems.¹⁴ Similarly, to her British publisher on the subject of unauthorized American reprints of her collection of sketches, *Roughing*

¹³ McGill, 4.

¹⁴ For an example of this, see “To Frederic Shoberl [December 1830/ January 1831],” (*Letters*, 54-5), where the reprints of “The Captive Squirrel’s Petition” —from the *Lady’s Magazine* (October 1830) to *Ackermann’s Juvenile Forget-Me-Not* (1831) and then the provincial papers—are offered as justification for publishing two short poems in *Forget-Me-Not* for 1831.

It in the Bush (1852), Moodie writes: “this will no[t] [bring] any *pecuniary benefit*, on either you or me, but it may help to win me a name, and in this way, serve us both.”¹⁵

But as this dissertation insists, iteration is not neutral. In the colonial context, the repetition and circulation of familiar English forms—the idyllic sketch, the cottage scene and motif, the image of hearth and home—do not merely reflect a decentralized print economy; they actively participate in the ideological work of naturalizing colonizing presence and rendering space governable. Moodie’s desire to “win a name” is not only about authorial recognition; it is also about genre’s capacity to stabilize identity across contexts: to present the English woman, the pioneer mother, the rustic cottage-cum-shanty, as knowable figures within a broader aesthetic and moral order. In this, Moodie resembles her predecessor in Chapter 1, Olivia Fairfield, who must learn to perform recognizable forms of virtue to be legible within a sentimental reading culture. Moodie, too, becomes a character formed through typification: the transplanted English gentlewoman whose adaptability confirms the improving logic of empire.

What does it mean—and what does it require—to “win a name” in an age when in an age where anonymous, pseudonymous, and unauthorized works saturate the market? Part of this chapter’s intervention is to claim that the differentiation processes and techniques through which publishers and editors respond to print proliferation are absorbed and adopted by writers, in their own style and formal choices. Angela Esterhammer has shown how periodical publications in the 1820s and 30s strove “to attract and retain readers” through recognizable branding:

Each periodical seeks to position itself in the literary field by developing a corporate identity, striking a balance between a recognizable product that maintains the features its readers expect from issue to issue, yet with enough suspense and novelty to motivate continued attention.¹⁶

¹⁵ “To Richard Bentley [July 20, 1852],” *Letters*, 125-28: p. 127.

¹⁶ For Esterhammer, one of the ways in which Blackwood’s differentiated itself from competitors was through “fictionalized authorial identities performed by its editors and writers,” “dramatiz[ing] its own

Just as publishers and editors cultivated brand identities in an oversaturated market, writers developed analogous strategies to “emulate and differentiate” themselves from other contributors. I read the highly visual style of periodical writings in the 1820s and 30s as (1) a response to the need to balance comforting familiarity with amusing novelty across installments and (2) a result of the magazine format’s prerequisite for articles to attract and entertain in a compressed, contained space. In the context of serialized fiction, documentary observation and the invitation for a reader to ‘picture this’ ensure that a work is memorable and immediately gratifying from issue to issue. In the case of single-issue tales, essays, and poems, the visual-verbal processes of compression and containment that render works suitable for the curated, fragmented magazine page also render them suitable for dislocation, decontextualization, and reprint.¹⁷ Certainly, as cheap print technology develops, this visual mode is reenforced by the inclusion of illustrations across formats, as well. These formal pressures are not ideologically neutral. As this dissertation argues, such strategies of condensation, typification, and visual coherence participate in broader imperial projects of representing difference as manageable and subject to improvement. With the rise of cheap print technologies and illustrated formats, such conventions only intensified. The editorial and authorial strategies for creating and maintaining an amusing and informative serial publication

production and consumption.” Angela Esterhammer, *Print and Performance in the 1820s: Improvisation, Speculation, Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 29-30.

¹⁷ Jon Klancher reads the mass journal as a “collage,” “a strangely constructed sequence of verbal and graphic images,” “discontinuous shards with no visible principle of continuity” (79). David Bennett argues that the reception of the magazine “mimes its editorial production”: “reading, here, is an activity of selection and omission which produces the text as a (spatial) collage or (temporal) montage of fragments in provisional or indeterminate relations. The experience of periodical reading is an experience of discontinuity” (488). See Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987): 79; David Bennett, “Periodical fragments and organic culture: modernism, the avantgarde, and the little magazine.” *Contemporary Literature* 30.4 (1989): 480-502.

with mass appeal produces a set of visual-verbal conventions that we can trace first (briefly) through more canonical writers like Mary Russell Mitford, before turning to Susanna Moodie.

The opening image of 100 books packed amongst bedding, clothing, and tools not only dramatizes the global mobilization of print; it also calls attention to the status of Moodie's creative work as property, intellectual, material, and aesthetic, and to her belief that these portable forms could shape colonial identity across dislocation. The extent to which Moodie's stories, sketches, and poems are reprinted—both by her own ambitious dissemination and, unauthorized, by editors keen for content—is an idea that I develop by tracing the publication history of Moodie's first poem penned on Canadian soil, "The Sleigh-Bells: A Canadian Song." The reappearance of this poem in different formats, contexts, and places illuminates what print historians have revealed about the heavily networked nature of the nineteenth-century press, and the poem's motifs and its various paratexts point to a writer attune to the public desire for a particular kind of country picture, and, by extension, a particular kind of author. Moodie's evolving self-presentation—particularly in how she frames and re-frames "Sleigh-Bells" in footnotes, correspondence, and editions—reveals the extent to which she admires and emulates trend-setting women writers and their professional practices. She recognizes and attempts to reproduce, in a colonial setting, the intimate, domestic affect cultivated by English authors like Mary Russell Mitford. This chapter argues that it is in the iterative iconography of the singular domestic space—the cottage, the hut, the cabin, the shanty—and in Moodie's repeated call for readers to "picture this," that we see genre doing its most powerful ideological work: rendering unsettled settler life legible, aesthetically familiar, and affectively desirable, even amid spatial dislocation.

II. "To the editor of the Albion," "[from] the close confinement of a log cabin"

When writing to the editor of *The Albion, or British, Colonial, and Foreign Weekly Gazette*, from the “close confinement of a log cabin” in 1833, the Moodie family had been on Canadian soil for a few months at most. In her letter, Moodie quickly distinguishes herself from her fellow settlers, lamenting that “in a new colony [...] every energy of the mind is employed to accumulate wealth.”¹⁸ Her recipient had been thoughtfully selected. *The Albion’s* subscribers were predominantly British expats living in the United States and Canada; content proved typically conservative and patriotic in tone. With “little sympathy” from “fellow settlers” on matters poetic, Moodie writes to the editor in search of “a more liberal channel of communication with the public.”¹⁹ Here, Moodie asserts her desire to find or even create a public, one that can specifically “atten[d] to the cultivation of literature.” This early intervention exemplifies a broader strategy that recurs throughout Moodie’s work: the presentation of literature, particularly domestic, lyrical, and picturesque forms, as a mode of cultural elevation.

This distinction between *cultivation* and the colonizing-settlers’ constant attention to *accumulation* reappears across Moodie’s writings, wherein carefully curated literature is offered as both a necessary antidote to the coarse realities of the settler-colonizer’s experience and a practical intervention in print modernity’s “continuous stream” of “information.”²⁰ At this early moment in her career and at the very beginning of her life in Canada, Moodie’s stated desire for

¹⁸ Her choice of editor and publication is intentional, very much suited to her project. Founded in 1822 by John Sherren Bartlett (1790-1863), a British naval surgeon living in post-war New York, *The Albion’s* subscribers were mostly British expats living in the United States and Canada, with content politically conservative and patriotic in tone. In a letter to her publisher Richard Bentley describing a “splendid review” of *Roughing it in the Bush*, Moodie writes that “there is not a village in British North America where the *Albion* is not taken” (“To Richard Bentley, July 1852,” *Letters*, p. 125).

¹⁹ “The Sleigh-Bells. A Canadian Song. By Mrs Moodie.,” *The Albion, A Journal of News, Politics and Literature* 1.9 (March 2, 1833), p. 72.

²⁰ Susanna Moodie, “To the public,” *The Victoria Magazine, a Cheap Periodical, for the Canadian People, edited by Mr. and Mrs. Moodie*, I.1 (September 1847): 2.

likeminded, literary community also reveals something about her own editorial impulses: to curate and cultivate. At the very moment she registers her geographic displacement, Moodie also curates her professional identity, enclosing what she calls a few “trifling specimens”—“the first flight of [her] muse on Canadian shores.”²¹

Not only does *The Albion’s* editor choose to publish two of Moodie’s poetic “trifles”; he also prints her entire covering letter under the approving headline: “we have been most agreeably surprised, in receiving the following communication from this lady.” While it was not unusual or unconventional for editors to include brief contextual prefatory notes or footnotes, the full reproduction of Moodie’s letter offers readers a rather exclusive glimpse of her self-fashioning, her attempt to position herself both as author and as colonial subject. The editor’s delight lies not just in the verse but in the accompanying “communication,” where Moodie constructs a rather picturesque and dramatic image: an English lady, isolated in the woods, nevertheless writing, seeking like-minded society. The paratext does crucial aesthetic and ideological work here. It transforms Moodie’s “trifles” into tokens of perseverance and civility, casting the small log cabin as both constraint and proof of character. In doing so, the editor amplifies Moodie’s appeal by aligning her with the familiar sentimental and picturesque tropes that structure imperial reading practices. Perhaps Moodie anticipated this, calibrating her letter with a *hastily* written sketch to appeal to liberal metropolitan editors, eager for signs that culture and character could endure in the Canadian backwoods.

In the editor’s prefatory remark and in Moodie’s covering letter—what I will refer to as the poem’s paratext—and in the verse itself, Moodie invites her readers to picture her sketching on the spot, and by extension, to picture her at home. “The Sleigh-Bells: A Canadian Song” will quickly

²¹ Ibid.

become one of her most extracted and re-printed poems. I read the poem by reading around it: the original verse and its paratext in *The Albion* (1833), the juxtaposition of Moodie and Pringle's "emigrant songs" in a fashionable British literary annual (1834) that follows, and the reappearance of the poem with explanatory footnote in her autobiographical collection of prose sketches *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852). Across the poem's various iterations and differing paratexts, Moodie consciously figures herself as dutiful wife and mother, always drawing attention, as well, to her small cabin home.

Among the numerous quotable features of Moodie's letter to *The Albion*, she writes of how "the close confinement of a log cabin" and "the cares of a family" have not kept her from writing. With only a handful of extant letters from the early period of settlement, the repetition of language and image in subsequent letters highlights the extent to which Moodie intentionally sketches her particular scene: her "close confinement." The following year, in a letter to Sumner Lincoln Fairfield, poet and editor of *North American Magazine*, Moodie writes: "though residing in a small log hut, in the backwoods of Upper Canada, and constantly engaged in the everyday cares of domestic life, I am not so wholly indifferent to praise [...]"²² The little documentary evidence we have from the 1830s suggests that Moodie regularly conjured her 'shanty' in the woods as a key feature of her professional self-presentation.

Her "hastily written sketches" in prose and verse are the products not merely of a busy mother and dutiful wife; they are deliberately framed as such. It matters to Moodie that her writing emerges from within the "close confines" of a small, humble home—whether shanty, cabin, or cottage—because it aligns her literary persona with a recognizable and marketable type: the persevering settler woman who, despite isolation and hardship, maintains both moral discipline

²² "To Sumner Lincoln Fairfield, January, 1835," *Letters*, pp. 92-3.

and cultural refinement. This rhetorical positioning allows Moodie to lay claim to cultural authority without threatening gender or class propriety. She is neither too genteel to survive the frontier nor too coarse to be read back home in England. In this way, Moodie's humble backwoods setting becomes a frame—not just architectural but aesthetic. Her log cabin, like a novel's margins or a picture frame, contains and dignifies the scene. To write from a shanty is to embody the very aesthetic logic that undergirds Elizabeth Hamilton's village tale and broader English pictorial traditions: domesticity despite difficulty, enclosure amid wilderness, and the cultivation of taste amid apparent cultural barrenness, idleness, or corruption. In short, her log cabin becomes a generic form of legibility, allowing Moodie to circulate as both author and character within an imperial literary economy that prizes aestheticized endurance.

III. Mitford and Moodie, “close-packed and insulated”

Susanna Moodie's strategic evocation of the “close confines” of her log cabin is not only a report on settler hardship, but a calculated gesture within a recognizable literary tradition. Her paratextual self-presentation—as a literary woman writing from the periphery, yet within a neatly bordered domestic space—follows a formal logic rooted in English sketch writing. Nowhere is this more evident than in the influence of Mary Russell Mitford, whose *Our Village: Sketches of Rural Character and Scenery* (1824–1832) helped establish the iconography and tone that Moodie would later adapt for her own settler fictions.²³ Mitford's village sketches are defined by a highly visual aesthetic that trains the reader's eye on the ordinary charm of English rural life: children playing in fields, flower-strewn cottage paths, village celebrations and fetes. And yet, as critics

²³ The sketch-writings for which Mitford was universally known were first published serially in the *Lady's Magazine* (1823), and then as five volumes under the title, *Our Village: Sketches of Rural Character and Scenery*, 5 vols (London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1824–32).

have shown, this apparent lightness masks a deep formal conservatism. The sketch format, with its framed views and serialized episodes, functions as a containment device, organizing rural life into manageable, affectively charged vignettes. This is the genre logic Moodie inherits and recontextualizes. What Moodie borrows from Mitford, then, is not only a mode of description or a tonal register, but a formal technology: one that makes rural, domestic life, however impoverished or displaced, legible, charming, and quaint. The backwoods shanty, like the village cottage before it, becomes a site of narrative and moral production. The sketch's light touch, its brief duration and self-contained spatial logic, are what allow it to carry the ideological freight of improvement without overtly announcing it.

Moodie's reiterative turn to her iconographic cabin-confines and her decision to set her first Canadian poem in their log cabin, shut-in during a winter storm, evokes the visual style and affective intimacy *Our Village*. Moodie's style of sketch-writing suggests an abiding admiration for a number of professional women writers during this period, but in the case of Mitford, a number of letters reveal the extent to which Moodie actively sought her literary friendship and mentorship: "I had always ranked Miss Mitford as one of the first of our female writers," a young Moodie (then Strickland) writes to Mary Russell Mitford in July 1829.²⁴ In that same letter, Moodie writes, "I have pictured to myself your little cottage, and your poor lame maid Olive."²⁵ Moodie's letter and her praise for Mitford's writing specifically confirms the affective strength of Mitford's cultivated intimacy; Moodie feels compelled to write to Mitford personally, as a friend, and to confess, ultimately, to "picturing" her at home in her "little cottage." This compliment (and implicit confession) points to what Josephine McDonagh calls Mitford's "aura of face-to-face

²⁴ "To Mary Russell Mitford, July 31, 1829," *Letters*: 37-40, p. 39.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

friendliness,” accomplished in part through “an intimate mode of address” in the “impersonal, and geographically extendable, context of the press.”²⁶

When Moodie proudly asserts, “I have pictured to myself your little cottage,” she admits to encountering Mitford’s work as pretty pictures. As Elizabeth Helsinger has convincingly shown, Mitford wrote of “rural life encountered as if it were already a picture, poem, or story.”²⁷ Her scenes, or “country pictures,” are prefabricated, already framed, often with a critical assessment already attached: “is not that *pretty*?”²⁸ In the collected volumes published in the second-half of the 19th century, even the text itself is framed by flowers and bees, presented literally as a pretty picture [Figure 2.1].²⁹ The first page of this 1910 edition exemplifies the neatness and compactness of the very cottages and cottage-gardens described within the volume’s sketches; and it is within this neat, compact opening sketch that Mitford offers her first (of many) odes to “ignoble and nondescript dwellings” that populate “a little village far in the country”:

[...] a little world of our own, close-packed and insulated like ants in an ant-hill, or bees in a hive, or sheep in a fold, or nuns in a convent, or sailors in a ship; where we know every one, are known to every one, interested in every one, and authorized to hope that every one feels an interest in us.

This list of similes—so typical of Mitford—insists on the likeness of things. We, English readers, are all alike in our desire for safety, security, and familiarity. Moving in and out of natural forms

²⁶ McDonagh writes about how village sketches formed “an influential element within the literature of migration,” “producing a genre and a style that were not only highly portable, but which specifically appealed to writers and readers who had themselves made long-distance, trans-oceanic journeys.” See *Literature in a Time of Migration: British Fiction and the Movement of People, 1815–1876* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 153-58.

²⁷ Helsinger, 121; *Our Village* makes the case for Helsinger that the simplification and codification of certain “images and narratives” “brings with it a certain stylization” when performed for a “national audience” (13).

²⁸ The opening sketch, “Our Village,” is renamed “Country Pictures” in subsequent 19th-century editions; Mitford, p. 224.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

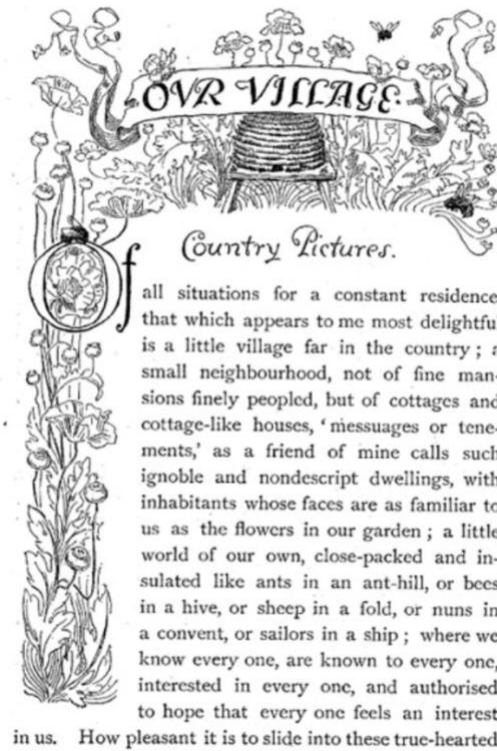


Figure 2.1 First page of Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village* (Macmillan, 1910).
Illustration by Hugh Thomson.³⁰

and manmade cloisters, Moodie suggests that, on all scales, it is natural and good to contain, compress, make still. The aesthetic value of enclosure maps neatly onto a moral one: containment signifies care, propriety, and legibility. In this framework, the phrase “close-packed and insulated” begins to resonate with defensive urgency. It carries a faintly reactionary tone, emphasizing protection and interiority in a time of accelerating social and political transformation. *Insulated from what, or whom?* The seemingly benign aesthetics of enclosure, then, encode deeper anxieties about mobility, racial difference, and class disruption. In this sense, we might hear echoes of Felicia Hemans’s famous poem on “The Homes of England,” where the “hut,” like the “hall,” takes on

³⁰ As featured in Deidre Lynch’s “Homes and Haunts: Austen’s and Mitford’s English Idylls,” *Representing Place in British Literature and Culture 1660-1830*, ed. Evan Gottlieb and Juliet Shields (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 173-82. An earlier version of Lynch’s chapter was published in *PMLA* 115.5 (October 2000): 1103-1108.

national importance: although separated from the opening “stately Homes of England” by two additional stanzas, the hut, cottage, and hall come together in the final patriotic stanza of the poem: all constitute “the free, fair Homes of England,” all are represented as domestic sanctuaries (and all, by extension, are equally susceptible to the threats of external invasion).³¹ In Mitford’s sketches, as in Moodie’s later adaptations, the formal pleasure of aesthetic likeness conceals a political logic: to be “alike” is to be safe, to belong, and to remain undisturbed. Genre here does not simply depict containment—it produces it, offering readers not just what they recognize, but what they are invited to desire.

Part of what I am interested in is why the singular, humble residence takes on such iconographic importance across English and settler-colonial literary traditions—why it proves so appealing, persistent, and, like the genre and style of the village sketch itself, so profoundly “portable.” The small house—whether cottage, hut, cabin, or shanty—repeatedly functions not just as setting but as symbol: a site of aesthetic coherence, moral clarity, and narrative containment. Its portability is not just geographic but ideological: it carries with it a cluster of affective associations—coziness, innocence, humility, and stability—that can be redeployed across radically different contexts. There is, of course, a long eighteenth-century visual and literary tradition that undergirds this iconography, beginning with Thomas Gainsborough’s sentimentalization of the

³¹ Hemans’s poem first appeared in *Blackwood’s* magazine in April 1827, before publication in volume form in 1828. Tricia Lootens interestingly notes the difference in epigraph across these two publications, from Joanna Baillie’s “a land of peace” in *Blackwoods* to a line from Scott’s *Marmion* in her collected volume: “where’s the coward that would not dare / To fight for such a land?” For Lootens, the new epigraph highlights what is defensive about Hemans’s “Homes.” Her domestic harmony comes to serve as “an incentive for aggressive striving after glory, be it in the battlefield or the marketplace.” “Hemans and Home: Victorianism, Feminine ‘Internal Enemies,’ and the Domestication of National Identity,” *PMLA* 109.2 (March 1994), pp. 238-253: 248. Scholars have typically attached something of Hemans’s genre of nationalism here to provincial fiction more generally, but McDonagh and other recent critics have argued for the “forward-looking ambitions” of Mitford and her imitators (McDonagh, 163).

rural poor—women and children depicted as ruddy, reclining, and waiting at the edge of the woods, anticipating the return of an absent but presumably laboring father. This scene, pastoral yet morally instructive, becomes a kind of tableau of proper domestic affect, an idyllic motif that reappears with variation in the work of William Cowper, George Crabbe, William Cobbett, and William Wordsworth, before arriving, stylized, at Mary Russell Mitford's cottage door. In each case, the cottage operates as more than a physical dwelling; it functions as a visual-verbal shorthand for a whole affective and ideological world, a tightly held cluster of values that Raymond Williams calls "structures of feeling," naturalizing relationships between labor, gender, and class through form.

Perhaps "the cottage" comes to stand, metonymically, for provincial life or idyllic rurality more broadly, what John Plotz has described as an at-once "trivial (but chartable) Nowheresville" and a "universal (but strangely ephemeral) everywhere."³² Its appeal lies in its aesthetic and ideological duplicity: both grounded and transportable, trivial and transcendental, provincial and paradigmatic. In Moodie's sketch-writing, Mitford's cottage takes the form of a log cabin, a log hut, or a shanty. The immediate effect proves more rustic, humbler still; the recurring emphasis on compactness, stages what scholars like Plotz, McDonagh, and most recently, Jayne Hildbrand have described as the "curiously portable kind of geographic fixity"—a way of asserting rootedness without political specificity, of rendering the domestic scene stable while severing it from local complexity.³³

In Moodie's sketch-writing, Mitford's village cottage becomes a log cabin, a log hut, or a shanty. The effect is at once more rustic and more ideological. Moodie's continual reference to the

³² John Plotz, "Semi-Detached: The Aesthetics of Virtual Experience Since Dickens," *Victorian Studies*, 53.3 (Spring 2011), 405-16: p. 409-10.

³³ Ibid. See also, Jayne Hildebrand, *Novel Environments: Science, Description, and Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

small, enclosed dwelling space is not merely descriptive; it is a rhetorical and aesthetic move that activates the sentimental economies of the village sketch while re-situating them within a colonial framework. Her regular discursive practice of narrativizing an unfamiliar and potentially threatening environment in the terms of English rustic domesticity—“our log cottage,” “our little shanty”—serves both personal and political ends. For the writer, it may offer a kind of comfort, a grammar of familiarity in a disorienting place. For the reader, it provides a quaint, consumable picture of colonial life: novel, but not too strange; remote, but affectively close.

It is this Mitfordesque fantasy of and for an “insulated,” “little world of our own” that Moodie brings to her verse and sketch writing once in Canada. In the opening stanza of “The Sleigh-Bells,” Moodie positions her readers around “the blazing hearth,” anticipating “the sleigh-bells chime.”³⁴ The warmth of the “the ruddy blaze” and the prospect of visitors, as promised by the “sleigh-bell’s chime,” have a “soothing power.” The poem succeeds in balancing familiar pastoral motifs (“our hut is small, and rude our cheer”) with enough local wildlife and novel sights to capture the interest of readers back home. With “dark pine woods,” “ice-bound” paths, and the distinct “merry” sound of the sleighbells, a calculated blend of foreign and familiar motifs makes “The Sleigh-Bells” not only a “Canadian song” but an *exportable* one, uniquely positioned for transatlantic circulation, especially in the sentimental anthologies and Canadiana collections that followed later in the century.

In the year following the American publication of “The Sleigh-Bells,” her poem crosses the Atlantic, sent to her literary mentor and former employer Thomas Pringle.³⁵ He publishes the

³⁴ To read the poem in full, please refer to this chapter’s appendix, p. 102.

³⁵ Thomas Pringle (1789–1834) was a Scottish poet, editor, and abolitionist best known today for serving as secretary to the Anti-Slavery Society in London during the 1820s and early 1830s and for editing and publishing *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), the first narrative of an enslaved Black woman published in Britain. After emigrating to the Cape Colony in 1820 with a group of Scottish settlers, Pringle became a

poem alongside his own “Emigrant’s Song” in his 1834 edition of the literary annual *Friendship’s Offering* (notably, it is Moodie’s poem alone that is then quoted and re-printed in *The Spectator’s* positive review of the annual that year).³⁶ The juxtaposition is telling: both poems place the settler-author in a clearing on the edge of an unknown landscape, facing outward from the safety of a modest home. In Pringle’s poem, the prelusive strangeness of new South African climes is swiftly followed by the cheering scene of his “beehive cabin,” bathed in light at the edge of the woods. Moodie’s scene, likewise, offers a pressurized contrast between the inhospitable wild and the emotional warmth of the cabin. Side-by-side, Pringle and Moodie’s poems conjure the press of the dark, unknown forest, framing their homes, tiny, cozy and warm. Pringle’s emigrant, although “content with the Present,” ends his song by evoking his stoic inheritance, summoning the courage of his “brave Scottish sires in the blithe Olden Day.”

With Moodie, the prospect of visitors and the return of her husband (“the father’s come”), as promised by the “sleigh-bell’s chime,” makes the “howl” of nearby wolves and the “crash” of falling trees less terrifying:

From the cedar swamp the gaunt wolves howl,
 From the oak loud whoops the felon owl;
 The snow-storm sweeps in thunder past,
 The forest creaks beneath the blast;
 No more I list, with boding fear,
 The sleigh-bells distant chime to hear.

prominent voice in colonial print culture, publishing both poetry and essays that navigated the tensions between imperial expansion and humanitarianism. Upon returning to Britain, he edited *Friendship’s Offering*, a widely read literary annual, and became increasingly involved in abolitionist activism. It was during this period that Pringle employed Susanna Moodie as a copyist and assistant at the Anti-Slavery Society, introducing her to a network of radical and literary reformers. Their professional relationship helped shape Moodie’s early career, facilitating the publication of her poetry in British periodicals and annuals before her emigration to Canada in 1832.

³⁶ *The Spectator*, No. 280 (November 9, 1833): “We have little room left for extract. The editors of these pretty toys occasionally bring their articles from afar; and we quote “A Canadian Song. By Mrs. Moodie.”

The picture of a cozy evening around a warm fire—fragile reprieve— is overwhelmed by the final stanza’s frightening soundscape. Despite the speaker’s claim that “these sounds bring terror no more,” the poem ends by rhyming “fear” with “hear,” a slant echo that unsettles the reassurance it seems to offer. The line may even gesture toward a latent deictic *here*, suggesting that what has been formally denied—fear, unease—remains spatially and affectively present. Similarly, the repetition of the specifically “*merry* sleigh-bells,” especially across the enjambed line in the third stanza, reads at times less like a description than an incantation: the speaker insists her way into a feeling of safety that the poem’s tonal landscape resists.

And so, framed by “huge,” “creak[y]” forests and “dark-pine woods,” both of *Friendship’s Offering’s* verse accounts of migrant life are framed by fear, denied or resisted but seemingly ever-present. The dislocation of Moodie’s poem—transferred from *The Albion*, where it was accompanied by her covering letter and the editor’s delight, into the decontextualized, decorative space of a British gift book—amplifies this tension. In *The Albion*, the sleigh-bells and wildlife are part of a local soundscape; they resonate with readers familiar with North American winters and settler conditions. In the context of British leisure culture in which the reprint appeared, the poem feels more anxious, the juxtaposition with Pringle’s “Emigrant’s Song” a reminder that this poet, too, is new to these “dark pine woods.”

And yet, the poem is reprinted not in spite of that tension, but because of it. Moodie’s voice, like Pringle’s, is valuable precisely because it performs a settler version of contentment within conditions of dislocation and unease. Printed side-by-side in a “handsome little volume,” these poetic snapshots of KwaZulu-Natal and Ontario promise a version of imperial coherence: a quiet,

rustic happiness that can be exported, aestheticized, and consumed.³⁷ Their affective power lies not in their local specificity but in their ability to transform unfamiliar spaces into familiar narrative forms and somewhat-English images. What matters is not where the cottage stands, but what it means: warmth, enclosure, legibility, English character.

This meaning becomes even clearer in the sketches that follow. If “The Sleigh-Bells” offers readers a glimpse of the log-cabin interior through poetry, Moodie’s prose sketches stage a more elaborate scene of authorial self-presentation. Where the cabin was once evoked from a distance, through metaphor and sound, Moodie now places herself at its threshold: “leaning on the open door of my shanty.” It is this image, casual yet composed, rustic yet recognizable, that I turn to next, to consider how Moodie refines her visual-verbal self-fashioning into a fully articulated settler persona.

IV. “Leaning on the open door of my shanty”: from English Emigrant to Canadian Pioneer

When collating her Canadian sketches to send to Richard Bentley for publication nearly two decades after emigrating, Moodie chooses to include a large number of poems, all of them previously printed in Canadian, American, and British journals, newspapers, annuals. To “The Sleigh-Bells,” Moodie appends the following footnote:

Many versions have been given of this song, and it has been set to music in the States. I here give the original copy, written whilst leaning on the open door of my shanty, and watching for the return of my husband.

Here, Moodie fashions herself both as a popular song-writer, and as a dutiful, faithful wife, a Canadian Penelope leaning, waiting. The public and the private, the local and the national, emerge

³⁷ “The Annuals for 1828,” *La Belle Assemblée, or Bell’s Court and Fashionable Magazine Addressed Particularly to the Ladies*, London: John Bell (Nov 1827).

in one footnote. The image of the open door does double duty: it naturalizes her settler domesticity and signals authorial accessibility, an invitation into a scene already aestheticized. Her casual tone and posture suggest composure and authority, not fear or hardship.

In the decontextualized pages of *Friendship's Offering*, the poem's speaker appears unsettled, despite her insistence that she no longer passes the evening hours listening out for a "distant chime" and the sound's desired accompanying company. In the poem's 1852 paratext, Moodie imagines herself as more confident still, "leaning on the open door of my shanty." There is something remarkably casual and relaxed about the style and tone of her footnote. When her sister Catharine Parr Traill chooses to reprint this same poem in her own 1838 account of life in the Canadian backwoods, she criticizes Thomas Pringle, or rather "*Friendship's Offering*," for editing her sister's poem: "the alterations" "deprive it a good deal of the simplicity of the original," she writes.³⁸ While Parr Traill foregrounds the loss of authorial control and the aesthetic corruption introduced by metropolitan taste, Moodie instead offers the "original copy" not as complaint but as artifact. She does not register the proliferation of versions as dilution. On the contrary, she welcomes it: the fact that her poem has been adapted, "set to music," and reprinted across genres and markets is proof of its success.

This ever-so-slight divergence reflects a deeper difference in Moodie and her sister's writing styles and their respective publishing contexts. *The Backwoods of Canada* was published by Charles Knight for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK), a Whig initiative aimed at educating the working and middle classes through cheap, accessible books.³⁹

³⁸ Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada: Being Letters from the Wife of an Emigrant Officer, Illustrative of the Domestic Economy of British America* (London: Charles Knight, 1838): 206-7.

³⁹ The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK), founded in 1826 by Lord Brougham and others associated with the liberal reform movement, sought to educate working- and middle-class readers through accessible, affordable print. Charles Knight, the SDUK's principal publisher, emphasized utility

Parr Traill's sketches were marketed not as sentimental scenes but as quasi-scientific, documentary accounts: useful knowledge for prospective settlers and naturalists alike.⁴⁰ Knight's publishing ethos emphasized moral improvement through empirical observation and standardized information. By contrast, Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* was published by Richard Bentley, a major London publisher of literary fiction. Bentley traded in celebrity and narrative appeal, and *Roughing It* was marketed to the same readership that consumed Dickens, Bulwer-Lytton, and the Brontës. Moodie's literary persona—self-reflective, intimate, performative—is as much a product of Bentley's market orientation as it is of her stylistic inclinations.

This distinction also extends to the visual culture surrounding each writer. The SDUK was heavily invested in wood-cut illustration, which posed a technological and ideological challenge in the early nineteenth century. Because image reproduction required expensive and time-consuming engraving, publishers often drew from a common library of generic visual motifs—trees, birds, cottages—that could be re-produced across multiple publications. This meant that the very texts most concerned with specific geography (emigration guides, colonial ethnographies,

and empiricism across genres ranging from geography and history to natural science and political economy. As recent scholarship has shown, the SDUK's use of generic woodcut illustrations—reusable across magazines and volumes—reflected both technological limitations and ideological aims: to produce visual materials that were “readable” without being locally specific. See James Mussell, *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age*, especially pp. 75-82. See also: Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1700-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); James Secord, *Visions of Science: Books and Readers at the Dawn of the Victorian Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁴⁰ Much contemporary scholarship on Catharine Parr Traill emphasizes her contributions as an early Canadian botanist and naturalist. Scholars highlight her detailed observational writing and taxonomic interests in much later works like *Canadian Wild Flowers* (1868) and *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (1885), positioning her as a key figure in the development of colonial environmental knowledge. See Jody Jensen and Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, “Botany and the Woman Colonizer,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 242-258; and Michael Peterman, “Catharine Parr Traill: A Natural Historian in Changing Times,” *Flora's Fieldworkers: Women and Botany in Nineteenth-Century Canada*, ed. Ann Shteir (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022): 217-246.

travel literature, etc.) were often illustrated with iconography that had to be radically non-specific. The irony is striking: works meant to convey local difference were populated with interchangeable visual icons. As such, a woodcut of a rustic cottage could just as easily illustrate a text on Upper Canada as one on upstate New York or the Scottish Highlands. The image signified “rural life,” “hardy dwelling,” “improvement,” but not place. In this way, the visual culture generated by SDUK and similar illustrative publication efforts mirrors the very aesthetic logic Moodie and Mitford deploy in their prose: the small, rustic dwelling is always a structure and a structure of feeling, never quite a specific site.

The ideological work of the domestic dwelling is not confined to Moodie’s fugitive verses and their paratexts. It extends into *Roughing It in the Bush*, where the log cabin, now “shanty,” becomes not only a symbol of rustic charm but a rhetorical device for asserting cultural legitimacy. Just as Moodie shifts-shape across the poem’s reprints, from fearful emigrant to pioneer wife at ease, her home too changes shape. Her log cabin home is recast as an “open door” “shanty” in the collected poem’s footnote. This markedly Canadian and American term finds its way into published writing around the same time that Moodie writes her sketches, and is popularized, it would seem, by the works of writers like John Galt in Canada and James Fenimore Cooper in the United States. As the term itself migrates from North American vernacular into literary usage, it becomes available for aestheticization, a site where rustic hardship can be reframed as quiet endurance and quaint charm. Moodie’s interchangeable use of log cabin, log cottage, and shanty bring the North American term and structure into the familiar aesthetic domain of the English cottage.

Catharine Parr Traill’s earlier published description of “a shanty” in *The Backwoods of Canada* (1838) is repeatedly extracted and relocated to miscellany magazines, and the

accompanying illustration, “Log-house,” is also reprinted in subsequent projects edited and published by Charles Knight for the SDUK [Figure 2]. With its simple title and neutral scene, the woodcut illustration was likely brought in from earlier works (most likely American travel accounts), the stamp itself culled from Knight’s exhaustive catalog of woodcuts used for his



Figure 2.2 “Log-house,” *The Backwoods of Canada* (London: Charles Knight, 1838), [Web](#).

massively popular (and cheap) illustrated magazine. A search for the image of the “Log-house” brought up at least one nearly simultaneous iteration in Charles Knight’s *Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*; the first edition of *Backwoods* was published in January 1838.⁴¹ Many of the wood-cut illustrations added to Parr Traill’s work were brought in

⁴¹ *Penny Magazine* [...], 373 (January 27, 1838): p. 40. Later, Parr Traill / Knight’s “Log-house” would find its way into a volume of 4,000 woodcuts, nestling itself amongst countless other huts, cottages, and cabins in an entry that merges time and space: “Dwellings: New Zealand (Maori), South America (Indians), Ireland, Roman Empire, Ceylon. Canada, Calcutta, Middle East, Cairo, China” (See *Knight’s Pictorial Gallery of Arts*, Vol. 1, London: Charles Knight, 1858). See Figure 2.5.

from earlier illustrated works. Images like “Spruce,” “Silver Pine,” “Bull-frog,” and “Flying Squirrel,” were generic and oftentimes only tangentially related to the content detailed in *The Backwoods of Canada*.⁴² This paradox is especially visible in the contrast between Parr Traill’s prose and the “Log-house” image. While the woodcut presents a quiet, undifferentiated structure, Parr Traill’s responses to “log-houses” and “cottages” are sharp and particular. “I was anxious to obtain a near view of a log-house or a shanty,” she writes, “and was somewhat disappointed in the few buildings of this kind that I saw along the banks of the river”:

It was not the rudeness of the material so much as the barn-like form of the buildings of this kind, and the little attention that was paid to the picturesque, that displeased me. In Britain even the peasant has taste enough to plant a few roses or honeysuckles about his door or his casement, and there is the little bit of garden enclosed and neatly kept; but here no such attempt is made to ornament the cottages.⁴³

This moment stages a now-familiar gesture in Parr Traill’s writing: the nostalgic sentimentalization of Britain from the vantage point of colonial disappointment. Her phrasing implies a failure of taste, a moral as well as aesthetic deficiency. “Even the peasant has taste enough” back home. This is what Patrick Wright has called the “expatriate view,” marked by the “false and wishful clarity of distance.”⁴⁴ Parr Traill’s nostalgic gaze forgets, or suppresses, the presence of “beggarly looking cottages” in England too.⁴⁵ Her disappointment is less about actual architecture than about a perceived rupture in an otherwise idyllic landscape.

⁴² See Figure 2.6 for examples.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁴ Commenting on the national heritage industry in 20th-century Britain, Patrick Wright argues that it is the quarterlies which “incorporate an expatriate perspective” that prove to be the “most rabidly nostalgic.” “The last act of true patriotism,” in a declining nation, “must be to take that lucrative job in one of the old colonies,” he writes. *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 231-2.

⁴⁵ We need only think of the tracts from decades previous, where certain cottages are described as “hovels” with “broken windows, stuffed with dirty rags,” “ragged tiles, and “loose stones,” and the cottagers’ “brats”

Unlike the rural shanties, Parr Traill's description of the Upper Province cottages and cottagers evokes Gainsborough's happy threshold scenes, but with the added community-feeling of village life.

I am delighted, in travelling along the road, with the neatness, cleanliness, and comfort of the cottages and farms. The log-house and shanty rarely occur, having been supplanted by pretty frame-houses, built in a superior style, and often painted white-lead colour or a pale pea-green [...] no ragged, dirty, squalid children, dabbling in mud or dust; but many a tidy, smart-looking lass was spinning at the cottage-doors, with bright eyes and braided locks, while the younger girls were seated on the green turf or on the threshold, knitting and singing as blithe as birds.⁴⁶

Here, the aesthetic and moral logic of the English idyll—and of 'Englified' improvement—reasserts itself. Disenchanted, barn-like shanties with "ragged, dirty, squalid children" have been "supplanted" by "pretty frame-houses" with "tidy" girls at "cottage-doors," productively spinning. The image of girls spinning is not incidental. It evokes a long-standing tradition in British and European visual and literary culture in which female domestic labor, especially textile work, signifies moral order, industriousness, and social stability. From eighteenth-century conduct literature and cottage industry iconography to nineteenth-century gift books (where spinning-girl images were common), spinning connotes both virtue and value.⁴⁷ In Parr Traill's settler vision, these spinning girls anchor the now-Canadian cottage scene within a lineage of English industriousness that is gendered, aestheticized, and implicitly white.

The ideological contrast with novels like Elizabeth Hamilton's *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* is instructive. In that text, domestic disorder is indexed by female idleness and

appear "filthy and ragged," "with dirty faces, matted locks, and naked feet and legs." Hannah More, *Black Giles the poacher; with some account of a family who had rather live by their wits than their work. Part I.* (London: J. Marshall, printer to the Cheap Repository for Moral and Religious Tracts, 1796): 3-4.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁷ See Figures 2.7 and 2.8 for the type of illustrations Parr Traill's description evokes; even the demand for "honeysuckles about the door" points to a long tradition of English cottage set-pieces.

inattention to cleanliness and routine. The “improving” heroine, Mrs. Mason, reforms her slovenly hosts by reintroducing proper habits of labor and self-regulation. Parr Traill’s tidy, spinning girls, then, represent a triumph of cultural transplantation: a narrative in which colonial space is rendered morally legible through the visible performance of female labor. This narrative of aesthetic improvement is more than just sentimental wish-fulfillment; it is an ideological performance of settlement, in which the disorder of the colonial periphery is gradually brought into alignment with the visual and affective norms of English domesticity. The log-house becomes a “white-lead” cottage; the “dirty, squalid children” become girls; the threshold becomes a stage for virtue. In these scenes, what is naturalized is not just the house but the family, whose stability is framed as both achievable and desirable through the grammar of the English cottage idyll.

Parr Traill’s juxtaposition of barn-like shanty and pretty, painted cottage highlights what is different about Moodie’s style of writing and literary strategy. Certainly, there is nostalgia and rosy-hued longing for a mythicized English countryside in Moodie, too, but her Mitford-style storytelling makes for much less commonplace, middle-class disapproval in her own accounts. In Moodie’s seemingly off-the-cuff remark about leaning on her shanty door, she gives a different snapshot of her domestic life and, crucially, her professional life. Here, the shanty, like her enterprising writing and publishing efforts, captures the ephemerality and improvisational energy of Moodie’s pioneer self-fashioning in a way that terms like cottage and cabin cannot. As a temporary structure, quickly raised, the shanty conjures much of the ephemerality and portability that this chapter has come to associate with this reiterative cultural moment vastly construed. It also aligns with what this chapter has described as the portability of English aesthetics, in which familiar forms are redeployed across new, unstable geographies. Parr Traill’s disappointment in and apparent loathing of the Canadian shanty underlines Moodie’s own quiet acceptance. There is

pride here—in the success of her poem, in her domestic labors, and in the modest architecture that frames them. What is more, in her decision to re-figure her log cabin as her shanty, that pride starts to take on a nationalistic flair.

In *Roughing It in the Bush*, Moodie seemingly rewrites Mary Russell Mitford's Betty Adams and her "little ruinous cottage," giving readers instead the Canadian "Betty B——" and her "lone shanty in the woods."⁴⁸ In *Our Village*, Betty's English cottage appears to be in "a sad state of betweenity," where "dangling stockings and shirt, swelled by the wind," dry "in a neglected garden." "Dwell[ing], at present in single blessedness," the wife of Mitford's "sometimes gardener" reminds her of the "lady whom everybody knows":

I never saw any one who so much reminded me in person of that lady whom everybody knows, Mistress Meg Merrilies;—as tall, as grizzled, as stately, as dark, as gipsy-looking, bonneted and gowned like her prototype, and almost as oracular. Here the resemblance ceases. Mrs. Adams is a perfectly honest, industrious, painstaking person, who earns a good deal of money by washing and charring, and spends it in other luxuries than tidiness,—in green tea, and gin, and snuff.

Compare this to Moodie's Betty and her shanty, "destitute of a single acre of clearing":

Yet Betty had plenty of potatoes, without the trouble of planting, or the expense of buying; she never kept a cow, yet she sold butter and milk; but she had a fashion, and it proved a convenient one to her, of making pets of the cattle of her neighbours. If our cows strayed from their pastures, they were always found near Betty's shanty, for she regularly supplied them with salt, which formed a sort of bond of union between them; and, in return for these little attentions, they suffered themselves to be milked before they returned to their respective owners [...] She had had three husbands, and he with whom she now lived was not her husband [...] Betty's second husband had been killed in one of our fields by a tree falling upon him while ploughing under it. He was buried upon the spot, part of the blackened stump forming his monument.

⁴⁸ Mary Russell Mitford, "The First Primrose," *Our Village*, pp. 73-81; Susanna Moodie, "Our First Settlement," *Roughing It in the Bush; or Life in Canada*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1852), pp. 104-107.

With Mitford's comparison to Meg Merrilies, living in "single blessedness," and Moodie's emphasis on Betty's "three husbands," these sketches imply there is something disreputable about these Bettys, living on the edges of their communities. They are known, tolerated, but not fully absorbed. Despite Mitford's remark that Betty is a "perfectly honest, industrious, painstaking person," her disordered household, fondness for "green tea, and gin, and snuff," and her resemblance to Walter Scott's racialized eccentric character Meg Merrilies suggests otherwise. Their gardens are similarly neglected. Where Betty A spends her money on "green tea, and gin, and snuff," Betty B has a habit of "borrowing."

If Mitford's sketch verges on gentle satire, Moodie's is edged with the gothic. The humor is darker, the eccentricity sharper, and the community boundaries more tenuous. The decision to include an account of Betty B's second husband, "killed in one of our fields by a tree falling upon him," reminds readers of the ever-present dangers of living in the colonies. The "blackened stump" functions as a kind of accidental Wordsworthian monument or relic, a Romantic/gothic touch that gestures toward colonial precarity and the instability of life on the frontier.

Despite beginning her sketch with the assertion that "there was something original about Betty B——," Moodie's portrait is highly iterative. It reworks the village sketch mode by exporting a recognizable type into a colonial setting, adjusting the details to suit a different political geography and a more ambivalent tone. If Moodie's early verse captures her failure to "find England" in the "new" landscape,⁴⁹ her sketch-writing suggests that she can find something else—a sense of literary home—through iconographic characters and their characterful dwellings, all

⁴⁹ In one such poem, "The Lament of the Canadian Emigrant" (1833), Moodie looks, listen, and fails to find England in her new environment: "in the depths of dark forests my soul droops her wings, / In tall boughs above me no merry bird sings."

with a little local color.⁵⁰ Mitford's Betty A and her cottage are transported to Canada, becoming Betty B and her shanty, eccentric enough to amuse readers and generic enough to appeal to readers across global audiences.

In this transformation, we see Moodie at work as a writer of portable types; she adapts an existing archetype—morally ambiguous and idle, rustic woman (like Hamilton's Mrs MacClarty and Mitford's Betty A)—for colonial ends. But that imperative to morally reform eccentric characters at the level of narrative and plot, so central to the didactic fiction of writers like Elizabeth Hamilton and Hannah More, has dissipated by the 1830s. For Mitford and for Moodie, it is enough to place them among a cast of recognizable social types, to make them legible, amusing, or affectively resonant. These later sketches rely less on narrative arcs of correction and more on the formal pleasures of typification and juxtaposition; character emerges, here, not simply as a moral entity, but as an epistemological and affective object, something readers know, feel for, and recognize, even without full narrative resolution. The reader, in turn, is no longer positioned as a moral pupil, but as a knowing observer, someone invited to discern patterns, laugh at oddities, and draw their own ethical conclusions.

⁵⁰ Literary historians have long associated local color writing with the postbellum rise of regionalist fiction in the U.S., particularly short stories featuring marginalized, rural, or culturally distinct communities narrated through the eyes of outsiders. Often seen as feminine, minor, or sentimental, Anne Boyd Rioux's recent account of the rise of regionalism re-evaluates regionalism as a vital space of literary innovation, one that complicates binaries of center and margin, realism and romance. Rioux draws attention to regionalism's global and postcolonial potential, as well as its enduring role in representing race, gender, class, and the everyday. While Susanna Moodie's work predates the high tide of this movement, her attention to provincial distinctiveness and vernacular tone anticipates the genre's key conventions. Moodie's iterative self-fashioning and affective investment in domestic and geographic story-telling might be read as an early transatlantic contribution to what would later be canonized as North American literary regionalism. See "Local Color and the Rise of Regionalism," *A Companion to American Literature, Vol 2*, eds. Susan Belasco and Theresa Strouth Gaul (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020): 323-341.

We can now see *The Woman of Colour* (1808) as unexpectedly anticipatory of this shift. Although Olivia Fairfield is herself cast as a figure of exemplary humility and virtue, the white, upper-class English characters around her are not offered up for reform but for display: they are affected, self-important, and always already performing their roles. The novel's sketches of their behavior do not seek their improvement. The work of literature, here, is not to correct deviance but to neutralize the threat of difference by bringing eccentric or excessive characters into view and rendering them recognizable types.

V. Reprinting reprinted “recollections” in the United States and Canada

When George Putnam reprints *Roughing It in the Bush* (without authorization) for his “Semi-Monthly Library for Travellers and the Fireside” series in the United States, he includes a new, somewhat crude, presumably cheap woodcut image of a log-cabin on the titlepage [Figure 3]. The log-house image included in Catharine Parr Traill's *Backwoods* [Figure 2] fits easily within a picturesque tradition: the staffage at the edge of the vignette, the linens drying on the line, trees bending inwards, containing a miniature, domestic scene of a rather still life. In the American woodcut scene (1852), like the Canadian engraving that follows in 1871, the scene refuses this stillness. A campfire with accompanying billows, felled trees with a recumbent axe, three figures mid-conversation, and a log cabin with an open door suggest a lively, dynamic scene of work. The contrast between these illustrations points to more than style or national taste—it reveals how the ideology of settler domesticity is adapted to different markets. Parr Traill's or Charles Knight's image reinforces a moralized, feminine ideal of containment.

Putnam's image, by contrast, aligns with American expansionist aesthetics: active, industrious, and resolutely forward-looking. The use of an American illustrator to illustrate the unauthorized Anglo-Canadian work highlights, as well, that despite the ease with which text could

be extracted, copied, and reprinted for little to no cost, there was no print technology that allowed for the copying of images at this time.⁵¹ Writing to Moodie in the summer of 1852, Putnam writes:

I have taken the liberty to send you [...] 10 copies of your admirable work, *Roughing It in the Bush*. If the present state of copy right law, had been such, as to give any suitable protection, I should have been glad to have made such arrangements with you, as would have served for you, a proper remuneration, for the American edition of your work.⁵²

To this he adds the post-script: “P.S. I trust you will not be displeased with the liberties taken by the Editor, if sins, they are sins of *omission only*.” In referring to this offer in a letter to her British publisher Richard Bentley, Moodie describes the anticipated copies as her “*stolen brooms*,” “[her] own goods and chattels,” and although somewhat disgruntled here and elsewhere in such bold-faced pirating, she admits to being “very curious to see the *Yankee omissions*.”⁵³ Unsurprisingly, most of the omissions constitute any and all critique of “yankee” characters. More surprising, however, is the omission of thirty-one of the collection’s thirty-seven poems.

On his decision to exclude Moodie’s verse, Putnam’s editor Charles Briggs writes the following by way of preface to the American edition:

The London Edition of “*Roughing it in the Bush*” contains several small poems by Mrs. Moodie and her husband, which have been excluded, because they rather retarded the flow of the narrative, and did not possess sufficient interest in themselves to serve as an apology for their presence. C.F.B. NEW YORK, June, 1852.

Briggs’s editorial note makes clear his discomfort with the collection’s hybrid form. By eliminating thirty-one of the volume’s thirty-seven poems, he transforms *Roughing It* from a deliberately miscellaneous work into a more uniform prose narrative—what he imagines will be a smoother,

⁵¹ See note 39.

⁵² George Putnam’s letter is copied out in one of Moodie’s letter to Richard Bentley dated July 10, 1852 (*Letters*, 125-7).

⁵³ Emphases original.

more commercially viable product for American readers. Briggs's logic, that the poems "retarded the flow of the narrative," suggests a bias not only against verse, but against variety itself. The poems are dismissed as ornamental, even extraneous, distracting from the real work of narrative. His editorial move enacts a kind of generic transformation, reshaping the text to better match the formal expectations of the American travelogue or emigrant memoir.



Figure 2.3. Frontispiece to *Roughing it In the Bush; or, Life in Canada* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1852), [Web](#).

What is most striking about this editorial excision is how closely it aligns with the critical neglect Moodie's poetry has faced in the decades since. The body of Moodie scholarship has, for the most

part, followed Briggs's lead: there is relatively little engagement with the inclusion and arrangement of poems across *Roughing It*, despite Moodie's own insistence, spelled out in her 1852 introduction: "In order to diversify my subject, and make it as amusing as possible, I have between the sketches introduced a few small poems, all written during my residence in Canada and descriptive of the country." Moodie presents her verse as integral to the structure and texture of her collection.

The first American edition, then, becomes not just a textual abridgment but a formal realignment, prioritizing cohesion over miscellany and narrative continuity over multivocal range. In this editorial act, we can detect a larger critique of the multi-genre logics of the miscellany form, which had long been associated with femininity, amateurism, and uneven quality. The exclusion of Moodie's verse is not only a rejection of her poetic output, but of her editorial vision—her belief that prose, poetry, sketch, and anecdote could together compose a textured portrait of everyday life. Briggs's preference for uninterrupted prose also betrays a desire to naturalize Moodie's text into the single-voiced authority of the novel, drawing the reader into a seamless narrative and away from the fractured, piecemeal quality that reflects the lived discontinuities of colonial experience.

I have previously argued that Thomas Pringle's binding together of verse, prose, illustrative engravings, extensive footnotes and appendices in both his colonial sketch-work and in his arguably repressive editorial choices in *The History of Mary Prince*, speak to his anxieties about representing both race and colonial experience.⁵⁴ In his work, and in his work on Mary Prince's *History*, the shuffling around of various papers, the various "goes" at representing particular scenes, historical details, individuals, and settings, manifest as a palpable uncertainty, an

⁵⁴ See Cary-Beckett and McDonagh, "Idyll as Refuge: The Settler's Dream," particularly pp. 22-28.

indeterminacy. We might see this as a kind of representational panic: the sense that no single form can suffice, that colonial realities resist straightforward narration, and that multiple genre attempts are necessary to stabilize the scene.

For Pringle, editorial multiplicity is a symptom of doubt. For Moodie, by contrast, the multi-genre structure of *Roughing It* does not signal crisis but continuity. Her stated aim, to “diversify [her] subject” and make it “as amusing as possible,” places her firmly within the world of the early nineteenth-century miscellany (where she has been all along), where a variety of genres was both marketable and artistically legitimate. Moodie’s decision to include her poems was not arbitrary, and that is to say that the variety afforded by different forms and genres seems to matter to Moodie; they are part of a deliberate formal ecology. Although the prose-work is written in the first-person, the overall form is capacious. Sketches remain distinct in tone and voice: some are humorous, Mitford-like character sketches, others are anecdotes, or advice essays (almost written in the imperative); some read like moral tales, while the earliest sketches read like an earlier 19th-century novel travelogue. The aim here suggests that *variety* equates to a kind of expansiveness, that descriptive verse might capture Canada from a different angle. The result is a deeply textured portrait of colonial life, shaped by the author’s print-cultural inheritance and expressive of a world not easily captured by narrative realism alone.

Nearly twenty years after the British publication of *Roughing It in the Bush* by Richard Bentley, the first Canadian edition was published with seven new wood-engraved plates and bound in gilt-stamped cloth (1871). It bore a revised subtitle—*Forest Life in Canada*—and a newly authored preface contrasting “Canada of the present” with “Canada of forty years ago.”⁵⁵ For the

⁵⁵ Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush; or, Forest Life in Canada* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1871).

first time, Moodie was able to oversee and shape the terms of her own republication. And like Briggs before her, she made omissions, though of a different kind. In preparing *Roughing It* for a Canadian audience, Moodie excised her more critical commentary on Canadian neighbors and removed all verse expressing longing for England. “The little said on Canadian society,” she recalled, “had made her so unpopular with the natives,” that she had avoided setting her later works in Canada.⁵⁶ The 1871 edition represents not only a recuperation of her public image, but a recalibration of national feeling. The version of Moodie that emerges is no longer a disoriented emigrant, haunted by idyllic English scenes.

What begins as a strategy of variety—of capturing Canada through multiple lenses and tonal registers—ultimately consolidates into something more singular and more serviceable to national mythmaking. With the 1871 edition, Moodie starts to recuperate her image, now ‘at home’ in Canada. In the intervening decades, poems like “Sleigh-Bells,” “Canadian Hunter’s Song,” “The Canadian Herd-Boy,” to name a few had helped Moodie “win a name for herself” at home in North America, even if the sketches of Canadian “natives” set her back in the years immediately following the publication of the 1852 British edition. While there is space, of course, for “Sleigh-Bells” in the 1871 edition, equally popular, reprinted songs about the challenges of life in Canada are cut entirely. Published first in *The Adieu! A Farewell Token of Christian Friendship* in 1833, and then again in Montreal’s *Literary Garland* in 1842, before finding its way into the 1852 British edition of *Roughing It*, “Home Thoughts of an Emigrant” conjures longing dreamscapes of “lovely England,” with “soft waving woodlands” and “green daisied vales.”⁵⁷ These idyllic images and

⁵⁶ Quotations here from Moodie’s July 20, 1852 letter to Richard Bentley (*Letters*, 127). She describes being “loaded with abuse” at the hands of “Canadian Anglo-Irish Editors.”

⁵⁷ *The Adieu! A Farewell Token of Christian Friendship; consisting of entirely original pieces, in prose and verse* (Colchester: J. Enfield, 1833): 49-51; *The Literary Garland; a Monthly Magazine Devoted to the*

motifs of “distant” “lovely England” are omitted come 1871. Instead, with watercolor illustrations of figures fishing and quietest images of home with “hearth brightly burning,” the once-English myth of rural bliss has been naturalized in Canada.⁵⁸

This editorial self-curation anticipates her absorption into the Canadian nationalist tradition later in the century, when selections of her verse began appearing in school readers, gift books, and national anthologies. The cutting and pasting of those specifically Canadian songs into anthologies and encyclopedias of “Canadians” ushers in the transition from Moodie the emigrant-writer to Moodie the Canadian author. Together, these sweet songs and vignettes of sleigh-bells and herd-boys, where “Northern lights are flashing” and “cattle-bells” “quickly jingle,” capture a version of Moodie’s Canadian home vastly different from her early Canadian verse. The 1871 and 1913 editions, in addition to anthologies like *Canadian Poems and Lays* (1883) and *Songs of the Great Dominion*, reveal how the editorial processes and priorities of the early 19th-century periodical press (extracting and curating images, verse, and picture-like prose and highlighting the pleasing interplay of visual and verbal forms) prime the reading public for the more saccharine mixed-media assemblages of the decades that follow (works like Helen Allingham’s *Country Cottages* and *Happy England*, for example).⁵⁹ In Moodie’s Canadian edition of *Roughing It in the Bush* and in the Canadian anthologies more generally, the editorial aim of the 1830s and 40s—to cultivate generality with wide-appeal—is supplanted by an increasingly urgent desire to harness and produce national feeling. In this sense, the post-1852 iterations of Moodie seemingly strive

Advancement of General Literature, Vol. IV (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1842): 347; “Lament of Canadian Emigrant,” *Roughing It in the Bush* (London: Bentley, 1852): 78-9.

⁵⁸ See Figures 2.9, 2.10, and 2.11 for watercolor images from an expensive 1913 edition of *Roughing It in the Bush*.

⁵⁹ *Roughing It in the Bush; or, Life in Canada* (London and Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1913); *Canadian Poems and Lays* (Montreal: W.D. Lighthall, 1883); *Songs of the Great Dominion: Voices from the Forests and Waters, the Settlements and Cities of Canada* (Montreal: W.D. Lighthall, 1889).

after an idea of Canada, one that can be used in the “project of creative a cohesive national identity.”⁶⁰ In the same way that the iconographic cottage finds its way onto the biscuit tins of the twentieth century, Canada’s log cabin is enlisted for the commercial task of accommodating and selling maple syrup [Figure 4].

Considering the chapter’s interest in the affordances of reprinting (and the related processes of extraction, decontextualization, adaptation, and illustration), it would be incomplete without a consideration of how liberal (and, by extension, colonizing) projects both participate in and benefit from (cheap) literature’s move towards cultivated generality. In a public statement on the benefits of reprinting, Moodie speaks from the perspective of an editor, at the launch of her very own



Figure 2.4: A log-house tin for Canadian maple syrup (date unknown, 20th century) alongside an English cottage tin for biscuits, made by Huntley, Boorne & Stevens (1931)⁶¹

“CHEAP PERIODICAL for the CANADIAN PEOPLE.”⁶² With *The Victoria Magazine* (1847-8), Moodie sought to “extend the taste for general literature among that most numerous and not least respected

⁶⁰ Helsinger and McGill both track how rural scenes and images are enlisted in the “project of creating a cohesive national identity” in England and the United States respectively (Helsinger, 236).

⁶¹ The V&A’s object record for this cottage tin (1931) documents how new process of offset lithography, patented in 1877 allowed multicoloured designs to be printed on to exotically shaped tins. See “Farmhouse.”

⁶² *The Victoria Magazine; A Cheap Periodical for the Canadian People* was a short-lived periodical published in Belleville, Canada from 1847 to 1848 and edited jointly by Susanna Moodie and her husband.

class of fellow Colonists,—the rural population of the Province.” At a time when most readers were dependent on imported British titles, the Moodies hoped that a local, cheap publication would increase circulation beyond the literati concentrated in urban centers. With an expressed desire to reach often neglected Canadian readerships, Moodie speaks in terms shared with contemporary popular education movements, revealing a markedly middle-class investment in literary edification. At this later moment in her career—she had been living and working in Canada for nearly 15 years at the launch of her magazine—we find some of her most direct claims around what counts as “useful,” and it would seem, here, that the most useful publications combine a select array of fiction, verse, and practical articles. “In a country like Canada, where the people and all branches of industry are in a state of rapid progressions,” Moodie writes, “there is little time for a continuous course of instructive reading.”⁶³

In their reviews of other new periodicals and newspapers, the Moodies similarly praise “miscellan[ies] of useful, entertaining, and political information” and magazine issues with “well selected articles, both in prose and verse,” emphasizing here in the praise of strong “selections” that these publications overwhelmingly provide reprinted pieces at more accessible price points.⁶⁴ In review of the third issue of *Wilson’s Experiment*, “for the trifling sum of fifteen pence, the poorest reader in the Province can obtain a miscellany of useful, entertaining, and political information” “contains a number of interesting and well selected articles, both in prose and verse, besides original papers of considerable merit.”⁶⁵ In reviews of other publications, Moodie

Though only a handful of issues were published, the magazine combined original material with selected reprints, including fiction, verse, advice literature, and political commentary to 781 subscribers. See *Letters of a Lifetime* 80-82.

⁶³ *The Victoria Magazine* (1847): 2.

⁶⁴ Praise cited here is for the third issue of *Wilson’s Experiment* (*The Victoria Magazine*, I.4, Dec 1847): 96.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

champions those that balance moral uplift with literary variety, especially those that make previously exclusive genres more accessible through reprinting. Although her magazine was short-lived, it positioned Moodie as an important participant in a growing network of editors, reviewers, and contributors invested in shaping the reading habits and literary culture of a shifting, expanding Canadian public.

This chapter considers how Susanna Moodie works within a reiterative print culture, and, more particularly, how periodical print culture shaped her style and formal choices. Reflecting on her early career, Moodie writes: “I had no idea of writing to make books in those days.”⁶⁶ This is perhaps obvious considering her publication history in annuals, magazines, and newspapers; but the remark also emphasizes that by the 1850s, Moodie notices an emergent distinction (in her own practice and in the print cultural moment) in writing sketches for periodicals and in producing a collection of sketches. The 1850s, as McGill shows, becomes the decade in which literary markets centralize, and the presumption that an “author unifies or is unified by his published work” starts to take hold.⁶⁷ While working within a print culture that valued iteration over origination, Moodie still seems to learn, as Mitford had before her, that an author can have a personality, that that personality can be generated both in the casual, public-oriented tone of sketch-writing and in the paratextual additions that permit a tone more familiar still. Mitford shows Moodie exactly how an author’s personality can be the unifying force that sells a collection; and that with the right iconography, emulated and familiar but captivantly differentiated, that author can pioneer a national literature.

⁶⁶ “To Richard Bentley, April 24, 1865,” *Letters of a Lifetime*, 214-18, p. 216.

⁶⁶ “To Richard Bentley, January 1854,” *Letters of a Lifetime*, 147.

⁶⁷ McGill: 3, 17.

Her literary self-staging and editorial curation thus offer more than a personal or market-savvy evolution; they demonstrate the deep entanglement between formal adaptability and English colonial ideology. What vanishes in these later editions are the experimental edges of *Roughing It in the Bush*: the skeptical tone, the uneasy poems, the friction between voice and form. What remains is a Susanna Moodie whose sketches and shanties now belong not to a transatlantic miscellany, but to the visual-verbal iconography of Canadian belonging—a figure of literary permanence atop the portable structures that made her voice first legible.

Appendix: Humble Dwellings

“The Sleigh-Bells. A Canadian Song. By Mrs Moodie.”

'Tis merry to hear, at evening time,
By the blazing hearth the sleigh-bells chime;
To know the bounding steeds bring near
The loved one to our bosoms dear.
Ah, lightly we spring the fire to raise,
Till the rafters glow with the ruddy blaze;
Those merry sleigh-bells, our hearts keep time
Responsive to their fairy chime.
Ding-dong, ding-dong, o'er vale and hill,
Their welcome notes are trembling still.

'Tis he, and blithely the gay bells sound,
As his sleigh glides over the frozen ground;
Hark! He has pass'd the dark pine wood,
He crosses now the ice-bound flood,
And hails the light at the open door
That tells his toilsome journey's o'er.
The merry sleigh-bells! My fond heart swells
And throbs to hear the welcome bells;
Ding-dong, ding-dong, o'er ice and snow,
A voice of gladness, on they go.

Our hut is small, and rude our cheer,
But love has spread the banquet here;
And childhood springs to be caress'd
By our beloved and welcome guest.
With a smiling brow his tale he tells,
The urchins ring the merry sleigh-bells;
The merry sleigh-bells, with shout and song
They drag the noisy string along;
Ding-dong, ding-dong, the father's come
The gay bells ring his welcome home.

From the cedar swamp the gaunt wolves howl,
From the oak loud whoops the felon owl;
The snow-storm sweeps in thunder past,
The forest creaks beneath the blast;
No more I list, with boding fear,
The sleigh-bells distant chime to hear.
The merry sleigh-bells with soothing power
Shed gladness on the evening hour.
Ding-dong, ding-dong, what rapture swells
The music of those joyous bells!



Figure 2.5. Catharine Parr Traill's "Log-cabin" (top row, third from left) has been transported two decades later, reprinted in "Dwellings: New Zealand (Maori), South America (Indians), Ireland, Roman Empire, Ceylon. Canada, Calcutta, Middle East, Cairo, China," *Knight's Pictorial Gallery of Arts*, Vol. 1 (London: Charles Knight, 1858), [Web](#).

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BACKWOODS OF CANADA.



Bull-frog.

notes, I can hardly refrain from laughing when a great fellow pops up his broad brown head from the margin of the water, and says, "Willi-roo, willi-roo, willi-roo," to which another bull-frog, from a distant part of the swamp, replies, in hoarser accents, "Get out, get out, get out;" and presently a sudden chorus is heard of old and young, as if each party was desirous of out-croaking the other.



Spruce

Figure 2.6. “Bull-frog” and “Spruce,” illustrations from *The Backwoods of Canada* (London: Charles Knight, 1838), [Web](#).

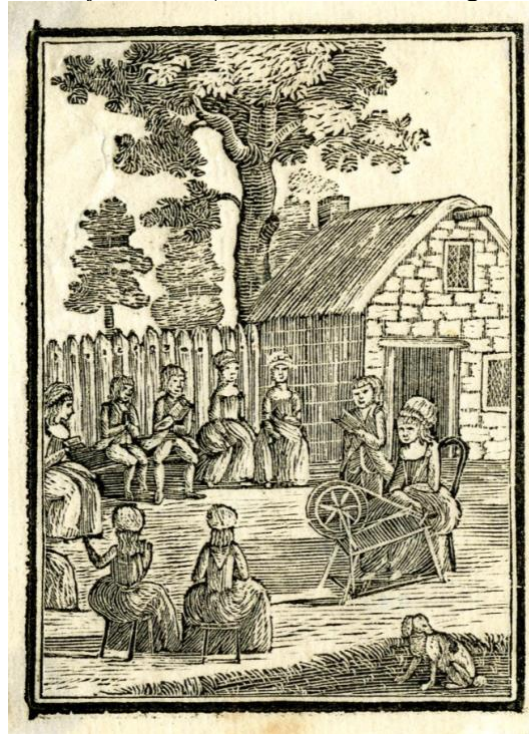


Figure 2.7. Thomas Bewick's frontispiece to *The Renowned History of Primrose Prettyface who was raised from being the daughter of a poor cottager, to great riches, and the dignity of Lady of the Manor* (London: 1784; proof. c.1779), wood-engraving, [British Museum](#)



Figure 2.8. George Cruikshank's illustration for Defoe's "The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner" (London: 1831), wood-engraving, [British Museum](#)



Figure 2.9. R.A. Stewart's illustration: "The Log Cabin of the Early Settler," *Roughing It in the Bush; or, Forest Life in Canada* (London: T.N. Foulis, 1913)



Figure 2.10. R.A. Stewart's illustration: "The Farm of 1871,"
Roughing It in the Bush; or, Forest Life in Canada (London: T.N. Foulis, 1913)



Figure 2.11. R.A. Stewart's illustration:
"Residence of the Late Col. Stricklands, Founder of Lakefield, Ontario,"
Roughing It in the Bush; or, Forest Life in Canada (London: T.N. Foulis, 1913)

Plotting Against Pastoral: Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the Pragmatics of Black Belonging

Five hundred kilometers away—in Windsor, Ontario—as far west as Ontario takes you before reaching the Detroit River—another woman is writing and publishing her thoughts on Canadian emigration. Published in the very same year as Susanna Moodie’s account of “life in the Canadian backwoods,” Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s *A Plea for Emigration; or Notes of Canada West* (1852) makes the case for “Canada West” as the ideal destination for Black relocation in the years immediately following “the passage of the odious Fugitive Slave Law.”¹ With northern American states all-the-more “dangerous in the extreme,” and with an “absence of condensed information accessible to all,” Shadd Cary becomes “determined to visit Canada” to “collect” reliable information from “unquestionable” papers and from observation.² Her inquiry leads her to

¹ There are several scholars doing exciting and much-needed work on Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s archive at this moment of writing. As Nneka D. Dennie highlights in her recent collection of Shadd Cary’s writings, Jane Rhodes’s important 1998 biography has sat alone, the only book-length project on Shadd Cary’s political thought published for over 25 years. The biography—*Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century*—reissued in 2023 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), charts Shadd Cary’s move from the US to Canada and back again, painting a portrait of the journalist and educator as a feminist, reformer, and controversial activist. Not long after Rhodes’s publication, in his attempt to “elaborate a sustainable place in Canadian Studies for blackness,” Rinaldo Walcott centers his thinking on the difference between Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Susanna Moodie: “Canadian studies found Moodie; they did not find Shadd Cary” (30). He reflects on writing his 2000 article in a collected volume published this very year (2025). “Shadd Cary’s biography provided me an opening to think Canada and to think beyond Canada,” he writes, asking questions “in the same fashion and attitude that Shadd Cary asked the abolitionists to stop talking and do something” (pp. 21-22; 26). For Walcott’s essay and many more sustained engagements with Shadd Cary’s corpus, see Kristin Moriah (ed.), *Insensible of Boundaries: Studies in Mary Ann Shadd Cary* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2025); Rinaldo Walcott, “‘Who is She and What is She to You?’: Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the (Im)Possibility of Black/Canadian Studies,” *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*, ed. Walcott (Toronto: Insomniac, 2000): 29-47. For a brilliant new edition of “A Plea for Emigration; or, Notes of Canada West, in its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect: with Suggestions Respecting Mexico, West Indies, and Vancouver’s Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants,” see *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: Essential Writings of a Nineteenth-Century Black Radical Feminist*, ed. Nneka D. Dennie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023): pp. 94-134. Her work won the MLA Prize for Bibliographical or Archival Scholarship for 2023. See also: note 57 for information about the Black Women’s Organizing Archive (BWOA)

² Mary Ann Shadd Cary, “A Plea for Emigration; or Notes of Canada West” (1852), *Essential Writings*, ed. Nneka D. Dennie (2023): 27. Hereto cited “A Plea for Emigration.”

ultimately settle in Canada herself—not in Toronto, where Shadd Cary and her father had attended the Great North American Anti-Slavery Convention just weeks before (September 11, 1851) and where she had been offered teaching position—but in the more remote Sandwich, Canada West. It is from here and then Windsor, just across the river from Detroit, that Shadd Cary opens a school and pens her “plea,” urging readers to likewise seek refuge in Canada.

The Fugitive Slave Act (1850), the “odious” catalyst for Shadd Cary’s emigration and *Plea*, legalized and incentivized the kidnap and capture of Black people alleged to have escaped to free states. Militias formed to police state-borders and in the newly annexed Texas, militias patrolled a newly drawn US-Mexico borderline, both keeping alleged fugitives from escaping to Mexico and by extension keeping free Black people within the confines and control of the nation-state.³ In northern cities like Boston and Philadelphia, abolitionists and journalists urged their communities to keep “top eye open” and to “keep a sharp lookout for kidnappers.”⁴ On the page and in the already-precarious lives of Black people, fugitive slave laws collapsed all emergent white-supremacist distinctions: emancipated, self-emancipated, freeborn, all were caught in a liminal space of fugitivity, all were now exposed to increased surveillance and violence.

In the chapter that follows, I begin with Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s *A Plea for Emigration; or Notes on Canada West*, thinking about the author’s choice to mobilize the empirical and the

³ For Harsha Walia, this violent “regulation of Black movement” reveals the ways in which contemporary US border imperialism is “bound up” in anti-Blackness. It is important to add that at this moment of writing (January 2025), Walia shows, with citations, that the federal ICE Agreements of Cooperation in Communities to Enhance Safety and Security (ACCESS) program, wherein states are authorized “to deputize local law enforcement to pursue and arrest undocumented migrants,” “is based on the Fugitive Slave Act” of 1850. See *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021), especially part one, “Displacement Crisis, Not Border Crisis” (pp. X-Y).

⁴ Quoted appeals from a broadside published and circulated in Boston in 1851, cited and printed in full in Simone Browne’s work on the anti-Black history of surveillance: *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Durham: Duke University Press (2015): 21-3.

polemical, all while refusing to fully engage in the hyperbolic style and pastoral tropes of the emigration guidebook genre so popular in the period. Critics have typically gestured towards the genre of “booster literature” when attempting to place Shadd Cary’s work in the history of print.⁵ Not unlike other emigrationist treatises of the period, *A Plea for Emigration* has been described as “unabashed propaganda tract that exaggerated the benefits of the Canadian haven while ignoring many endemic problems.”⁶ But I argue that there is a palpable resistance to fully engage the well-established conventions and vocabularies of the genre. Furthermore, I read both her decision to self-publish her plea in pamphlet-form and subsequent pioneering efforts in publishing a newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman* (1853- 1860), as in keeping with this utilitarian approach to social and political reform.

This chapter returns to and departs from the visual-verbal vocabularies explored in the project’s previous chapters. Where Susanna Moodie leans heavily on idyllic tropes to transform unfamiliar terrain into a legible landscape, Shadd Cary declines to romanticize the Canadian environment. If *Roughing It in the Bush* enacts a literary conversion of wilderness into a log-cabin home, *A Plea for Emigration* suspends the category of home altogether. Shadd Cary’s realism is not scenic but strategic, rooted in material life, sharpened by urgency, and oriented toward the practical challenges of Black livelihood. Her pamphlet speaks to a displaced readership navigating what she herself names the impossibility of safety in even the freest northern states. Rather than narrating settlement as resolution, she maps Canada West as a tenuous possibility for survival,

⁵ On ‘booster literature’, see James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo- World, 1783– 1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). On the ‘informational literature of migration,’ “the maelstrom of print and paper,” see Josephine McDonagh, *Literature in a Time of Migration: British Fiction and the Movement of People, 1815-1876* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 8– 22; and Fariha Shaikh, *Nineteenth-Century Settler Emigration in British Literature and Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

⁶ Rhodes, 43-4.

shaped simply by a livable climate, adequate infrastructure, and British colonial laws that make property-owning a more achievable reality for Black emigrants.

In resisting the aesthetic excesses of boosterist literature and emigration guidebooks, Shadd Cary also resists addressing a pre-existing readership with fixed desires. Instead, the pamphlet meets its readership where they are at, both geographically and rhetorically, offering a set of contingencies, tradeoffs, and opportunities in place of sentimentalized images of home and garden. As such, it is not only the content of Shadd Cary's *Plea* but its very form—portable, self-published, pragmatically sold at speaking engagements (its profits used to fund her very own newspaper)—that models Black success and builds a civic vision attuned to racial precarity and resistant to romantic national myth-building. The pamphlet, as with the *Provincial Freeman* later, becomes a material site for civic reimagining, a space of Black self-determination that does not rely on inherited tropes of domestic belonging.

Shadd Cary stages what a good-enough life might look like under difficult conditions, relocating the ideal of home from a settled scene to something iterative and circulatory—less a rooted claim to land than a shared commitment to survival, solidarity, and self-fashioning in flight. Rather than picturing freedom as a destination, Mary Ann Shadd Cary's pamphlet affirms what Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen and Alex A. Moulton describe as “fugitivity as method”: a relational, iterative practice of mobility and place-making that resists the linear escape narratives of North-bound flight.⁷ Building on the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Katherine McKittrick, these

⁷ I choose to work with the term “fugitive” and the category of “fugitivity” to capture and cite the histories and practices of resistance that fugitivity signals, in addition to critical and creative Black, abolitionist methodologies today. Taking cues from Katherine McKittrick and Sylvia Winter, scholars like Celeste Winston cast fugitivity as “an actively evolving practice” and maroonage as “not simply a metaphor by which to describe the endurance of fugitivity in postslavery context.” For Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen and Alex A. Moulton, “fugitivity” names a “relational, iterative practice of mobility and place-making,” as opposed to “a linear escape from the enclosures of the plantation to the freedom of the Maroon-town”; in this, they

scholars position fugitivity not merely as refusal, but as creative world-making—a means of rehearsing and enacting emancipatory futures. And yet, this vision of mobility stood in direct contrast to other prominent Black voices of the time. To understand the stakes of Shadd Cary’s emigration plea, we must situate it alongside Frederick Douglass’s vocal opposition to Black emigration and to the broader debates unfolding in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act.

I. “Do More, Talk Less”: Black Nationalism and the Emigration Divide

In the Black press and in meetings across North American cities, debates for and against emigration had been increasing with fervor in the 1840s. Perhaps most famously, Frederick Douglass, a staunch anti-emigrationist, repeatedly argued against “expatriation, or removal.” In an editorial in his *North Star*, published on the eve of the new fugitive law, Douglass did not equivocate: “We repeat, therefore, that *we are here*; and that this is *our* country [...] We shall neither die out, nor be driven out.”⁸ He would repeat this sentiment, in speeches and in print, and holdfast to his conviction that emigration weakened the national causes of abolition and enfranchisement. In his first public response to the Fugitive Slave Act, Frederick Douglass appeared, in his words “on behalf of a horror-stricken and suffering people” before a crowd of

draw on the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, where “place-making” becomes “a means of rehearsing and enacting emancipatory futures.” Celeste Winston, *How to Lose the Hounds: Maroon Geographies and a World Beyond Policing*, Durham: Duke University Press (2023); Gross-Wyrtzen and Moulton, “Toward ‘fugitivity as method’: An introduction to the Special Issue,” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 22.5 (2023): 1258-1272. Central to these works is the work of Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, Durham: Duke University Press (2020), and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence,” *Futures of Black Radicalism*, eds. G. T. Johnson and A. Loubin, New York: Version (2017): 225-40.

⁸ Frederick Douglass, “The Destiny of Colored Americans,” *The North Star* (Rochester, NY): November 16, 1849. Even in the aftermath of the Dred Scott decision (1857), Douglass insisted on staying: “now and always [...] *we are American citizens*” and “it is the duty of the American people so to recognize us.” Frederick Douglass, *Douglass’ Monthly*, January 1859: p. 2.

“nearly five thousand” in Boston, urging politicians and citizens to “afford relief and protection to the runaways from bondage.”⁹ He begins his address by describing the “urgent” five hundred mile journey to Boston, a journey that took him past “hundreds of [his] terrorstricken brethren” “tak[ing] their departure for the Canadas.” Immediately, Douglass casts Canada as their intended site of refuge, but the image he offers is far from comforting:

They know well, Mr. Chairman, what Slavery is, and dread to return to it, with a horror more piercing than the fear of death itself [...] the slave knows that, if returned, he will have to submit to excruciating torture. Hence, these tears; hence this dark train going out from the land, as if fleeing from death. Many of them are without the means to live, and are going almost naked to a severer climate, and to face colder winters, than they had ever dreamed of.

Here, life in Canada is imagined as a fate not much better than death. As an image, “this dark train going out from the land,” “almost naked,” names a genuine anxiety about the unpreparedness of a now-migrant population, while also reappropriating the rhetorical devices of a proslavery discourse that sought to dissuade fugitivity amongst enslaved communities. In one of the earliest issues of the *Voice of the Fugitive*, the first Black newspaper in Canada (1851-53), the editor reports that many fugitives had been subject to “horrible stories, “circulated by proslavery white people about Canada.” The repetition of “you will starve and freeze, if you go there,” has surely “persuaded” many to “stay in the states until they are pounced upon by the slave-catcher,” they write.¹⁰ Certainly, it was in the interest of enslaving propagandists to cast the Canadian environment as harsh and hostile. Published and re-printed widely in the weeks that followed the

⁹ Frederick Douglass, “Do Not Send Back the Fugitive.” Speech. October 14, 1850. *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews Volume 2: 1847-1854*, ed. John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). [Web](#).

¹⁰ *Voice of the Fugitive*, April 23, 1851. The *Voice of the Fugitive* was the first Black newspaper in Canada founded by Henry and Mary Bibb in 1851.

Boston rally, Douglass's October 1850 address also participates in this dialectical tradition of claiming and disavowing Canada as site of refuge for Black Americans.

But Douglass's position was not uncontested. His former co-editor, Martin R. Delany, took him directly to task in his 1852 treatise *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*.¹¹ In one of the earliest published full-length political treatises by a Black American, Delany outlines the "condition" of Black Americans as one of entrenched oppression, arguing that no true national belonging is possible without political sovereignty and land ownership, both of which are denied to Black Americans under white supremacy. For Delany, voluntary migration to South America, or later, Liberia, was not capitulation but a practical, political strategy: "a new country, and a new beginning, is the only true, rational, politic remedy for our disadvantageous position," he argued.¹² His theory of racial uplift was grounded in the need to escape not just slavery but the inherited degradation that the nation's racial structures made inevitable. While Delany acknowledges Canada as a refuge for formerly enslaved people and as a temporary sanctuary, he ultimately dismisses it as an inadequate long-term solution for Black political and economic self-determination. Even Canada, he argued, was too vulnerable to U.S. influence: "Canadians are descended from the same common parentage as the Americans on this side of the Lakes," he writes.¹³ He insists that true self-determination for Black people requires settling in a land where they can form and govern their own nation, not one where they are perpetual subjects. Delany's emigrationist vision is ultimately rooted in founding a Black nation where people could control their institutions, laws, and futures.

¹¹ Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Philadelphia: "Published by the Author," 1852).

¹² *Ibid.*, 205.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 174.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary's *Plea* navigates these emigrationist vs. anti-emigrationist debates. Unlike Delany, she does not advocate for geographic distance as a requirement for Black self-determination. And unlike Douglass, she refuses to imagine the U.S. as a viable political home under current conditions. If Delany saw American racial ideology seeping across the Canadian border, and Douglass hoped to reform it from within, Shadd Cary's pamphlet mapped a third possibility: staying close enough to monitor the shifting tides of U.S. law and politics while building structures of civic life outside American jurisdiction. Her vision of Canada West was pragmatic, not utopian. For many Black activists, particularly in the early 1850s, emigration was emerging as the only option for "men who love liberty too well to remain in the States," as Shadd Cary writes.¹⁴ For all of Douglass's anxiety about Canada's severe climate and his nationalist calls for people to stay and fight, "every northern city with a sizable black population" experienced "an exodus" in 1850.¹⁵

II. "So there seems to be no safe alternative left but [...]": Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the realist

Born free in Delaware in 1823, Mary Ann Shadd Cary was the eldest of thirteen children in a prominent Black abolitionist family. Her father, Abraham Shadd, was a conductor on the Underground Railroad and active in the American Anti-Slavery Society, and their home served as a waystation for self-emancipated fugitives. Educated in Pennsylvania, Shadd Cary taught in Black schools across New York, Delaware, and Pennsylvania before emigrating to Canada West in 1851. Long before she became the first Black woman editor and publisher in North America, she was

¹⁴ Mary Ann Shadd Cary, "Our Free Colored Emigrants," *Provincial Freeman*, May 20, 1854; Shadd Cary founded and edited the *Provincial Freeman* from its inception in 1853 through 1860. The newspaper was the second newspaper published by Black writers in Canada (the first was Henry Bibb's *Voice of the Fugitive*), and the first newspaper published by a Black woman in North America.

¹⁵ Jane Rhodes, 28-9.

writing, organizing, and agitating across the Black press and at state conventions. Her life and work embody a deeply political understanding of print as a platform for civic participation and community formation, a medium that could cross national borders even when she could not.

Her challenge upon settling in Windsor in the autumn of 1851 was to counteract the loaded and contradictory image of “cold” and “severe” Canada circulating in both proslavery propaganda and abolitionist discourse. On the one hand, enslaving interests depicted Canada as a frozen wasteland, a place too cold, remote, and uncultivated to sustain Black life. On the other, white abolitionists and Christian missionaries trafficked in sentimentalized visions of Canadian refuge, producing boosterist narratives of bucolic farmland and grateful Black settlers, part of an effort to provide rousing accounts of Black prosperity for their white, American readerships. The source material was widely and wildly unreliable, and Shadd Cary was frustrated with what she saw as propaganda and distortion on all sides.

How, then, to correct unreliable narratives from within the genre of the emigration guide, a form notoriously prone to exaggeration, abstraction, and unearned optimism? Mary Ann Shadd Cary begins her *Plea* by adopting the familiar protocols of the genre only to quietly revise and reframe them. Her opening gesture—a geographical sketch—follows the expected conventions of the emigrant pamphlet, offering a panoramic view of Canada’s borders, “extending on the north to the Arctic Ocean, from Atlantic on the east, to the Pacific on the west, and the southern boundary of which is subject to the inequalities in latitude of the several Northern States and Territories belonging to the United States government.”¹⁶ This cartographic overview might initially appear rote, even boosterish in its scope and scale. But the shift is swift. Almost immediately, she pivots

¹⁶ *A Plea for Emigration*, 97-8, 99.

to the most persistent critique in circulation: the cold. “The feature most dwelt upon” becomes her first site of intervention.

Her response is methodical. First, Shadd Cary invites readers to recalibrate their geographic imagination. She locates “many flourishing towns in Canada” further south than significant portions of Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Michigan, an implicit challenge to climate-based propaganda that positioned Canada as both inhospitable and uninhabitable. As custom dictates, she supplements this claim with empirical support, “giving such evidence as will substantiate [her] assertion” and annexing a table detailing the “extreme ranges of cold and heat.”¹⁷ She follows with pragmatic reassurance (“the summer will compare with the same season south of the line”) and “much” testimonial corroboration from residents with “many years residence.” The emigration guide’s conventional gestures—geographic orientation, local testimony, and direct address—are all present, but Shadd Cary instrumentalizes them to resist exaggeration and instead cultivate trust.¹⁸

The language of the opening section, however, suggests more than just a corrective to climate misinformation; it opens up a deeper meditation on the instability of borders and the absurdity of fixed geopolitical imaginaries. Her phrasing—“*subject to* the inequalities in latitude of the several Northern States and Territories belonging to the United States government”—is syntactically odd and ascribes a kind of perverse power to a specifically American landscape. It suggests that the integrity of Canada’s southern edge is somehow warped by the uneven latitudinal stretch of a U.S. empire expanding both literally and figuratively. Here, she begins to stage a larger

¹⁷ In the introduction to her work on the literature of migration, Josephine McDonagh writes of how “new stereotype machines” could “impress on what was likely to be recycled and superseded information the look of precise and useful current ‘facts’.” See *Literature in a Time of Migration*, 12.

¹⁸ *A Plea for Emigration*, 99, 100.

critique, one that extends beyond geography: the idea that territorial lines, national boundaries, and climatic imaginaries are discursive devices that delimit where and for whom freedom is imaginable. In this view, the U.S. “line” becomes a synecdoche for imperial violence, expansionist policy, and the failure to guarantee Black safety or autonomy.

Shadd Cary’s subtle undermining of geographic fixity resonates with the broader ethos of her work, and with this dissertation’s guiding interest in the relationship between genre and spatial belonging. The Canada she describes is porous, contingent, and entangled with the very nation from which Black emigrants seek refuge. This emphasis on Canada as contiguous, and not only contiguous but as weaving in/out/through the US landscape at various “latitudes,” subtly unsettles the reader’s assumptions about north and south, center and periphery. Her spatial reasoning—insisting that Canadian towns “sit further south” than their American counterparts—performs a kind of epistemological defamiliarization. In this, she joins a tradition of Black radical geography (later theorized by thinkers like Katherine McKittrick and Ruth Wilson Gilmore) that calls into question the coherence of national space itself, implicitly critiquing the ways geographic abstractions are mobilized to support racialized narratives of belonging.¹⁹

The image of Canada that emerges in the opening section of her *Plea* does not sit neatly, or rest quietly, atop a coherent American shape. Within the world of emigrationist discourse, there was a well-rehearsed fear that “the Canadas are destined to *come into* the United States,” or rather, that Canada was very much subject to the pressures of American territorial expansion and imperial

¹⁹ Katherine McKittrick’s methodology of Black living emphasizes relational, spatial, and experimental forms of knowledge. Her attention to “Black geographies” redefines space as a product of racial, historical, and epistemic struggle, and informs the chapter’s framing of Shadd Cary’s alternative spatial logic. See *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

projection.²⁰ This fear, as captured in the minutes of the 1854 Emigration Convention, echoes Martin Delany's anxiety about the "manifest tendency on the part of the Canadians generally, to Americanism." "That the Americans are determined to, and will have the Canadas," Delany claims, "there is not a shadow of a doubt."²¹ For Delany, then, Black Canadians would have to live alongside white Canadians prone to "Americanisms" (such as racist ideologies), while also living in fear of inevitable American colonization, aggressively literal as well as cultural. His concern is both geopolitical and epistemological: that the spatial refuge offered by Canada might itself become a staging ground for the very logics of exclusion, racism, and imperialism that Black emigrants hoped to escape. In this way, Shadd Cary and Delany both contend with the precariousness of diasporic place-making, refusing to romanticize geography as inherently emancipatory, and instead exposing its susceptibility to appropriation by white colonial ideologies.

But for Shadd Cary, proximity to the United States helps make her case *for* emigration. If geographic and cultural distance makes "proper" "elevation" possible in Delany's treatise, physical proximity makes emigration a more persuasive category (and, by extension, makes security and liberty more attainable) in Shadd Cary's plea. Safe and secure, "on this side of the," albeit rather

²⁰ "Minutes from Emigration Convention" (1854); for an account of emigration debates before 1850, specifically on the history of the proslavery foundation of the "benevolent" American Colonization Society (ACS), see Nicholas Guyatt, "'The Outskirts of our Happiness': Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History*, 95.4 (March 2009): pp. 986-1011.

²¹ Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States Politically Considered* (1852). Taking his former co-editor (*North Star*) to task—Frederick Douglass—, Delany argues that "a new country and a new beginning is the only true, rational, politic remedy for our disadvantageous position." For Delany, voluntary migration to South America or (later in his career) Liberia emerges as the "proper and only means of elevation." To remain in the US would mean accepting the inevitable inheritance of "degradation" "entailed upon the child" by the enslaved parent, "handed down in regular succession"; at the same time, to emigrate to Canada would mean overlooking the bare fact that "Canadians are descended from the same common parentage as the Americans on this side of the Lakes." In between the lines of Delany's argument about shared parentage, an image of the white Canadian as vulnerable to American, proslavery logics emerges in conjunction with an image of the border—just a lake between—as equally vulnerable.

arbitrary, “line” —Windsor situated just across the river from Detroit—Shadd Cary could actively keep an eye on the state of things in the US, while simultaneously building the social and institutional foundations of Black life in Canada. The permeability of the border, far from being a liability, becomes for Shadd Cary a resource: her own proximity to the States meant that she could return for conventions and lecturing tours, raising much needed subscriptions and funds for her publishing ventures, while offering firsthand experience of the Canadian frontier to emigration-curious communities.²² This practical geography shapes the very form of her activism: she does not need to imagine Canada as utopian, as others did, but can present it as an accessible, livable space from which to engage in cross-border political work. Her emigrationist politics, then, are grounded in the possibility of sustaining a life and a press, of making a home and a community, just outside the reach of American racial violence. This defiance of nationalist cartography and poetics appears in her earliest extant piece of published writing, a statement that inaugurates her editorial voice: “In anything relating to our people, I am insensible of boundaries.”²³ This declaration is not simply a call for diasporic solidarity; it is a refusal of the very logic that renders Black subjects out of place.

To return, then, to Shadd Cary’s text, where accounts of Canadian soil, timber, livestock, fruits, and vegetables are neatly assembled for her reader’s consideration. “Tobacco grows finely”; “blue plums are raised with ease, and strawberries, raspberries, grapes [...] in fact all of the fruits

²² Shadd Cary’s lecture tours are mentioned in an article titled “From Our Philadelphia Correspondent,” *Provincial Freeman*, December 1, 1855. Jane Rhodes also offers an account of Shadd Cary’s lecture circuit in the summer of 1853; she was even joined by her father, Abraham W. Shadd, a well-known and highly regarded activist and speaker himself, at a meeting in their hometown of West Chester, PA: pp. 77-80.

²³ “Letter to Frederick Douglass,” *North Star* (23 March 1849), in which Shadd Cary agrees with Henry Highland Garnet’s letter to the editor, which “argued that self-reliance is a vital component of Black people’s struggle for liberation.” See the opening of Nneka D. Dennie’s work on Shadd Cary’s writings (1-2).

seen in our markets are plentiful”; “the horses are of a medium size”; poultry and eggs, in the winter, “are often sold at a rate that in the United States would be called high.”²⁴ Barring a few claims that some vegetables and cheeses are “superior,” Shadd Cary’s account of Canada’s “productions and inducements” proves quite measured. Where she does include data in the form of tables, the information is spare and carefully curated, limited to just a few representative crops (Figure 1). The effect is a text that refuses both excess and spectacle, foregrounding legibility and use over persuasion through surplus.

GRAINS, POTATOES, TURNIPS, &C.			
The accompanying table exhibits the average yield to the acre, of the several grains mentioned, in fallow land:			
ARTICLES.	NO. BUSH.	ARTICLES.	NO. BUSH.
Wheat,-----	30	Oats,-----	70
Buckwheat,-----	15	Barley-----	40
Rye,-----	35	Indian Corn,-----	50

Figure 3.1. Transcription of Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s grains table from the collected works of Mary Ann Shadd Cary (ed. Nneka D. Dennie, 2023)²⁵

This rhetorical restraint is particularly striking when placed alongside the typical format of mid-century emigration guides, in which encyclopedic tables of climate conditions, crop yields, land values, and export statistics serve not only as informational apparatus but as persuasive technologies in themselves (Figures 2 and 3).²⁶ In such documents, the overwhelming density of numerical detail performs a kind of economic sublimity, overwhelming the reader to manufacture

²⁴ *A Plea for Emigration*, 104-6.

²⁵ *A Plea for Emigration*, 103.

²⁶ See appendix.

a sense of inevitable prosperity and return on investment. By contrast, Shadd Cary's pared-back aesthetic and her refusal of the statistical sublime signal a different authorial and political orientation: one that privileges clarity over persuasion and critical assessment over speculation. If the emigration guide conventionally stages its authority through accumulation—of land, of data, of textual real estate—*A Plea for Emigration* models a counter-form, in which selective disclosure, grounded empiricism, and formal modesty produce a politics of discernment. The spareness of her tables signals not insufficiency but a revaluation of what counts as persuasive and for whom.

Gardening emerges as a priority here, above and beyond the cash-crop and export commodity prioritization typical of emigration guides. The lack of a sustained attention to male-coded entrepreneurial prospects recalibrates the gendered imaginary in Shadd Cary's *Canada West*, foregrounding the kinds of agricultural work historically taken up by women: family gardens, backyard animal husbandry, and the informal economies of market food production.²⁷ Shadd Cary's vision of abundant garden fruits and vegetables re-centers Black women as agents of economic stability and spatial belonging. Her *Canada West* is not one in which prosperity is attained through accumulation of vast tracts of land, but one where Black women might cultivate their own provisions, contribute to local economies, and claim their place within a shared civic ecology. The abundance of "blue plums," "grapes," "eggs," and "cheeses" not only testifies to the land's fertility but also implicitly invites her readers to imagine themselves as both nurturers and

²⁷ Interestingly, in R.J. Boutelle and Marlas Yvonne Whitley's recent (2025) chapter on Shadd Cary's plea, they similarly locate a focus "on family farms, gardens and garden plants." For Boutelle and Whitley, the attention to local markets and state fairs allows readers to envision themselves as proprietors. See "Plotting New Gardens: The Black Feminist Roots of Community-Building in *A Plea for Emigration*," in *Insensible of Boundaries: Studies in Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, ed. Kristin Moriah (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2025): 147-164.

proprietors—participants in a form of Black homemaking that is practical, sustainable, and community-oriented.²⁸

Compare, then, this careful measure of Shadd Cary’s empirical account and her objective, matter-of-fact tone with an earlier Canadian emigration guide (1833):

There [Canada] the climate has no parallel for salubrity, there the lands cannot be excelled, there the scenery for variety of form and aspect, extent of view and general completeness, can scarcely be surpassed in any part of the world.²⁹

Or just the opening line to white abolitionist James Redpath’s *A Guide to Hayti* (1861):

There is only one country in the Western World where the Black [person] and the man of color are undisputed Lords.³⁰

She presents to you the opportunity of not only exhibiting the capacity of your race, but of creating a new Eden in the most fertile of the Antilles.³¹

These passages are emblematic of what James Belich has termed the “paradise complex” of nineteenth-century emigration literature. As he argues, “booster literature”—an expansive field of promotional books, pamphlets, editorials, and public lectures—routinely portrayed “newlands” as “biblical Lands of Canaan, Lands of Goshen, and Gardens of Eden.”³² While Belich’s formulation helpfully identifies the genre’s utopian orientation, his use of “newlands” deserves scrutiny; these lands were only “new” to colonizing settlers, their “discovery” predicated on indigenous dispossession and erasure.³³ Against this literary and ideological backdrop, the quiet realism of *A*

²⁸ *A Plea for Emigration*, 104-6.

²⁹ *Information Respecting the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada, in which The British American Land Company Intend to Commence Operations for the Sale and Settlement of Lands in the Ensuing Spring* (London: W.J. Ruffy, 1833).

³⁰ James Redpath, *A Guide to Hayti* (Boston: Haytian Bureau of Emigration, 1861), 9; for other examples of popular emigration guides of the period, see *The Emigrant’s Guide to Upper Canada; or, Sketches of the Present State of that Province, Collected from a Residence Therein During the Years 1817, 1818, 1819. Interspersed with Reflections*. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820).

³¹ Redpath, 174.

³² James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth* (2009), 154.

³³ I resist Belich’s 21st-century use of the word “newlands” in so far as it evokes an uncritical white, colonizing inheritance. By extension, Tiya Miles has studied the similar (albeit historically specific)

Plea for Emigration becomes all the more striking. In place of Edenic fantasy, she offers a judicious appraisal of climate, cost, and crop yield. There are, on a couple occasions, traces of boosterism in Shadd Cary's "the vegetables grow very large," but ultimately, in place of popular myths of abundance, there emerges something more akin to good-enoughness or temporary satisfaction.³⁴ Her Canada is not a Promised Land but a viable alternative.

That strategic realism is most evident when Shadd Cary turns from local description to comparative argumentation. This conclusion that Canada is *good enough for now* comes in the more polemical moves of her writing, where Shadd Cary turns to other destinations considered by emigrationists, Mexico and the West Indies. In those places, she contends, Black emigrants are likely to remain dependent on white "planters," subject to the same exploitative logics they seek to escape. The conditions of Black labor would be little improved, and property ownership, a cornerstone of civic participation, would remain elusive. Thus, her conclusion:

So there seems to be no safe alternative left but to be satisfied with that government now existing that is most reliable and most powerful. That government is Great Britain; her dependencies for a *secure* home for the American slave and the disgraced *free* man.³⁵

"So there seems to be no safe alternative left but to be satisfied [...]." The conclusion performs a rather awkward sort of humility topos, wherein the British, colonial government is "most reliable," "most powerful" and, by extension, we hope, benevolent; in Britain's subordinate lands, at least, political recognition amounts to relative "security" and "freedom" "now existing." It is a strikingly conditional endorsement, almost a concession: a call not to idealize, but to settle—for now—for

inheritance of Black emigrants, who frequently adopted the language of and for white settlers in Canada. Miles presents the relationship between Black survival and "colonial intrusion" as a series of endlessly complicated, "fluctuating, spatially inflected power relationships." See "Beyond a Boundary: Black Lives and the Settler-Native Divide," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 76.3 (July 2019): 417-426.

³⁴ *A Plea for Emigration*, 104.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 130; emphasis original.

what is least bad. Her phrasing, “so there seems to be no safe alternative,” sutures hope to realism, and security to the colonial state, not because Britain is inherently just, but because its legal infrastructure (for now) makes Black landholding and civic recognition possible. As Nneka D. Dennie, recent editor of Shadd Cary’s writings, more eloquently puts it: she endorses Canada and its “Britishness” insofar as it “held potential for Black liberation.” Challenging the previously held position that Shadd Cary “tried to convince readers that being British was more important than being black,” Dennie argues that the potential for Black liberation in Canada “did not require [her] to prioritize Britishness over Blackness, but rather, to pursue both in tandem.”³⁶ This is not the rhetoric of triumphant nation-building. Rather, it is a deeply conscious articulation of what *good-enough belonging* might look like in a world structured by racial capitalism and empire. If other emigration guides offer an Eden, Shadd Cary offers a garden plot, one that is livable, if not ideal, and that remains attentive to the political climate as much as atmospheric conditions.

That the marshalling of fruits, vegetables, and farm animals manages to resist the curatorial urge to present verbal snapshots of idyllic country-living amounts to a deliberate pastoral refusal. There are no green scenes of plenty, or small but neat cottages and gardens here. In this dissertation’s second chapter, I considered the extent to which Canadian emigrant Susanna Moodie encounters her new frontier environment as pretty pictures. For Moodie, there is comfort, familiarity, and by extension, a “soothing power” in the regular discursive practice of narrativizing a strange place in familiar, rustic language—our “log cottage” or our “log cabin.” Similarly, in “Idyll as Refuge: the Settler’s Dream” (2024), Josephine McDonagh and I thought about how white abolitionist and editor of Mary Prince’s *History* (1831), Thomas Pringle, inserts his voice

³⁶ Benjamin Fagan, *The Black Newspaper and the Chosen Nation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 98. *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: Essential Writings of a Nineteenth-Century Black Radical Feminist*: note 34, 139-40.

into Prince's narrative's footnotes, shifting readers from her first-person account of violent lived-experience to a detached, third-person account of a comparable scene in the mode of the picturesque. Here and across all my work, Sara Suleri's reading of the picturesque as a British *imperial* project has shaped how I read the mobilization of certain visual-verbal vocabularies as obscuring violent realities, domesticating "threats" into "a less disturbing system of belonging."³⁷ I reiterate these cases and arguments here to highlight the absence of a very much standard template in Shadd Cary.

Unlike the guidebooks and settler manuals circulating widely mid-century—many of them published in London and richly illustrated with fold-out maps, steamboat schedules, railway timetables, and outfitter advertisements—Shadd Cary's pamphlet offers no pictorial strategies, no immersive scenic framing.³⁸ What is more, the journey and arrival details (captured by chapters like "General Directions on Arriving in Canada") that form such a vivid and memorable first half of a white emigrant's guide are noticeably absent in Shadd Cary's pamphlet.³⁹ This omission is not incidental but structurally significant: her readership, composed of fugitives, freed people, and

³⁷ Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 198-99 (and also, pp. 75-101). As noted in "Idyll as Refuge," Ian Baucom takes up Suleri's "idiom of the picturesque," reading it as an "idiom of containment" and "an idiom of comfort in refusal." See Ian Baucom, "Mournful Histories: Narratives of Postimperial Melancholy," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 42 (1996), 259-88 (p. 286). See Cary-Beckett and McDonagh, "Idyll as Refuge: The Settler's Dream," in *The Victorian Idyll in Art and Literature: Subject, Ecology, Form*, eds. Thomas Hughes and Emma Merkling (New York: Routledge, 2024), 13-25 (pp. 23-28).

³⁸ *The British American Guide-book* aimed to be "useful and interesting to readers on both side of the Atlantic," speaking to a transnational, bourgeois readership of prospective settlers and armchair tourists alike. *The British American Guide-Book: being a condensed Gazetteer, Directory and Guide, to Canada, the Western States, and Principal Cities on the Seaboard* (New York and London: H. Bailliere, 1859), 28. For another example typical of the period, see Francis A. Evans, *The Emigrant's Directory and Guide to Obtain Lands and Effect a Settlement in the Canadas* (Dublin: William Curry, Jun. and Co.; London: Simpkin and Marshall; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1833).

³⁹ "General Directions," chapter title from *The British American Guide-book* (1859). Even Moodie's 1852 collection of sketches (*Roughing It in the Bush*) published by Richard Bentley in London, despite its anti-boosterism thrust, did not speak to a population of people in need of refuge; published two decades after the fact of arrival, the collection, rather, historicized a moment within the history of Canadian emigration.

freeborn Black Americans, undertook widely variable, often perilous routes through a web of slave-holding states and clandestine networks. The singular journey with a fixed point of origin or arrival—imagined and idealized in settler narratives like Susanna Moodie’s and (the fictional) Olivia Fairfield’s—has no equivalent here.⁴⁰ Shadd Cary, after all, is not writing for the ideologically secure emigrant subject envisioned by most settler literature.

As she makes clear in her preface, she addresses a displaced and endangered public, one for whom availability of “emigration’s inducements” written “*particularly*” for them (“colored people”) is urgently lacking.⁴¹ She strips her emigration pamphlet, then, of poetic superfluity, the very genre logics that seek to aestheticize the frontier, and provides instead: “condensed information accessible to all.”⁴² Even at the level of style and address, Shadd Cary never asks her readers to *imagine*, to *picture*, or to *survey*. She denies her readers the fantasy of surveying land from a distance and thus resists the colonizing-settler impulse to convert space into property. Instead, she insists that Canada West be apprehended not through mastery but through a kind of realistic, and perhaps comforting, continuity. In this framework, Canada is not figured as *better* land—more fertile, more scenic—but as proximate, familiar, and accessible. The imaginative work demanded of her reader is not to envision a utopia, but to recalibrate their sense of belonging to recognize that safety and futurity might exist just beyond an arbitrary and porous borderline.⁴³ In

⁴⁰ Later in the chapter, I consider how the logistical specificity of travel appears across a wide variety of later newspaper articles and correspondence published in her *Provincial Freeman*, where Shadd Cary compiles testimonies of border crossings and practical knowledge. But in the *Plea* itself, the pamphlet resists this kind of how-to itinerary.

⁴¹ *A Plea for Emigration*, 96-7.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ For more on the “longstanding porosity” and “ephemerality” of the U.S.-Canadian border during the antebellum period, see Kristin Moriah, “‘A Greater Compass of Voice’: Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield and Mary Ann Shadd Cary Navigate Black performance” in *Insensible of Boundaries*: 122-144 (especially pp. 123-26).

this, *Plea* enacts a genre of radical realism that redefines both the political function of emigration literature and the spatial logics of Black fugitivity.

Amongst the more obvious reasons why Shadd Cary's pamphlet declines to perform the boosterish rituals of an "unabashed propaganda tract" (to reiterate Jane Rhodes's indictment): she is not trying to *sell* anything. The "mania for migration," as James Belich calls it, was rooted in the colonizing desire to attract more grist for the mill, to get enough population density to hold and to work the land.⁴⁴ The associated literature often functions largely as a giant advertisement, if not for a named emigration scheme or landholding company, then for all the myriad capitalist ventures associated with colonization. Shadd Cary's project isn't a colonial-capitalist one; and the absence of that characteristic tendency towards utopianism, and all the cousin pastoralist tropes that come with these romanticized styles of writing, further highlights how there is something inherently and exclusively colonizing and capitalistic about pastoralism in this period, or, more specifically, about the imagined harmony between emigrant and idealized rural space.

And yet, even in its pragmatism, *A Plea for Emigration* is not without moments of rose-tinted description. There are flashes of idealization, particularly in Shadd Cary's at-times romanticization of British governance and her cautious optimism about Canadian racial politics. Still, even these gestures are tempered, rhetorically and ideologically, by a prevailing ethos of realism. Her account of the "dispositions" of white Canadian settler-colonizers for example, is couched not in celebratory terms but in a language of conditional and provisional satisfaction:

The disposition of the people generally towards colored emigrants, that is, so far as the opinions of old settlers may be taken, and my own observation may be allowed, is as friendly as could be looked for under the circumstances.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Belich, 148.

⁴⁵ *A Plea for Emigration*, 124.

This is the framework of provisionality, the language of sufficiency—“as friendly as could be looked for,” “under the circumstances, “satisfied,” *good enough, for now*. In the year following the Fugitive Slave Act, Shadd Cary prioritizes immediate safety; this is a temporary solution to an immediate threat. In the decade following the publication of both Shadd Cary’s and Martin Delany’s 1852 emigration treatises, Canada continued to be presented as a practical waystation rather than a final destination. At the National Emigration Convention for Colored People in 1854, Canada was presented as “temporary relief, which like a palliative, soothes for the time being the misery” of American racial violence.⁴⁶ Presented throughout the proceedings as a “temporary asylum,” there is evidence of both Shadd Cary’s and Delany’s earlier insights into the limits of Canadian freedom. Even in its moments of affirmation, then, Canada remains a compromised site—relief, not resolution. That Shadd Cary and Delany both return to the US during the Civil War speaks to their conviction that Canadian freedom offered only a temporary “remedy to a dreadful evil.”⁴⁷

It might be tempting to interpret Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s eventual departure from Canada—first to recruit for the Union Army during the Civil War, and later to resettle permanently in the United States following the 1865 abolition of slavery—as a repudiation of the life and community she had built across the border. But to read it this way would be to misunderstand both the tenor of her politics and the provisional character of the refuge Canada had offered. Her exit

⁴⁶ Although there is no written evidence of Shadd Cary attending the Emigration Convention (women’s names were frequently held from convention minutes), it seems that she was, in the very least, involved in its organizing and promotion. Martin Delany, on the other hand, was very much present and vocal (his signature appears first at the end of the proceedings document). “Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People; held at Cleveland Ohio on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, the 24th, 25th and 26th of August 1854” (Pittsburgh: A.A. Anderson, 1854): [Web](#).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 70-1; Leaving her children safe at home in Canada, Shadd Cary went on the road for over a year, enlisting Black men to fight for the Union. In 1865, Delaney was commissioned as a major, the highest rank achieved by a Black field officer during the Civil War.

from Canada underscores the extent to which her habitation there was always a political stance. Canada was livable not because it was idyllic, but because it offered, in a narrow window of time, the legal structures and physical security that made Black life—and more specifically, Black agitation—possible. Her writing during the intervening years makes this clear. In an editorial announcing an upcoming Emigration Convention (1856), she implores:

Cease to uphold the United States government, if it will, and while it does uphold human slavery. Cease to grapple after the shadow while you disregard the substance. “Come out from” a government that begins its depredations upon the rights of colored men, and ends by destroying the liberties of white men [...] Determine to remove to a country or to countries where you may have equal political rights, and thus be *elevated* at *once*. Where from the responsibilities of your position as freemen, you will have something else to do, and a higher tone of thought, than to *serve* a class of tyrants for reduced wages, and to speculate upon, and imitate the fashions and follies of a people who despise and decide you.⁴⁸

Coming “out from” and “thus be[ing] *elevated* at *once*” suggest both a physical and spiritual expansion, something like room to breathe, framing emigration as both political divestment and moral ascent. Emigration is not just a flight from violence, but a gesture toward a different kind of civic relation, one not defined by accommodation but by action. Crucially, the goal is not only to escape the indignities of racial subjection, but to secure the space in which new forms of thought and collective life might emerge. “You will have something else to do,” she writes, naming action itself as the predicate of political subjectivity. In this sense, Shadd Cary’s politics are less about resettlement than about reorientation, about claiming a livable position from which to think, to publish, to work, to act.

Susanna Moodie’s sketches, re-collected and re-packaged decades after her initial emigration, rehearse the settler’s retrospective desire to make sense of displacement through narration and, in varying degrees, through idyllic aestheticization. Similarly, the editor of *The*

⁴⁸ Shadd Cary, “The Emigration Convention,” *Provincial Freeman*, July 5, 1856. Emphasis original.

Woman of Colour assembles the fictional Olivia Fairfield's letters and publishes "a tale" of displacement and hardship "designed" to "teach" its readers compassion and inclusion. By stark contrast, Shadd Cary's pamphlet is a document written in motion, in the thick of political crisis, printed to travel and to act. It does not retrospectively justify emigration; it makes the case, materially and textually, for a future-oriented, collective movement. As such, it becomes not only a document of emigration, but a blueprint for Black print culture itself—embodied, mobile, and radically present.

III. "I mean to be understood": Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the editor and self-publisher

Once she had assembled her information on Canada West, Mary Ann Shadd Cary sets out to print her "statement of facts," "the result of much inquiry." Instead of forwarding the document to anti-slavery newspapers in the states, she decides to self-publish the material in the form of a short pamphlet, as she had done with her first appeal three years earlier.⁴⁹ Shadd Cary could have asked her new neighbor in Canada, Henry Bibb, to print her pamphlet. Bibb and his wife Mary were influential in Sandwich, leaders of a Black settlement project, the Refugee Home Society, and editors of the Society's print arm, Canada's first Black newspaper, the *Voice of the Fugitive* (1851-1853). The Bibbs were central figures in the region's Black political and social life, and their press would have been a natural partner for Shadd Cary's publishing efforts. Yet from the

⁴⁹ Shadd Cary self-publishes *Hints to the Colored People of the North* in 1849 in Wilmington, DE; her pamphlet was reviewed soon after in Frederick Douglass's *North Star* (8 June 1849). No full copy of the pamphlet remains; the *North Star* review contains the only extant excerpt. In this brief excerpt, Shadd Cary aims to "speak plainly" in condemnation of "[her] people's" "processions, expensive entertainments, excursions," "mak[ing] grand...displays of costly apparel, and churches on churches, to minister to vanity." Her contention is that the "regalia" and "pomp" fuels white people's contempt: "there is continual criticism on our actions being indulged in contempt of us." Nneka D. Dennie includes the excerpt from the *North Store* in her collection of Shadd Cary's writing: pp. 146-7.

outset, tensions emerged, particularly between Shadd Cary and Henry Bibb, whose increasingly pointed editorials cast her outspokenness as insubordinate and her independence as a threat. As scholars have noted, Bibb appears to have been “disturbed” by Shadd Cary’s refusal to defer to the established Black male leadership in Canada West.⁵⁰ Much of the scholarship around the publication of *A Plea for Emigration; or Notes of Canada West*, presents Shadd Cary’s decision to self-publish—and, importantly, to opt for a white printer in Detroit—as a kind of retaliative or punitive response to the Bibbs, who were printing regularly in the early 1850s.

This interpretation, while not entirely incorrect, risks flattening the political substance of her choice. Shadd Cary’s disagreement with the Bibbs, and with Henry Bibb in particular, was not merely interpersonal. It was ideological and deeply rooted in conflicting visions of Black civic life, economic self-determination, and the ethics of abolitionist politics. In *A Plea for Emigration*, Shadd Cary had taken the Refugee Home Society to task, lodging a critique of the “begging” system encouraged by Henry Bibb and his supporters. *The Voice of the Fugitive* and the Refugee Home Society regularly published appeals for charitable donations from American readers, often casting Black Canadians as impoverished fugitives in need of white benevolence. There are many examples where the language of solicitation and an imploring tone saturate Bibb’s writing, particularly as he sought increased funding for land: “If our people must beg, we hope they may beg for something that is permanent. Let them beg for an honorable livelihood, for education, for their children, and land on which they can support them.”⁵¹

For Shadd Cary, this model of racial uplift was fatally compromised by its dependence on white philanthropy. In direct opposition to Henry Bibb and other abolitionists, Shadd Cary spoke

⁵⁰ For a much more detailed account of the discord between Bibb and Shadd Cary, see Rhodes’s second chapter “Emigration Furor and *Notes of Canada West*,” 25-50, p. 43.

⁵¹ *Voice of the Fugitive*, 9 April 1851.

out against charity: “I have often thought, if it is *really* a benevolent act [...] or even what sort of vanity was gratified [...],” she writes in her *Plea*.⁵² True racial uplift could not be brokered through the conditional generosity of white society, but had to emerge from a framework of self-sufficiency, mutual aid, and Black intellectual production—a refusal of the paternalism embedded in the politics of benevolence. Her decision to print her own pamphlet and, soon after, to establish the *Provincial Freeman* (1853–1857), marks a critical shift in her publishing practice, from addressing a potential emigrant in need of information to cultivating an ongoing, expanding community of readers committed to liberation and self-determination.

The *Provincial Freeman* stands as an example of how the work of printing exemplifies the kind of entrepreneurial opportunities and political maneuvers available to Black people—women, too—from the relative safety of Canada. While Henry Bibb also published an antislavery newspaper in Canada, his editorial approach rejected oppositional voices, including Shadd Cary’s. For a gadfly like Shadd Cary, the work of disagreement and dissent is not something to be suppressed but rather a constitutive feature of political participation. The friction seemingly fuels her drive to act. Take, for example, this excerpt from an 1855 issue of the *Provincial Freeman*:

We are absolutely opposed to begging [...] we would be glad [rather] to send, by your order, at least *one thousand numbers of the Freeman, weekly*, to the enemies of the colored people of this country and the “United States.” Shall we not, on your account, furnish certain hotels and steamboats with the paper? Who will order volume II, to be sent to each Director of the E.W. Railway?⁵³ We much rather you should do this than to *give us your money!*⁵⁴

⁵² *A Plea for Emigration*, 113; earlier in the long-standing debate between Bibb and his “begging” and Shadd Cary and her condemnation of his “institution,” Shadd Cary penned a letter to the *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* with the headline “No More Begging for Farms or Clothes for Fugitives in Canada” (October 29, 1852).

⁵³ Later in the article, the editor writes: “how shall we defend ourselves and our people, against such abuse as one of our ministers received the other night, at the hands of the slaveholder’s tool, on the steamer of the “Great Western Railway,” if the *Freeman* should fail?” See Shadd Cary, “It is no longer a question to be asked, whether The Provincial Freeman is needed [...],” *Provincial Freeman* (October 6, 1855): 94.

⁵⁴ *Provincial Freeman* (October 6, 1855): 94.

Just this small sample of her public writing captures her persuasive power and something of her polemic. Unlike Henry Bibb's paternalistic, third person "let them beg" (note 52), Shadd Cary's use of the first-person plural across the *Provincial Freeman* figures herself as one with all political refugees in Canada; she does not merely write on their behalf. Here, she addresses sympathetic readers in the U.S. and in Canada, and instead of "begging" or customarily imploring readers to subscribe, the enterprising editor asks readers to subscribe on behalf of an "enemy." "Your money" is refigured, no longer a passive *gift* but rather a weapon or agent of change. By asking her readers to weaponize the printed object, to redirect their financial support not toward charitable donation but toward strategic dissemination, she transforms print into a tool of confrontation and counterpublicity. This isn't simply circulation; it's political inscription in hostile, transitional spaces.

What's at stake in choosing hotels, steamboats, and railways as *Provincial Freeman's* destinations? What is striking about her proposition that readers send copies directly to enemies is that she specifically names sites where Black people were regularly surveilled, excluded, or ejected. These liminal sites are not only nodes of movement and commerce, but also theaters of contested access. Black Canadians and fugitives were routinely denied service or forcibly removed from these very places. Shadd Cary's editorial tactic reclaims these American routes and rest-stops as platforms for protest, staging her paper's movement as a form of occupation and confrontation, all from her printing offices in Toronto. This mode of media resistance—a radical departure from the rhetoric of moral persuasion or genteel uplift—emerges from her sustained frustration with the paternalism embedded in the benevolent abolitionism exemplified and perpetuated by Henry Bibb and the Refugee Home Society. Shadd Cary does not seek pity or patronage. She seeks leverage. And with the *Provincial Freeman*, she builds it.

The point is not merely to persuade white readers but to assert presence where Black presence is typically denied. Here, Black capital—monetary and intellectual—is marshaled not to appease or assimilate, but to irritate, to agitate, and to force acknowledgment from those who would rather ignore or erase. In the decades ahead, Shadd Cary develops this call for offensive tactics of consumption into a more extensive policy against white business in favor of Black patronage:

You must spend the last farthing in supporting white masters, mechanics, stores and trades. See to it that colored men and women be encouraged to conduct business [...] We, who have always been the victims of policy, must in turn, and in the spirit of this era, make a policy. Demand that a portion of patronage come to your shops, from both white men and colored, else withdraw your patronage from the corner grocery, and let it keep itself [...] [your money] aids the white man to strengthen his hand, in the unrighteous fight against your people, and at the exclusion of your sons. Proclaim a policy and stick to it like grim death.⁵⁵

“Policy” here is reclaimed from legislative abstraction. Her call to “proclaim a policy and stick to it like grim death” elevates the everyday act of spending into a form of direct action. In this reframing, the Black consumer becomes a political agent, and the act of buying becomes a mode of redistribution and reclamation. As Derrick Spires has tracked in the *Frederick Douglass’s Paper* articles attributed to William J. Wilson and James McCune Smith, this is exactly the kind of economic policy that “Black activists were refining” in the 1850s, a policy “based on mutual dependence that incorporated contemporaneous understandings of economic citizenship with more traditional uplift strategies.”⁵⁶ Similarly, what Shadd Cary articulates is not simply a theory of self-

⁵⁵ “Letters to the People— No. 2 Trade for Our Boys!,” *New National Era* (April 11, 1872): Nneka D. Dennie, 51-53.

⁵⁶ In the third chapter of *The Practice of Citizenship*, Derrick Spires thinks through the “shifting understandings of representation and citizenship” in the 1840s and 50s, particularly how “black activists search for economic representations” amid a “growing sense that market capital was replacing political capital.” Derrick Spires, *The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 121-22.

reliance, but rather a vision that proves tactical and infrastructural, anchored in the idea that communal uplift requires economic discipline and sustained commitment. Refined and well-rehearsed by the 1872 publication of “Trade for Our Boys!,” Shadd Cary’s vision is already latent in her *Provincial Freeman* editorials, where subscription is framed as a political maneuver, and it can be traced further back still to *A Plea for Emigration*, where settlement is linked not to rural idylls, but to the practical possibilities of autonomy and market participation. For Shadd Cary, racial justice and civic belonging are not secured through the benevolence of white allies or state recognition, but through networks of Black production, circulation, and care.

While the economic dimensions of Shadd Cary’s vision of racial uplift are more immediately evident, equally significant is her theory of print as a material and political technology. In Shadd Cary’s print culture, texts are tactical instruments. When she imagines the *Provincial Freeman* taking up space in hostile hotels and on “enemy” steamboats and trains, she figures the printed object as an agent of a chaos. Here, the printed page exerts a kind of insurgent presence, inserting Black thought and vitality into white institutions of leisure, commerce, and transport. This is more than symbolic intrusion: it is a challenge to the spatial and ideological boundaries that structure public life.

In this light, *A Plea for Emigration* gains force not only from its argument but from its discrete form, inscribed across its green covers (and not in small font): “FOR THE INFORMATION OF COLORED EMIGRANTS” (Figure 4). As a self-published pamphlet, she could name her audience and address them specifically, personally. Unlike ephemeral newspaper clippings, the pamphlet offers both legibility and longevity: it can be held, annotated, handed off, or carried close. Its green covers enclose a promise that is both intimate and collective: here, held in your hands, is both a proposition and a gesture of solidarity. It does not pretend to offer a comprehensive guide for

families seeking information on border crossings. Instead, it performs a different kind of labor, at once material and affective. In its concision and portability, it becomes a vehicle of assurance, a physical artifact of shared possibility. Small and compact, the pamphlet can be passed hand-to-hand, kept close to the body, shared across meetings, on trains, on ferries, announcing the presence of a community already in motion. Its circulation tells the reader: others have done this. Others are doing this. You are not alone. If the emigration guide is a document of mastery—offering maps, established routes, and visions of dominion—Shadd Cary's *Plea* and her *Provincial Freeman* materialize as printed forms of kinship, affirming presence, possibility, and belonging across scattered geographies, and assuredly inviting readers into a shared politics of movement and mutuality.

Self-publishing *A Plea for Emigration* with a white, American printer was not merely a logistical choice; it was a bold political and financial risk. Offending the Bibbs was only part of the fallout. By refusing to temper her pro-emigration stance, Shadd Cary placed herself at odds with much of the dominant Black intellectual leadership of the period. The *Pennsylvania Freeman*—the very newspaper on which she would later model her own *Provincial Freeman*—reviewed the work, noting the quality of her prose but pointedly refusing to endorse her central argument. Other leading anti-slavery papers, including *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, were so firmly anti-emigration that they refused even to acknowledge the publication. These refusals to engage Shadd Cary's work in public print culture were not editorial slights, and they had real financial repercussions. A receipt from her American printer George W. Pattinson to Rev. Mr. McArthur, a

Windsor-based missionary and Shadd Cary's close ally, confirms that Shadd Cary required, and received, financial assistance to cover her printing costs as early as July 1852.⁵⁷

And yet, this early risk formed the foundation for a much larger, more ambitious print enterprise. In the years that followed, newspaper reports and letters make clear that Shadd Cary used the pamphlet strategically, leveraging the modest "sales of her small book" to "defray her expenses" and to "procure aid for her [newspaper] enterprise."⁵⁸ The pamphlet was not simply a standalone intervention, then. It was a seed that funded the more expansive, more frequent interventions of the *Provincial Freeman*. Where the pamphlet offered bounded intimacy and direct address, the newspaper allowed for responsiveness, continuity, and for serialized solidarity. Together, the pamphlet and newspaper chart a flexible, responsive print ecology—one that meets its readers not with myth or mandate, but with tools for decision-making and durable self-determination.

⁵⁷ Jane Rhodes calls attention to the receipt in the Mary Ann Shadd Cary Papers at the Archives of Ontario (previously Ontario Provincial Archives) in Toronto (p. 49). In 2020 and 2021, the Black Women's Organizing Archive (BWOA) based at the Center for Black Digital Research at Penn State University organized archivists from across the US and Canada to support the cataloging, transcription and digitization of Mary Ann Shadd Cary's papers at the Archives of Ontario (in addition to the collection held at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University). I am indebted to them for their active, ongoing intellectual work. [See more here.](#)

⁵⁸ "From Our Philadelphia Correspondent," *Provincial Freeman* (1 December 1855): Dennie, 155.

Appendix: Tables, Pamphlet, Installation

STATISTICAL RETURNS of the COUNTIES OF SHEFFORD, STANSTEAD, AND SHERBROOK														
N. B. About One Fourth more may be added under the various heads														
COUNTIES AND TOWNSHIPS.	POPULATION.						PROPERTY.							
	In 1831.	Proprietors of Real Property.	Not Proprietors of Real Property.	Families engaged in Trade.	Families earning subsistence in Agriculture.	Farm Servants.	Acres of Land Occupied.	Acres of Land Improved.	Houses Inhabited.	Houses Building.	Houses Vacant.	Taverns.	Grist Mills.	Saw Mills.
I. COUNTY OF SHEFFORD.														
Shefford	1176	135	51	5	165	11	20,824	7610	186	5	4	2	2	4
Stukely	388	48	14	—	57	11	8,658	2062	62	—	1	—	1	1
Milton	148	16	12	—	28	—	4,450	357	28	—	—	—	1	—
Ely	25	5	—	—	5	—	920	192	5	—	1	—	—	—
Granby	797	88	46	1	122	1	13,870	2493	134	1	—	2	1	3
Brome	1239	150	167	2	197	9	22,905	6005	217	—	—	2	4	5
Farnham	1314	120	104	2	214	8	22,338	4673	222	—	—	2	2	6
Total	5087	362	294	10	788	39	95,764	23,992	854	6	6	8	12	20
N.B. The Township of Roxton was unsettled at the time the Returns were made.														
II. COUNTY OF STANSTEAD.														
Hatley	1600	177	101	5	2	10	32,238	10,702	274	5	—	4	3	7
Barnston	2221	109	264	3	18	24	37,228	10,451	374	9	4	1	3	11
Barford	84	3	12	—	—	—	3,325	179	16	1	5	—	—	1
Stanstead	4226	331	351	12	30	65	65,918	24,695	689	10	8	3	8	13
Bolton	1170	140	50	2	2	10	31,485	6,919	198	5	5	—	5	6
Potter	1005	65	112	1	2	17	22,785	4,489	177	9	1	2	3	4
Total	10,306	825	879	23	54	126	192,979	57,433	1726	39	23	10	22	42
III. COUNTY OF SHERBROOK.														
Eaton	106	59	21	141	43	—	18,680	12,026	165	6	3	—	2	7
Compton	149	97	22	208	14	—	22,557	7,359	129	4	2	3	3	4
Ascot	1135	62	34	125	11	—	18,392	5,746	176	2	2	4	3	4
Dudswell	242	20	—	43	—	—	5,299	1,105	46	—	—	—	—	—
Clifton	70	6	8	1	11	—	1,601	459	14	—	—	—	1	2
Hereford	171	21	14	2	31	—	3,273	1,012	35	—	—	—	1	2
Orford	230	15	23	20	8	—	1,429	569	36	1	1	—	—	1
Brompton	248	31	5	1	35	—	4,061	1,351	36	—	—	—	—	—
Shipton	1313	88	72	19	131	29	18,086	5,215	160	5	5	2	2	5
Melbourne	864	89	54	12	121	4	12,817	4,153	143	1	—	1	2	6
Windsor	129	19	4	3	20	4	3,225	830	23	—	—	—	1	2
Westbury	67	4	8	—	12	—	1,127	330	12	—	—	—	—	—
Newport	120	19	5	—	22	—	3,265	960	24	—	—	—	—	—
Total	7104	684	411	135	908	175	113,816	41,113	999	19	13	10	14	31

E, Extracted from the General Statistical Returns of **LOWER CANADA**, laid before the Legislature.
ds, for increase, since the Returns were made.

			PRODUCE, (Bushels.)								STOCK.				EDUCATION	
Distilleries	Asheries.	Other Manufactories.	Wheat.	Oats.	Barley.	Pease.	Rye.	Indian Corn.	Buck Wheat.	Potatoes.	Cattle.	Horses.	Sheep.	Hogs.	Schools.	Scholars.
—	4	1	2140	1247	112	313	2955	3395	163	24,003	184	178	1836	430	8	294
1	1	—	957	1203	60	34	1000	747	7	13,990	610	60	1095	140	2	48
—	—	—	286	78	135	30	242	583	8	1,721	103	13	76	43	2	58
—	—	—	120	94	—	11	90	88	—	540	47	2	55	10	—	—
—	2	—	1756	576	15	129	1354	4403	84	14,705	597	50	679	261	5	192
2	2	1	2868	3083	35	451	3398	7052	233	33,566	1432	200	1974	721	4	160
1	1	—	2507	1470	45	612	1253	7716	395	22,875	1327	222	1654	752	6	196
4	10	2	10,637	7751	411	1580	11,192	22,934	971	111,400	5132	715	7373	2347	27	862
1	3	—	5,756	7,797	91	1090	1493	10,858	207	53,060	2425	423	3654	1538	14	559
6	—	1	8,824	10,700	996	1610	2923	2,263	—	100,895	2601	366	4176	2094	17	668
—	2	—	220	40	40	—	96	265	—	1,700	66	1	26	37	—	—
10	11	—	12,763	30,792	674	3301	2912	20,940	25	196,556	6281	1209	8794	4016	33	1179
—	1	4	3,113	2,415	20	560	2445	3,709	23	32,691	1538	248	2564	860	8	324
2	4	7	2,189	2,034	106	282	1716	5,721	571	27,154	1006	160	1370	778	6	199
19	21	12	32,865	53,778	1827	6343	15,585	50,166	816	412,096	13,917	2407	20,584	9323	78	3017
1	1	—	4211	5722	473	425	2218	1,713	37	36,720	1534	250	2349	673	6	220
—	—	—	5425	5913	286	639	2071	5,666	35	49,180	1938	340	2584	1298	10	312
4	3	1	2768	3786	63	282	1130	2,895	38	34,593	1000	256	1288	662	5	265
—	—	—	1144	1273	73	137	234	456	8	8,800	292	49	497	197	2	40
—	1	—	369	274	10	58	97	51	—	3,100	103	13	147	47	—	—
—	1	—	950	470	14	75	269	555	223	7,080	280	29	364	132	—	—
—	—	—	135	835	—	28	73	118	20	3,890	66	50	5	52	—	—
—	—	—	749	1525	—	10	828	1490	—	9,190	286	60	421	181	3	96
2	2	—	3122	3961	64	293	2297	2,215	20	38,236	1140	219	1634	821	6	248
—	—	—	2822	1945	150	373	459	1737	—	23,470	946	154	1319	677	6	188
—	—	—	413	876	20	1	294	979	—	6,730	235	22	265	142	1	25
—	—	—	320	120	21	20	150	79	—	1,360	66	8	119	47	—	—
—	—	—	718	723	10	69	444	162	—	5,400	220	28	330	95	—	—
7	8	1	23,146	26,223	1179	2410	10,644	17,344	331	227,749	8100	1478	10,982	5031	39	1394

Figure 3.2. "Statistical Returns," a fold-out table included in *Information respecting the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada in which the British American Land Company intend to commence operations for the sale and settlement of lands, in the ensuing spring* (London: W.J. Ruffy, 1833).

MARKET PRICES AT SYDNEY.

The Commissioners have collected from Newspapers published in New South Wales, the following accounts of the Market Prices at Sydney on the first day of each Month during the Year 1830.

	Jan.	Feb.	March.	April.	May.	June.	July.	August.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Wheat.....per Bushel...	£. s. d. 0 6 6	£. s. d. 0 8 3	£. s. d. 0 6 9	£. s. d. 0 8 0	£. s. d. 0 9 6	£. s. d. 0 7 6	£. s. d. 0 7 0	£. s. d. 0 6 0	£. s. d. 0 6 0	£. s. d. 0 5 3	£. s. d. 0 4 9	£. s. d. 0 5 3
Maize.....ditto.....	0 5 0	0 3 9	0 3 6	0 4 6	0 3 9	0 4 3	0 2 9	0 1 10	0 1 9	0 2 8	0 2 9	0 2 0
Oats.....ditto.....	0 5 0	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 0	0 2 8	0 2 9	0 3 6
Barley.....ditto.....	0 5 0	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 3 0	0 2 8	0 2 9	0 3 6
Potatoes.....per cwt.....	0 8 6	0 4 0	0 5 0	0 5 6	0 10 0	0 7 0	0 7 0	0 6 6	0 10 0	0 13 0	0 11 0	0 9 6
Butter (Fresh).....per lb.....	0 1 9	0 1 3	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 0 9	0 0 9	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 3	0 1 2	0 0 9
Ditto (Salt).....ditto.....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....
Cheese.....ditto.....	....	0 0 9	0 0 9	0 0 9	0 0 10	0 1 1	0 1 1	0 0 11	0 0 11	0 0 11	0 0 10	0 0 7
Eggs.....per dozen.....	0 1 9	0 1 6	0 3 0	0 2 9	0 2 6	0 2 0	0 2 0	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 0 9	0 0 10	0 0 9
Ducks.....per dozen.....	0 7 0	0 6 0	0 5 0	0 4 6	0 5 0	0 3 6	0 2 0	0 2 3	0 3 0	0 5 6	0 6 0	0 5 0
Fowls.....per pair.....	0 5 0	0 4 0	0 3 9	0 3 6	0 3 6	0 2 0	0 2 0	0 2 0	0 3 0	0 5 6	0 6 0	0 5 0
Geese.....ditto.....	0 16 0	0 11 3	0 10 0	0 9 0	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 12 0	0 10 0
Turkeys.....ditto.....	1 0 0	0 16 0	0 12 0	0 12 0	0 12 0	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 9 6	0 12 0	0 14 0	0 13 0	0 12 0
Hay.....per ton.....	2 10 0	6 10 0	6 0 0	6 0 0	6 0 0	5 10 0	5 10 0	5 9 0	5 8 0	5 17 6	6 0 0	8 0 0
Straw.....per load.....	1 0 0	0 17 0	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 3 0	1 3 0	0 12 6	0 12 6	0 13 0	0 12 6	0 13 6
Brnad.....per 4lb. loaf.....	....	10d. to 11d.	8d. to 9d.	7d. to 8d.	10d. to 11d.	8d. to 9d.	8d. to 9d.	8d. to 9d.	8d. to 9d.	7d. to 8d.	7d. to 8d.	8d.
MEAT PER STONE.												
Beef.....	....	0 1 3	0 1 3	0 1 3	0 1 3	0 1 3	0 1 3	0 1 2	0 1 9	0 2 0	0 1 6	0 2 4
Mutton.....	....	0 1 5	0 1 5	0 1 5	0 1 5	0 1 5	0 1 5	0 1 4	0 2 4	0 3 0	0 2 6	0 3 4
Pork.....	....	0 2 6	0 2 8	0 2 8	0 2 8	0 2 8	0 2 8	0 2 8	0 4 4	0 5 3	0 5 9	0 4 6
Veal.....	....	0 3 1	0 2 6	0 2 6	0 2 6	0 2 6	0 2 6	0 2 4	0 4 4	0 4 6	0 5 9	0 4 6
FLOUR PER 100lbs.												
Fine.....	1 3 0	1 6 0	0 17 6	0 17 6	1 7 0	1 0 0	1 0 0	0 18 0	0 17 0	0 15 0	0 13 0	0 13 0
Seconds.....	0 19 0	1 2 0	0 15 0	0 15 0	1 2 0	0 16 8	0 16 8	0 15 0	0 14 0	0 13 0	0 11 0	0 11 0

Figure 3.3. "Market Prices at Sydney," *The Emigrant's Guide to New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land, Lower Canada, Upper Canada, and New Brunswick* (London: W. Pearson, 1832)

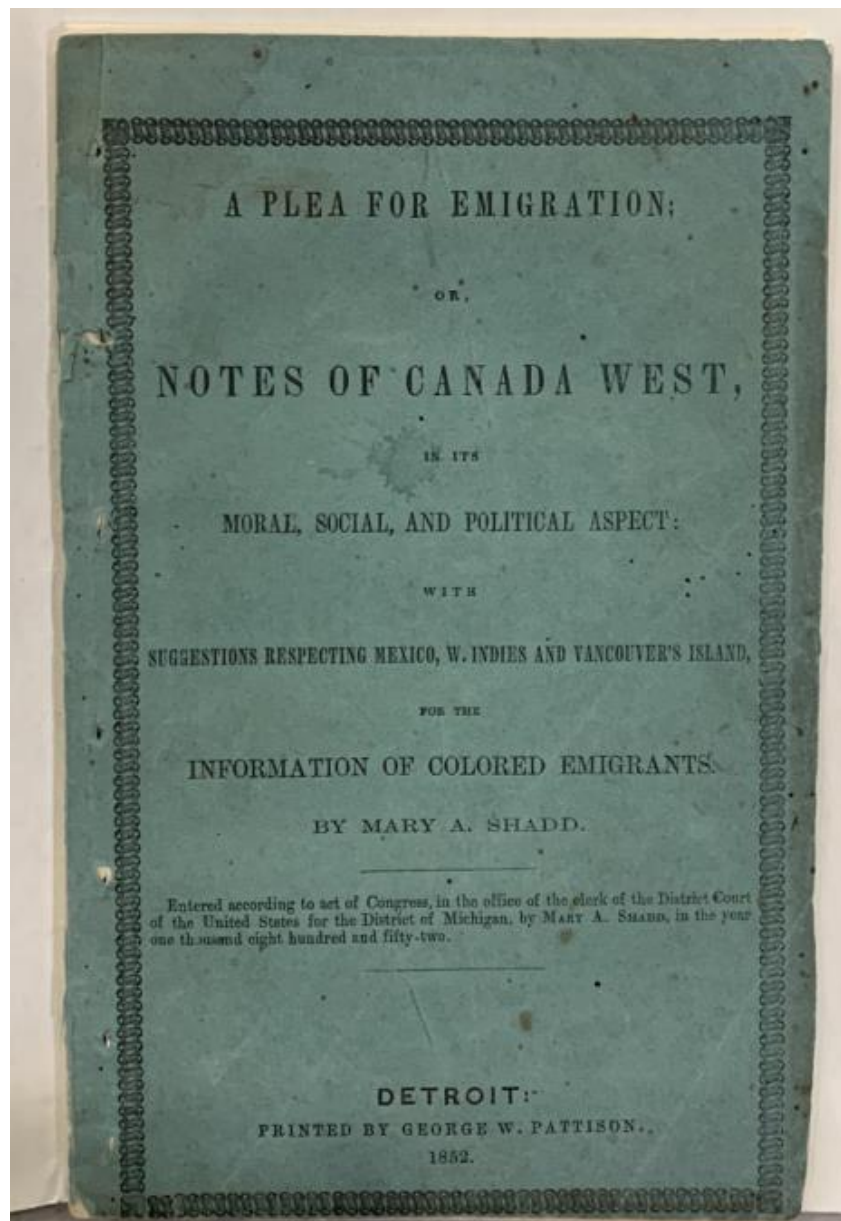


Figure 3.4. A copy of Mary Ann Shadd Cary's *A Plea for Emigration; Or Notes of Canada West in its Moral Social and Political Aspect* (1852).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ This copy is held by the Baldwin Collection of Canadiana in the Toronto Public Library. [Web](#).



Figure 3.5. "Luminary: Mary Ann Shadd" by Canadian Afrofuturist artist Adeyemi Adegbesan (Yung Yemi); Installed on the outside wall of Mackenzie House in Toronto (2021).

Iconoclasts on the Edge of Empire

Strategic, iconoclastic, and above all voices that this project assembles, Shadd Cary is an activist who “mean[s] to be heard.” As scholars like Kristin Moriah and Nneka D. Dennie have recently raised, Mary Ann Shadd Cary has gone unnoticed for too long, despite being the ultimate example of what Derrick Spires calls “the critical citizen”:

[She] operates as an agent of consciousness raising, in constant circulation, expanding the realm of possibility of the civic imaginary in a way that shifts focus from creating an acceptable or respectable blackness to contesting citizenship frameworks and public tastes that authorize such distinctions.¹

When Shadd Cary returns to the U.S., like Martin Delany and so many other Black refugees in Canada, when they keep choosing to stay through Reconstruction, their decisions reveal neither defeat nor compliance, but rather a refusal to forfeit the possibility of transformation. To choose to leave or stay was, and remains, a political act shaped by material conditions, strategic calculations, and visions of futurity under duress. This question—to *stay or to go*—returns to us today with renewed urgency, as creeping fascism, climate collapse, and the hardening of borders foreclose safety for many. What Shadd Cary offers is not a solution, but a strategy: to locate freedom not in proximity to state recognition, but in the infrastructure we build for one another—through print, through policy, through practice. In this sense, Shadd Cary’s vision belongs to a longer genealogy of *otherwise worlding*.²

¹ Derrick Spires, 164.

² *Otherwise Worlds* is an interdisciplinary anthology that explores the complex relationships between settler colonialism and anti-Blackness. Through essays, art, and interviews, the collection attends to alternative kinds of relationships that can lead toward liberation, emphasizing the importance of Black and Indigenous conversations in formulating otherwise worlds. See Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

The material fact of Mary Ann Shadd Cary's pamphlet places her within a broader history of women using print as both a means of self-definition and a tool for civic formation. In this, she has more in common with Susanna Moodie than first meets the eye. While their politics, privileges, and publics diverge, both women print, travel with, and circulate their own small volumes, and leveraging those volumes toward broader institutional recognition. There is something quietly significant about the portability of these objects; they offer a seeming comfort and security in the face of settler chaos or racialized precarity. They function as evidence of participation in a broader discursive field and as vehicles for making claims on public life. When Moodie emigrates to Canada with her 100 copies of *Enthusiasm, and Other Poems* (1831), she seeks through print to reassert a kind of literary centrality, even as she inhabits the colonial periphery. Disseminating loose pages to editors and publishers throughout North America and sending fragments back to England in hopes of re-publication, Moodie transforms her poems into fugitive verses—textual fragments seeking new homes and new publics, untethered from the formal coherence of the book. The material vulnerability of those unbound pages mirrors, in some sense, her own status in Canada as a transplant trying to take root in unfamiliar soil.

Shadd Cary's fugitive print strategy differs in form and function but is no less shaped by dislocation. Her *Plea for Emigration*—a self-contained polemic, deliberately composed, deliberately circulated—nevertheless answers to a diasporic condition. Like Moodie's pages, Shadd Cary's pamphlet functions as both anchor and emissary: a compact volume that can be passed along, tracing networks of kinship and aspiration across hostile geographies. What matters in both cases is the object's portability, its boundedness, and its capacity to create a sense of coherence amid movement. Neither woman relied solely on traditional channels of distribution; both cultivated self-sufficiency through print and sought to leverage small volumes into larger

enterprises. Each eventually founded their own serial publications—Moodie’s *Victoria Magazine*, Shadd Cary’s *Provincial Freeman*—as extensions of that project: not merely as platforms for individual voice, but as experiments in public pedagogy and political presence. Despite their ideological distance, what unites them is a conviction that print is more than a medium; it is a structure of survival, a way of inhabiting space, asserting voice, and imagining community. The volumes they carry—literal and metaphorical—mark the difference between isolation and address and between myth and reality. They are women working at the edge of empire, wielding print as a tool for self-fashioning, but also as a public intervention—each, in her own register, asserting that a book in hand is not just a mark of individual self-sufficiency, but the seed of communal possibility.

This dissertation has argued that literary genre—particularly those forms associated with English rural life, such as the idyll, the pastoral, and the picturesque—functions as a powerful technology for mediating the instability of empire. From Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Cottagers of Glenburnie* to Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s *A Plea for Emigration*, we have seen how English literary forms work to contain, domesticate, and aestheticize racial and spatial difference. These forms are not merely representational strategies but ideological mechanisms that transform unfamiliar or hostile environments into scenes of familiarity and moral order. These templates also coded certain bodies and spaces—Black, Indigenous, rural poor—as either in need of reform or outside the bounds of aesthetic legibility altogether. The sentimental education of cottagers, the picturesque rendering of the colonial landscape, the idyllic accounts of hearth and home: each is a scene of both instruction and exclusion. This project has also shown how literary character, like genre, serves as a classificatory device that emerges alongside—and helps consolidate—the racialized epistemologies of modernity. The figure of the reformable cottager, the dignified Black heroine,

the iconographic settler wife: each is produced through the formal grammars of genre. What emerges is a literary apparatus in which race and character are mutually constitutive, and in which typification becomes a technique of governance.

Yet the texts examined here also register the instability of these genre systems. The *Woman of Colour* exposes the failures of narrative closure and sentimental redemption; Susanna Moodie's settler sketches reveal the dissonance between imperial fantasy and lived experience; Mary Ann Shadd Cary's pamphlet refuses aesthetic consolation altogether, offering a pragmatic and politicized counter-aesthetic rooted in Black print culture. Together, these texts illuminate the ways in which genre is always a site of contestation: where racial ideology is enforced, but also where it can be critiqued, refused, or reimagined.

Thinking from the present—2025—these questions take on renewed urgency. We live in a moment of intensifying climate displacement, rising xenophobia, and increasingly militarized borders. Migration is both a geopolitical crisis and a representational one. As migrants are cast as threats, burdens, or spectacles, aesthetic and narrative forms continue to shape who is seen as deserving of safety and who is marked as disposable. In this context, the formal legacies of the idyll, the pastoral, and the picturesque still haunt the politics of belonging. Contemporary debates about national identity, heritage, and land are saturated with nostalgic images of “Englishness” drawn from the very aesthetic traditions this dissertation interrogates. The image of the tidy cottage, the rolling green hills, the orderly garden—these continue to serve as powerful ideological tools, marshaled in support of anti-immigrant sentiment and exclusionary nationalism. Far-right movements in the UK and elsewhere deploy a fantasy of the rural past as a justification for racial purity and social homogeneity. What *The Global Cottage* demonstrates is that these fantasies have

deep literary roots—and that their racial politics have long been embedded in the aesthetic forms themselves.

At the same time, the counter-tradition this dissertation recovers offers resources for thinking otherwise. In moments of refusal, misrecognition, or satire, the texts studied here resist the seductive coherence of the imperial idyll. Olivia Fairfield's rejection of English domesticity, Susanna Moodie's ambivalent self-fashioning, Shadd Cary's realist vision of Black autonomy: each marks a fissure in the ideological smoothness of empire. These fissures matter. They reveal how literary form can not only uphold but also unmake the terms of belonging. As literary critics and historians, we are tasked with attending to the politics of form—not simply in terms of content or representation, but as structures that shape thought, feeling, and power. This dissertation suggests that genre is not neutral ground. Rather, it is a site where social orders are stabilized, racialized hierarchies are produced, and futures are imagined or foreclosed. By tracing how genres travel, mutate, and get repurposed in diasporic contexts, *The Global Cottage* insists that literary history must be thought through the lens of migration, movement, and resistance.

In closing, I want to return to the image that haunts the end of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*—the “cardboard house” that is not England. Antoinette's account of disillusionment, disorientation and alienation from within England speaks across centuries to the texts gathered here, all of which expose in varying degrees the violence obscured by markedly English aesthetics and national myths. As we continue to grapple with the legacies of empire, forced displacement, and contested belonging in our own time, the question is not just who gets to belong, but what forms we use to imagine belonging in the first place—and that tracing their histories is a critical step toward more just futures.

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