

Dr David Parker

DICKENS, EDWARD SAID AND AUSTRALIA

The spotting of historical trends can easily give way to reductive dogma, and reductive dogma can easily give way to conspiracy theory. Something of the kind has happened of late to criticism addressing Dickens's interest in Australia.

He was interested in Australia. There can be no doubt about that. And it is scarcely surprising that he was. His career coincided with key stages in the development of the Australian colonies. The 1840s, the 1850s, and the 1860s saw the end of transportation, a massive growth in voluntary immigration, and the gold rush _ which transformed the economy of the colonies, plus much else beside.

Little wonder, then, that Dickens spoke of writing on Australian subjects as early as 1840 (*Letters* 7: 817_18). In 1847 he talked of visiting Australia after finishing *Dombey and Son* (5: 57). In 1850 he told a correspondent, not entirely ironically, that he was thinking of "flying to Australia and taking to the Bush" (6: 123). When his marriage was breaking up in the late 1850s, if John Forster is to be believed, he considered moving to Australia for good (Forster, bk. 8, ch. 2). During 1862 he even contemplated a public reading tour of Australia (*Letters* 10: 152_53).

Little wonder that, being the man he was, Dickens involved himself in emigration to Australia in a thoroughly practical fashion. From 1846 to 1858, you will recall, he administered Angela Burdett Coutts's Urania Cottage scheme. This was established to prepare homeless women, many of them prostitutes, for emigration. The scheme was not unsuccessful. More than half of the women who passed through the home, it is believed, did well in Australia (Schlicke 579_80).

And no wonder at all that Dickens wrote of Australia as a place where personal transformation might be achieved _ by the Peggottys and Micawbers in *David Copperfield*, by Magwitch in *Great Expectations*. In the end, he never ventured upon such a transformation himself, but he did express his confidence in emigration by persuading two of his sons to make lives for themselves in Australia. Alfred emigrated in 1865, Edward ("Plorn") in 1868.

Of late, however, voices have been raised deploring any kind of interest in anything to do with empire. Pitch defiles, we are to understand. Approve, silently tolerate, fail to complain, and you show yourself to be complicit in evil. Nothing but outright denunciation will do. The encouragement of voluntary emigration to a distant colony was a ruse for

disposing of the poor and forgetting about them. Encouraging prostitutes to emigrate was transparency itself.

Encouraging your own thoroughly middle-class sons, it has to be said, is something that remains to be explained, but an explanation will doubtless be forthcoming. It is a field in which far-fetched reasoning is the norm.

Fashionable thinking about empire finds its taint in the most surprising places. One celebrated analysis of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* points out that Sir Thomas Bertram runs the eponymous country estate on the profits of a sugar plantation in the West Indies. During the era in which the novel is set, we are reminded, such a plantation would have been worked by slaves. Sir Thomas's lifestyle, that is to say, and the comforts all his dependants enjoy, must be supposed the fruits of slavery and imperialism. The novel, therefore, has to be read as an implicit defence of slavery and imperialism (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 100_16).

Nor is it only surprising judgments that we find in such thinking. It is unfettered to dull conformity with fact. It has yielded a classic accusation against Dickens, for instance, that in sending Pip and Herbert to trade in the East, towards the end of *Great Expectations*, he was signalling his approval of British colonialism (*Culture and Imperialism* xvii). Pip and Herbert in fact go to Cairo. At no time during the time-scheme of *Great Expectations*, at no time during Dickens's life, was Egypt a British colony or anything like it. It was province of the Ottoman Empire.

The judgment of *Mansfield Park* and the accusation against Dickens over colonies in the East are both the work of Edward Said. Edward Said was a Palestinian Christian who spent the greater part of his life as an English professor in the USA. He died in 2003, sadly young, and much praised by obituarists. I do not wish to be unfair to Said's memory. It must be acknowledged, however, that he dedicated his career to criticism, often severe, of dead writers. I shall pay him the compliment of supposing he would have been as ready to endure it posthumously, as he was to inflict it during his lifetime.

Two of Said's books, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), were largely responsible for launching the teaching and research now conducted in universities under the banner of "postcolonialism" _ the teaching and research that have yielded many more observations on literature and empire such as those of which I have been speaking. The breadth of Said's scholarship is impressive, many of his judgments about history and literature are sound, but he was not content with asking what historians have long asked _ by whom texts were created, for whom, and for what purpose. He was not content with revealing the past in all its complexity, with all its contradictions, while highlighting salient features. Instead, he sought the intoxication of reductive dogma. He applauded reductive judgment in others, practised it himself, and encouraged it in followers.

An axiom of the postcolonialist movement Said founded is that few western authors who wrote during the centuries of western imperialism can be acquitted of complicity in it. He agreed with the French postmodernist thinker, Michel Foucault, who saw the history of literary production as one of powerful groups imposing their views on others, through the invention of dominant discourses which occlude unapproved discourses (Foucault 109_33).

Here is scarcely the place to dilate upon the sophistries of postmodernism, but it is worth remarking how rarely they are subjected to careful scrutiny. They certainly got none from Said. Like all postmodernists, Foucault subscribed to an epistemology attributed to the linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure. Foucault's thinking, indeed, stands or falls by this

epistemology. Saussure, so it is supposed, shows that language is a system of differences, socially produced and governed by convention alone (Saussure 120_22). Perception cannot be disentangled from discourse, his postmodernist admirers assume, so Saussure's understanding of language constitutes an epistemology. The principal flaw in all this is the notion that language can be governed "by convention alone."

Long before there were any postmodernists, the Argentinian writer, Jorge Luis Borges, dismissed any such notion by means of a mischievous *reductio ad absurdum*. It is to be found in his story about the imaginary planet Tlön, inhabited by unswerving idealists convinced that apparently solid things are but shadows of ideal forms. This conviction persuades their philologists that the original language of the planet contained no nouns. It lacked words for a sentence like "The moon rose above the river," they maintain. Speakers had to say something equivalent to "Upward behind the on-streaming it mooned" (Borges 8). The comedy of this in no way detracts from its acuteness. Even if we wanted to, we could not construct a language without nouns. Something more than convention alone governs language. Admit that, and you admit the failings of postmodernism.¹

Foucault's writings, in fact, are better understood as the elaboration of a gigantic conspiracy theory than as constructive thinking. Even so, the concept of the dominant discourse can be detached from his system, and considered as a practical tool for interpreting and judging texts. Few readers with a sense of period style are likely to find it less than intriguing. The question to be asked is whether it can be used to explain what Dickens thought, felt, wrote and published about Australia _ whether the commitment to imperialist objectives that Said and his followers see in Dickens is really there to be seen.

The answer has to be a qualified negative. Only half-truths and equivocations are yielded by the attempt to discern such a discourse. I shall show why I think this by dwelling chiefly on a body of writing about Australia, insufficiently studied for what it reveals of Dickens's views on the topic. It is not writing by Dickens himself, for the most part, but writing which he published as an editor. It is found in the weekly periodical, *Household Words*, which he edited from 1850 to 1859, and in its successor, *All the Year Round*, which he edited from 1859 until his death in 1870. Unsurprisingly, given the era during which they were published, there is much about Australia in these journals. An account of this material, not widely accessible, is something worth giving in itself, I like to think. But it also calls into question many of the assumptions of postcolonialism.

We no longer believe Dickens put the finishing touches to everything that appeared in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, but it is clear he had a hand in everything. Every periodical to some extent reflects the personality of its editor. *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* do so more distinctly than most.

By-lines are rare in both journals. Authors of non-fictional articles are never identified. An incidental result of this is our scant knowledge of who wrote what in *All the Year Round*. A ledger listing payments to contributors survives for *Household Words*. None does for *All the Year Round*. The rarity of by-lines produces an effect compounded by the headers on each pair of facing pages. "Conducted by," it says at the top of every verso; "Charles Dickens," at the top of every recto. The implication is clear: we are being given direct access to Dickens's own views.

No contribution, certainly, was commissioned for either journal without his consent. He advised contributors about what it was he wanted. He sub-edited many contributions personally. And he read everything _ after it had appeared, if not always before _ mindful

of future commissions. His close involvement, at every stage, in the production of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, makes them good indicators of the way Dickens's opinions evolved between 1850 and 1870. There are no better indicators of the way his opinions about Australia evolved during this period. There is a dominant voice, then, sounding from the pages of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, but a dominant imperialist discourse is another matter entirely.

Postcolonialists were not the first to express their indignation at British imperialism, of course. They are the rearguard of Marxist and quasi-Marxist thinking. Robert Hughes is a writer who met with Said's approval before the banner of postcolonialism was raised. Many Australians question his relentlessly lurid account of transportation and immigration in *The Fatal Shore* (1987), but Said admired it. Hughes combines extensive knowledge of the subject with a capacity for ignoring whatever fails to suit his thesis, and a similar capacity for fanciful invention. He denounces articles about emigration to Australia which appeared in *Household Words*. The writers _ Caroline Chisholm and Samuel Sidney _ were given a platform by Dickens, Hughes argues, from which to preach imperialist objectives. In declaring that such articles appeared "in every issue" of the journal, Hughes pioneered the cavalier treatment of fact favoured by postcolonialists (Hughes 557_58).

Said liked *The Fatal Shore* not least because it helped him reach the conclusions he did about *Great Expectations*. He tells us in *Culture and Imperialism* that Dickens's novel can be appreciated only by those who understand Australia to have been "a penal colony designed for the rehabilitation but not the repatriation of transported English criminals" (xv). Convicts like Magwitch he explains, quoting Hughes, "could succeed, but they could hardly, in the real sense, return. They could expiate their crimes in a technical, legal sense, but what they suffered there warped them into permanent outsiders. And yet they were capable of redemption _ as long as they stayed in Australia" (*Culture and Imperialism* xvi; Hughes 586). We detect reductive dogma giving way to conspiracy theory here. Who "designed" the colony, is one thing we want to know. What distinguishes going back to Britain from return "in the real sense"? What do Hughes and Said mean by "redemption"?

A more sober historian of Australia reveals the conflict of opinion in Britain that yielded what Hughes and Said glibly term "design."

The wits in London mocked at the idea of a colony of thieves. Members of the government, they argued, had grown giddy by being carried to a great elevation and had conceived the mad scheme of a land of thieves. One man in Scotland, reduced to the deepest woe when told of the expense of the proposal, described it as the most absurd, prodigal, and impracticable vision that ever intoxicated the mind of man. Some convicts groaned at the prospect of perpetual exile and arbitrary government in a barbarous country where their lives would be made bitter with hard labour. A self-styled writer for the sober part of the community believed the Botany Bay settlement would enhance the comforts and add to the lights of polished society and tend to the general happiness of mankind and the glory of that Being who had preserved the discovery for their own generation. Others with more modesty accepted Botany Bay as a solution to overcrowding in the gaols, or contemplated greedily the benefits to the British homeland of increased Asiatic commerce. The more imaginative let their minds wander over a society in which thieves had

flourished and become respectable. (Clark 10_11)

The decision of Pitt's government to make New South Wales the destination for transportees, after the loss of Britain's American colonies, was an improvisation contrived in the context of an inconclusive debate. Opposition to transportation continued. Even as Dickens was enjoying the first fruits of fame, a committee of inquiry was set up to review the question, thanks to the efforts of Sir William Molesworth.² We should resist the temptation to suppose that Hughes and Said, with rare perspicacity, saw singleness of purpose beneath the dissonant voices enumerated by Manning Clark. Their account is at best error, at worst reckless misrepresentation.

They are as unreliable on detail as they are on broad understanding. Convicts conveyed to New South Wales by the first few fleets, it is true, could not realistically hope to return home, but as traffic between Britain and Australia developed, this changed. Some convicts were transported for life, to be sure. More were transported for seven years, as Compeyson was in *Great Expectations*, or fourteen years, as Magwitch was. Such prisoners were not stopped from returning at the expiry of their terms. Pardons were not at all uncommon, even for lifetime transportees. It was only because they could return home that some criminals were able to boast of being transported more than once.³

Dickens, it is clear, was among those who took an interest in the return of transportees. It was first featured in his fiction in May 1836 in one of the interpolated tale in *Pickwick Papers*, "The Convicts Return" _ a tale which Said evidently never read, or at any rate never thought about (*Pickwick Papers* 77_84). Another sign of Dickens's interest dates from later in the same year. In September, in one of the *Sketches by Boz*, he related the story of Mr Barker, a thieving London cab-driver. "After a lengthened interview with the highest legal authorities," readers are told, "he quitted his ungrateful country, with the consent, and at the expense of its Government; proceeded to a distant shore; and there employed himself, like another Cincinnatus, in clearing and cultivating the soil _ a peaceful pursuit, in which a term of seven years glided almost imperceptibly away" (*Sketches by Boz* 148). After that, Mr Barker returns to London and resumes cab-driving.

From 1838, in fact, the return of transported convicts found a prominent place in public mythology. It was then that the pardoned Tolpuddle Martyrs arrived back in Britain. Newspapers and Chartist publications made much of this. The ordeal of the Dorset farm-hands came to be seen as a glorious episode in the struggle for free association.

Hughes and Said evidently meant nothing very precise when they spoke of "redemption," and it is lack of precision that stopped them understanding *Great Expectations*. Magwitch is transported, and returns illegally before the expiry of his term. Thanks to this, he achieves the only kind of redemption that interested Dickens. In Australia he acquires wealth and a degree of self-respect. Back in England, he is healed by the mutual love he and Pip discover. Dickens counterpoints the repudiation of Magwitch by the justice system, with the redemption he finally achieves. The end of chapter 5 of the book gives us a doleful image of Magwitch being returned, after recapture on the adjacent marshes, to the prison hulk where he awaits transportation: "We saw the boat go alongside, and we saw him taken up the side and disappear. Then, the ends of the torches were flung hissing into the water, and went out, as if it were all over with him" (*Great Expectations* 34). Contrast this with the moment towards the close of the novel, when Magwitch, "humble and contrite," lies dying in the Newgate infirmary. Pip prays, "Oh Lord, be merciful to him, a sinner!" (411).

If Said meant us to understand that, through *Great Expectations*, we can detect the enthusiasm for retributive punishment which characterised some contributions to the contemporary debate on penology, he was right, though scarcely original. If he meant us to understand that the novel exemplifies a discourse endorsing such enthusiasm, he was simply misreading it.

On one topic Dickens unquestionably exposed himself to criticism such as Hughes's and Said's. They are silent about this, though. It is this topic alone which recommends the notion of a dominant discourse, as an explanation for what Dickens published about Australia. The attitude towards Australian Aborigines, in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, is consistently hostile and patronising. It is of a piece with Dickens's attitudes towards the Indian Mutiny and Governor Eyre's suppression of the 1865 insurrection in Jamaica.⁴ He rarely responded to appeals for sympathy with races other than his own. Victorian opinion on such matters was ranged along a spectrum with, at one end, something akin to the Renaissance notion of the noble savage, and, at the other, something akin to the Greek notion of virtue being unique to the *polis*. Dickens agreed with the Greeks. He took the view that it was futile to deal with "Hottentots, as if they were identical with men in clean shirts at Camberwell" (*Letters* 11: 116).

Nothing Dickens published in his weeklies about Aborigines deviates from an understanding of the subject all too convenient for colonisers. In May 1850, *Household Words* featured a piece by Samuel Sidney belonging to the genre of outback yarn then being developed in Australia – narratives of shrewd and plucky bushmen who triumph over tricky circumstances and villainous opponents. It is entitled "Two-handed Dick the Stockman." Dick's exploits include the rescue of people threatened by untrustworthy and murderous "blacks" (*HW* 1: 141_44). "Two Letters from Australia," in the same volume (*HW* 1: 475_80), is a more fact-based account of conflict between colonists and aborigines. The authors were Francis Gwynne and W. H. Wills (Lohrli 290_91, 461_70). More stories mythologising the conflict were to follow. Frank Vincent's "Australian Jim Walker" was published in May 1858 (*HW* 17: 500_04). His friend is murdered by Aborigines, but the resourceful hero evades such a fate. The most sympathetic piece about Aborigines, to appear in either journal, is "Bungaree, King of the Blacks," published in *All the Year Round* in May 1859. It is a patronising account of a drunken old Aborigine elder, whose sole virtue is his ability to mimic pillars of the white establishment (*AYR* 1: 77_83). "Two Original Colonists," published in January 1870, tells of an escaped convict who fell in with a group of Aborigines, and lived with them for thirty-two years without seeing a white face. He learned their language, and mastered their ways, but never stopped looking upon them as a barbarous and cannibalistic people (*AYR* NS 3: 178_81).

The debate about the colonists' treatment of Aborigines continues to this day. Keith Windschuttle's book, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, has revived it. So much depends upon the choice and evaluation of sources, that adjudication is next to impossible except for specialist historians, and they show no sign of agreeing. One thing is plain, however. Whatever was actually done, a self-justifying discourse licensed mistreatment of Aborigines. Dickens was instrumental in establishing and perpetuating such a discourse.

No such accusation can be levelled against him, however, in connection with the treatment of other Australian topics in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. We can find some material promoting the objectives of ardent imperialists, to be sure, but an imperialist discourse, occluding others, is apparent only to wilfully perverse readers. A

dispassionate survey of articles relating to emigration, for instance, cannot substantiate views such as those urged by Hughes, Said and other postcolonialists, and it exposes errors of fact used to substantiate their views. Rarely after its first year of publication do we find unqualified advocacy of emigration in *Household Words*. Forty weekly issues of the journal, moreover, were published in that first year. During the year, it featured two articles by Chisholm, one co-written by Dickens, the other by R. H. Horne. And there were ten articles by Sidney on Australian subjects. Just two articles about Australia by other hands appeared in the journal. So much for there being articles about emigration in every issue.

The "hungry forties," as they were known, had created an interest among radicals and reformers in assisted voluntary emigration to Australia, as a measure for reducing poverty, unemployment, and industrial unrest at home. Call this imperialism if you like, but do not suppose that it necessarily entailed indifference to the fate of the poor, or excluded anxiety about means and ends. The issue of emigration, at any rate, was news in 1850 and, as a good editor, Dickens chose to exploit this in his new journal. He looked for suitable writers. Samuel Sidney _ or Samuel Solomon, to give him his true name _ was a journalist well-known for what he had written on the topic. He had in fact never been to Australia, but his brother John lived in Australia for much of his life, and supplied Samuel with information (Lohrli 428_32). Caroline Chisholm lived in Australia for twenty years all told, and was the founder of the Family Colonization Loan Society (Lohrli 226_28). R. H. Horne was a professional writer who lived in Australia from 1851 to 1869 (Lohrli 309_13). Dickens picked his contributors carefully.

Some of the 1850 articles, it is true, are barely disguised advocacy for emigration, and for popular attitudes professed in support of it. The one Caroline Chisholm produced jointly with Dickens is entitled "A Bundle of Emigrants' Letters." It appeared in March 1850 (*HW* 1: 19_24). It declares that the letters in question are transcribed "to serve no purpose, to support no theory." But it is easy enough for us to see the paper as an expression of the mindset later to be immortalised by Samuel Smiles in *Self-Help* (1859), a mindset with which Dickens had some sympathy. The paper talks of the problems of poverty being solved through the "industrious and frugal efforts of the working classes themselves." The article by Chisholm and Horne, published in June, is called "Pictures of Life in Australia" (*HW* 1: 307_10). It dwells upon signs of prosperity and social order. It emphasises, for instance, the nourishing and plentiful diet _ chiefly of meat _ that immigrants could hope for. It does touch upon the scarcity of marriageable women, though, a subject much debated.

"An Australian Ploughman's Story," by Sidney, was published in April 1850 (*HW* 1: 39_43). It is an encouraging little homily. The story is of a ploughman, a good husband and father, propelled by misfortune into machine-breaking, who is transported, but who, after further misadventures, is reunited with his family, and achieves prosperity. "Christmas Day in the Bush," Sidney's contribution to the 1850 Christmas number of *Household Words*, tells of two bachelor bushmen facing an austere Christmas by themselves, who make their way to a neighbour's station instead, where they enjoy festive tradition, seasonal plenty, and the consoling company of young women _ of which there is not enough, it is again hinted (*HW* 2: 309_10).

Such papers can be called propaganda, but to suppose them shaped by an overriding imperialist agenda is to underestimate the genuine curiosity and intelligence they manifest. They are simply the sort of texts a lively, campaigning editor publishes in response to what

he detects in the *Zeitgeist*. Any notion of a master discourse is dispelled by the brief duration of the campaign. It scarcely outlasted 1850. Caroline Chisholm published nothing more in *Household Words*. Sidney's contributions after 1850 are more measured. Campaigning journalism gradually gave way before an appetite for information and understanding.

Sidney's paper, "Three Colonial Epochs," for instance, published in January 1852, is optimistic about Australian prospects, but scarcely follows an official line (*HW* 4: 433_38). During the earliest phase of colonisation, it declares, Australia was simply "a great jail," where "unquestioned cruelties and tortures were practised." The governor was too powerful. No effort was made to reform convicts. Maladministration was rife. The second epoch came with the realisation that cattle and sheep could be raised in Australia. Colonel Macquarie succeeded by treating the colony as "a place of punishment for idle, and as place of reward for industrious felons." But Macquarie made the mistake of discouraging voluntary immigration. Mistakes did not end with his retirement in 1821, but the influx of voluntary immigrants, the discovery of gold, and infrastructure development launched a new era. Sidney ends his paper with a plea for immigrants of "a superior class." He was painting no antipodean paradise. He was striving to conceal nothing. He was simply making the kind of judgments about important issues that journalists are called upon to make.

Sidney, in fact, demonstrably moved away from committed advocacy towards more dispassionate journalism. "Lost and Found in the Gold Fields" appeared in March 1853 (*HW* 7: 84_88). It discloses details of Australian life in a cunningly oblique way. Success and failure, probity and dishonesty, what people did, what people were interested in, are all revealed by transcriptions of advertisements in Australian newspapers: missing persons, situations vacant, lost and found, stolen and lost livestock, public entertainments, public meetings, auctions, and so forth.

It was during 1853 that Horne supplied his chief contributions on Australia. Between January and September he contributed "A Digger's Diary," in four parts (*HW* 6: 457_62, 6: 545_51, 7: 125_29, 8: 6_11). It is a piece of writing of a kind the age, the medium, and Dickens's own instincts all favoured. It occupies the borderline between reportage and fiction. An unnamed first-person narrator _ not to be identified with the actual writer _ tells a tale of personal experience, offered as representative and typical. The narrator is persuaded to leave London for the Australian gold fields. He is anxious about pitfalls enumerated in "What to Take to Australia," a paper by Sidney, published the previous year, (*HW* 5: 364_66). Sidney had given advice, not only about clothes, kit, provisions, and comforts for the voyage, but also about arranging a passage and ensuring that commitments were met. Horne's digger finds all his misgivings borne out. The ship is dilapidated and filthy. The provisions are bad. Avoidable accidents happen. In Australia, he and his companions are cheated. Things are improving, the digger cautiously concludes, but slowly, because of unchecked immigration. The series in fact demonstrates how discussion of emigration in *Household Words* gradually became more considered and nuanced. No one could call "A Digger's Diary" unqualified advocacy for emigration.

"Canvass Town," also by Horne, and published in June 1853, is plainly nothing of the kind (*HW* 7: 361_67). It tells of an emigrant who gives up a good position in England for adventure in the gold fields, but who eventually finds himself, a university graduate, working as a labourer on road construction.

Some articles by Horne dwell upon colourful Australian characters, not always enticingly

for would-be migrants. "A Digger's Wedding" is a study in low life (*HW* 7: 511_12). In it, a freed convict strikes rich, and decides to marry a lady, whose charms and virtue are equally dubious. To celebrate the wedding, bride, groom, and all the groom's reprobate friends get drunk and stay drunk, until all the money has gone. The groom then abandons his bride and returns to the diggings. The story, readers are warned, is a common one.

This interest in colourful characters would be perpetuated in *All the Year Round*. "On the Wallaby," published in February 1867, gives an account of the peripatetic workers of Australia (*AYR* 17: 157_59). There are English peers following this lifestyle, readers are told, as well as vagrants naturally inclined to it, plus all kinds and qualities of men between. Some prosper thanks to it, save, and buy land of their own. Others are ruined by it. "A Sight in the Bush," of November 1869, also dwells upon peripatetic bushmen, but features one pathetic example _ mad, ragged, dirty, speechless, and always carrying lumps of uncooked animal fat, picked up outside shepherds' huts. He is eventually found dead (*AYR* NS 2: 587_88).

Another contributor to *Household Words* was a writer identified in records only as "Mulock" (Lohrli 380_81). The name is an unusual one. It may be a pseudonym indicating how the writer thought about himself. "Mullock" was a term for rubbish not unknown in British English, but it was adapted in Australia specifically to mean rock not containing gold, or spoil left after gold has been extracted. It was also used, by analogy, to mean a worthless person.⁵ The spelling with one *l* is a puzzle, but the name may well signify identification with Australia, and a mischievously modest understanding of the role of the journalist _ a creature of low standing who deals in the detritus greater talents discard.

Mulock, however, was a good journalist, perhaps because of modest objectives rather than despite them. He seems to have had some association with Geelong, and his writing is characterised by close examination of newsworthy fact. His first contribution, published in August 1851, is a piece of straightforward, vigorous, informative writing. "A Bush Fire in Australia" tells of a fire near Geelong, that resulted in several fatalities and much destruction of property (*HW* 3: 523_24). "The Harvest of Gold" was published in May 1852 (*HW* 5: 213_18). It is by Mulock, Henry Morley (Lohrli 370_80) and someone calling himself Ossian Macpherson (Lohrli 352). It is a first-rate piece of in-depth journalism. It describes the gold rush just getting under way: the discovery of gold, the gold diggings, the lives led by miners, the large fortunes made by some, and the disappointment that was the lot of many. Its horizons are broad, too. It shows how the Australian gold rush was depressing the world value of gold.

"We, and Our Man Tom," published in July 1852, was by Mulock unaided (*HW* 5: 396_98). It is about problems faced and solutions found by an emigrant farmer. There are enticing descriptions of the house he builds, the garden he lays out, the water hole he digs, the diet he enjoys, and the scenery he contemplates. But Mulock also emphasises the difficulty of finding suitable land, suitably watered, the abundance of noisome insects, and the dispiriting lack of anything old for emigrants to venerate.

The launching of *All the Year Round* in 1859 seems to have coincided with a revival of uncritical enthusiasm for emigration in Dickens. Perhaps his own thoughts of emigration had affected him. Thinking ahead towards *Great Expectations*, perhaps, which he would begin writing in the autumn of 1860, he was again allowing himself to be impressed by the capacity of Australia to transform. Whatever it was that inspired him, early issues of *All the Year Round* once again contain articles promoting emigration in a barely disguised fashion.

"A Piece of Blood Money," for instance, published in August 1859, tells of a forger transported to Botany Bay, of the fair treatment he receives, of the prosperity he achieves, of the pardon granted him, and of his death among his loved ones, back home in England (AYR 1: 394_96). If even transported criminals can achieve that, readers were being invited to reflect, what might not free emigrants achieve?

But this is not typical of *All the Year Round*. While editing it, Dickens seems to have developed a taste for atmospheric pieces with little didactic content. "Footprints Here and There," for instance, published in September 1861, rambles genially between an account of difficulties experienced by new immigrants, descriptions of Aborigines and typically colourful characters, and praise for the beauty of the Australian landscape (AYR 6: 13_17). "A Gold Digger's Notes," of April 1864, records a reverie on a river bank on a fine summer's day (AYR 11: 181_86). The narrator lets his mind wander between the flora and fauna of the bush, hunting, digger recreations, drunkenness and, finally, the melancholy fact that his gold has been stolen from him.

There are also plenty of straightforward, informative pieces about Australia in the journal. A couple of articles, for instance, published in 1859 and 1862, describe the system of conveyancing developed in Australia, avoiding costly legal fees (AYR 2: 132_35, 7: 38_39). "Some Snake Experiences," published in July 1861, gives information and advice about Australian snakes, and criticises the standard immigrant guides for remaining silent about them (AYR 5: 379_80). "Life Sown Broadcast," which appeared in April 1866, might have been designed to enrage twenty-first-century ecologists. It describes, with approval, the campaign to introduce European flora and fauna into Australia (AYR 15: 355_56).

And there are some impressive in-depth studies. "On Spec," of March 1861, is about speculation in Australian shares, and warns of the ease with which investments may be lost (AYR 4: 491_92). "Leading and Driving," of May 1869, is a detailed description of a deep underground mine (AYR NS 1: 608_10). "A Two-Year Old Colony," published in June 1861, gives a very full account of Queensland, its discovery, size, location, and resources (AYR 5: 294_97). It tells how penal settlement gave way to free immigration. It describes Brisbane and other population centres. Enthusiasm, at all points, is substantiated by exact information.

Standing back, we can detect a perceptible change in what *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* encouraged readers to think and feel about Australia, during the twenty years that Dickens edited them. Broadly speaking, the movement is from optimism somewhat loosely based on evidence, towards detailed factual appraisal giving rise to qualified optimism.

On some topics, we can see evidence of a distinct change of mind. An issue of *Household Words* published in April 1858 features an article by Morley and Frank Vincent (Lohrli 451_52), called "John Chinaman in Australia" (HW 17: 416_20). It is no exercise in multiculturalism. Morley and Vincent shared popular and official misgivings about the mass migration of Chinese to Australia, which began in the second half of the 1850s. They accuse the Chinese of lying, of stealing, of counterfeiting, and of sexual transgressions. Only grudgingly do they commend Chinese industry and frugality. Only grudgingly do they reveal an interest in Chinese customs.

"New China," published in *All the Year Round* in December 1865, is a kind of expiation (AYR 14: 471_74). Perhaps inevitably, an assumption of cultural superiority persists, but the paper offers a detailed and largely admiring account of the Chinese in Australia. It describes

Chinese dress and grooming, the Chinese quarters of towns and cities, Chinese shops, Chinese ceremonies and customs, Chinese music and opera. There is an account of Chinese mining techniques, and warm praise for Chinese market gardens. Readers are urged to recognise differences of class among the Chinese, and to understand that, as in all communities, both the good and the bad are to be found.

There is a comparable shift, over the years, in the attitude towards transportation. Early in his career, Dickens had not opposed it as a punishment. In 1840, he had toyed with the idea of producing a pamphlet, to deter those tempted to risk it (*Letters* 7: 817_18). Perhaps this needs to be contextualised. It is too easy to forget that, however deplorable it was in practice, there was a humane justification for transportation. It had originated as an alternative to execution. The heyday of transportation, it is worth remembering, coincided with the publication of works such as Bentham's *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), and with enlightened government measures such as Peel's axing of the death penalty in 1823, for no fewer than 100 offences.

Transportation, moreover, plainly appealed to Dickens the artist. It was a gift to the writer of fiction, and of other kinds of personal history. It offered a new kind of ordeal to describe. It offered a way of making characters disappear for extended periods. It offered a punishment to inflict upon fictional characters such as the Artful Dodger, for whom death would be inappropriate.

What he chose to publish in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* shows Dickens moving on from this kind of response to transportation. The oversimplified vision of Hughes and Said is detectable in neither journal, but we do see a shift away from an apprehension of transportation as something to sensationalise, towards an apprehension of it as something to denounce.

In 1852, Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) was still a penal colony, the Norfolk Island settlement had yet to be closed, and prison hulks were still moored in the Thames estuary. During July and August that year, a two-part article called "Transported for Life" appeared in *Household Words* (*HW* 5: 455_64, 5: 482_89). The writer was probably William Moy Thomas, a young journalist on the staff of the *Daily News* which Dickens, remember, had helped to found (Lohrli 445_47). But the story was dictated by the transportee himself, we are told _ unnamed, but now known to have been William Henry Barber, convicted of complicity in a case of fraud and forgery, transported in 1844, and unconditionally pardoned in 1848 (Lohrli 445_46). It is a gripping story, for today's readers no less than for readers in the 1850s. It describes the humiliation of the narrator's conviction, the privations of the voyage out, the penal colony of Norfolk Island, and its cruelly corrupt regime. Readers are told of depravity and humanity among both prisoners and officers, of an escape attempt, of a bloody revolt among the convicts, and of the decision to decommission a penal settlement too notorious to endure. The piece concludes with an account of the narrator's slow progress back to Europe and to rehabilitation.

It is an exposé, but one in which suffering is foregrounded, the call for remedy barely more than implied. Passages such as this sound the keynote: "What a catalogue of ills I had suffered in those twelve months! The wreck of all that I possessed in the world; the estrangement of friends, the severance from those I dearly loved, imprisonment in three different dungeons, branded with all but a capital crime, transported for life to the worst of all penal settlements."

The rawness of the account evidently inspired Dickens. We can detect the influence of

"Transported for Life" in *Great Expectations*. It seems to have provided some hints for the relationship between Magwitch and Compeyson. His co-defendant, at their trial, is guilty of the crime of which the narrator is guiltless. But the co-defendant insists upon his own innocence, and remains silent about the narrator's. The repugnance this arouses in the narrator is manifested when he is awakened from sleep during the voyage to Norfolk Island:

It was the man whom I loathed as the author of all my misfortunes, and with whom I had been supposed to have been associated in guilt. I had not known that it was his turn to watch that night, for I had studiously avoided all intercourse with from the day of my sentence. It was the duty of the watchman to awaken me to relieve him, and thus, by a strange fatality, it fell to him to arouse me from the only dream of happiness vouchsafed me during the voyage.

More hints of Compeyson are to be found in the picture painted of an accomplice of Westwood, leader of the convicts' revolt. The trial of the rebels is described: "One addressed the Court at considerable length, after having cleverly examined the witnesses, speaking fluently and well, enumerating all the weak points in the evidence against him, and noting every discrepancy in the facts. This man was more deeply implicated than any, except Westwood." Compeyson is able to make a similar impression upon the court at his and Magwitch's trial. Magwitch tells Pip:

. . . when it come to character, warn't it Compeyson as had been to school, and warn't it his schoolfellows as was in this position and in that, and warn't it him as had been know'd by witnesses in such clubs and societies, and nowt to his disadvantage? And warn't it me as had been tried afore, and as had been know'd up hill and down dale in Bridewells and Lock-Ups? And when it come to speech-making, warn't it Compeyson as could speak to 'em wi' his face dropping every now and then into his white pocket-handkercher _ ah! and wi' verses in his speech, too _ and warn't it me as could only say, "Gentlemen, this man at my side is a most precious rascal"? (*Great Expectations* 311_12)

Learn though he did from "Transported for Life," by 1862 Dickens was able to commission a more considered perspective upon transportation. He had concluded *Great Expectations* the previous summer. Van Diemen's Land was no longer a penal colony, the Norfolk Island settlement had been closed down, there were no longer prison hulks in the Thames _ only Western Australia was still accepting transportees.

In October 1862, an article on transportation appeared in *All the Year Round*, eschewing the sensationalism of "Transported for Life" (AYR 8: 111-15). It is one of a series of papers entitled "Small-Beer Chronicles," and was probably written by Henry Morley (Oppenlander 283). A polymath, who had practised as a doctor but would eventually become a professor of English, Morley was on the staff of both *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* (Lohrli 370_80). In 1852, he had co-authored a *Household Words* article on Norfolk Island, describing the Westwood revolt (HW 5: 73_77). This is alluded to in "Transported for Life." Now Dickens was using Morley to help form the climate of opinion which brought transportation to an end.

The method of the 1862 article is irony. It calls transportation "a very old and respectable

institution," and laments its decline. It had replaced a simpler method of dealing with criminals, readers are told: "We used to kill them." But this was painful to contemplate: "it seemed an intolerable blot on our civilisation, and wholly inconsistent with humanity. It would not do. It was intolerable to think, as you got up any fine Monday morning to attend to your business or to enjoy yourself, that your fellow-men and women were being hanged up by the neck before a brutal rabble, for robbing a hen-roost, or stealing a sheep. So gradually, and little by little, the gallows got to be out of fashion, and first one crime and then another was struck off the black list of capital offences." This left a problem, however. It was "thought necessary to *get rid* of the criminal. So he and she were just despatched beyond seas to the other end of the world, and there kept according to the nature of their misdeeds, for seven years, for fourteen years, for a lifetime." They "were sent to a place where none of us ever saw them, and where they could be forgotten. Reports in connexion with them would come out from time to time, but there is a great difference between reading about a convict, or any other terrible being, and coming face to face with the monster."

This sounds familiar. It foreshadows what Hughes says, what Said says, what countless other postcolonialists say. But what they say is devoid of irony. They substitute sanctimony for irony, and ignore the variety and complexity of Victorian thought. Look carefully at *Household Words*, look carefully at *All the Year Round*, and you will find the insight postcolonialists assume the Victorians to have lacked, conveyed with a subtlety postcolonialists have yet to match.

Dickens was a great and perceptive artist but, like all such, an imperfect human being. The shameful treatment of Aborigines in the pages of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* confirms this, and does suggest the influence of a dominant discourse which the hard, sad experiences of the twentieth century have compelled us to unlearn. But the treatment of other Australian topics suggests no such influence. There is no master narrative. We can spot vested interests being expressed, certainly. We can find things with which to disagree, things to repudiate, things which in all conscience must be repudiated, but we can also find an appetite for information, a willingness to test preconception against experience, and a readiness to rethink. Far from voicing imperialist precepts, on most Australian topics Dickens and his contributors were conducting a dialogue – the dialogue out of which understanding and judgment perpetually evolve.

The theoretical apparatus in which postcolonialists invest in fact impedes their reading of Victorian texts. It makes them see things that are not there, and miss things that are. It tangles them in conspiracy theory. Postcolonialist are proud of this theoretical apparatus. They should not be.

Notes

- 1 For a more systematic rebuttal of Foucault's epistemological premisses, see Jackson 117_21.
- 2 Evidence is currently emerging of an association between Dickens and Sir William. Dickens's friendship with his widow, Lady Andalusia Molesworth, has long been known. See *Letters*, especially 10: 85, 169, 194, 205, 328 and 407; 11: 42, 147, and 432_33; 12: 106, 354_55 and 703_04.
- 3 One such was the author of *The Memoirs of James Hardy Vaux, Written by Himself* (1819). He was transported three times.
- 4 See *Letters* 8: 459 and 11: 115_16.
- 5 See both *The Oxford English Dictionary* and Partridge.

Works Cited

- Borges, Jorge Luis. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." *Labyrinths*. Ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. New York: New Directions, 1964. 3_18.
- Clark, Manning. *A Short History of Australia*. 4th ed. Camberwell, Victoria: Penguin, 1995.
- Dickens, Charles, ed. *All the Year Round [AYR]*. 20 vols. London, 1859_68. New Series [NS]. 43 vols. London, 1868_88. After Dickens's death, the journal was edited by Charles Dickens Jr.
- . *David Copperfield*. Ed. Malcolm Andrews. London: Everyman Paperback, 1993.
- . *Great Expectations*. Ed. Robin Gilmour. London: Everyman Paperback, 1994.
- , ed. *Household Words [HW]*. 19 vols. London, 1850_59.
- . *The Letters of Charles Dickens*. Ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, et al. The Pilgrim/British Academy Edition. 12 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1965_2002.
- . *The Pickwick Papers*. Ed. Malcolm Andrews. London: Everyman Paperback, 1998.
- . *Sketches by Boz*. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1957.
- Forster, John. *The Life of Charles Dickens*. Ed. J. W. T. Ley. London: Palmer, 1928.

- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Gordon et al. Harlow, Essex: Harvester, 1980.
- Hughes, Robert. *The Fatal Shore*. London: Harvill, 1996.
- Jackson, Leonard. *The Poverty of Structuralism*. London: Longman, 1991.
- Lohrli, Anne. *Household Words. A Weekly Journal, 1850-1859, Conducted by Charles Dickens. Table of Contents, List of Contributors and their Contributions*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1973.
- Oppenlander, Ella Ann. *Dickens' All the Year Round: Descriptive Index and Contributor List*. Troy, NY: Whitston, 1984.
- The Oxford English Dictionary*. 1971.
- Partridge, Eric. *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. Ed. Paul Beale. 8th ed. London: Routledge, 1984.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto, 1993.
- . *Orientalism*. London, Routledge, 1978.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Wade Baskin. London: Owen, 1974.
- Schlicke, Paul, ed. *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Smiles, Samuel. *Self-Help*. London, 1859.
- Vaux, James Hardy. *Memoirs of James Hardy Vaux, Written by Himself*. 2 vols. London, 1819.
- Windschuttle, Keith. *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*. Paddington, N. S. W.: Macleay, 2002.