

Scottish Sounds in Colonial South Africa: Thomas Pringle, Dialect, and the Overhearing of Ballad

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OXNAM, Scotland is to this day a rural community of country roads and rolling farmland about fifty miles south of Edinburgh. From there, in 1818, the blacksmith Andrew Shiels emigrated to Nova Scotia, the “New Scotland,” settling eventually on a farm of his own just across the harbor from Halifax, in Dartmouth.¹ At a time when, according to the *Halifax Monthly Magazine*, “the poetical volumes of Nova-Scotia—as may be expected—would occupy but a narrow shelf in the library,” Shiels published an ambitious poetical work: *The Witch of the Westcot; A Tale of Nova-Scotia, in three cantos; and other Waste Leaves of Literature* (1831).² Shiels telegraphed his

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¹ Phyllis R. Blakeley, “Shiels, Andrew,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, University of Toronto; available online at <http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/shiels_andrew_10E.html>.

² [Anon.], rev. of *The Witch of the Westcot, and other Poems*, by Andrew Shiels, *Halifax Monthly Magazine*, 3 (June 1832), 1.

Scottish pride on the title page of his volume, quoting from Robert Burns's "Second Epistle to Davie" (1785):

Leeze me on rhyme; its aye a treasure,
 My chief—amaist my only pleasure,
 At home, a field, at wark or leisure;
 My muse, poor hizzie,
 Tho' rough an' raploch be her measure,
 She's seldom lazy.³

Like Scottish emigrants in British colonies the world over, Shiels found himself a Scotchman in the midst of a multifaceted emigrant community, "the inhabitants [of the Halifax region] being," as he writes in his preface, "a remnant of many nations." Given these demographics, Shiels opted to compose his poems in standard English, asking his reader "to exculpate at least a part of [his] rhyming delinquencies" because the "sudden change from the vernacular tongue of an outlandish borderer, to pure English, is (at least was to [Shiels]) rather an awkward transit."⁴ Shiels's turn from "the vernacular tongue" to standardized English reflects a broader process of linguistic adaptation among nineteenth-century Scottish emigrants. British colonialists throughout the century connected a more globalized and standardized English with both physical and social mobility, whereas dialect, as T. L. Burton and K. K. Ruthven have argued, evoked "second-rateness": "historically the English class-system has ensured that regional difference denotes social inferiority."⁵ The sounds of Scottish colonial culture therefore mirrored a complex matrix of nostalgia and social power.

Shiels's reluctance notwithstanding, dialect functioned throughout the nineteenth century as a generic marker of "Scotland," a form of "portable property" transportable from Scotland to anywhere on earth.⁶ Back home in Scotland, a debate

³ Robert Burns, quoted in Andrew Shiels, *The Witch of the Westcot; A Tale of Nova-Scotia, in Three Cantos; and Other Waste Leaves of Literature* (Halifax: Joseph Howe, 1831), title page.

⁴ Andrew Shiels, "Preface," in *The Witch of the Westcot*, [pp. v-vii].

⁵ T. L. Burton and K. K. Ruthven, "Dialect Poetry, William Barnes and the Literary Canon," *ELH*, 76 (2009), 314.

⁶ See John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008).

had emerged in the later eighteenth century about the value of the Scots “broad dialect”; poet and philosopher James Beattie for example wrote that he did not “think the Broad Scotch a language worth the cultivating, especially as it tends to corrupt a much nobler one, the English.”⁷ Beattie’s term “nobler” shows how the language of class inflected accounts of Scottish dialect. Burns, in contrast, saw dialect serving as a vehicle for “a distinctly Scottish idiom,” a vernacular connection to traditional Scottish culture having more to do with place than class.⁸ In his preface to *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), Burns writes of “our language” and “our nation,” distinguishing a specifically Scottish literary tradition tied to Scotland itself, as both a land and a nation.⁹ In the colonies, Scottish dialect sounded more often in this latter register, facilitating distinct nostalgic attachments to the homeland. Dialect may well have served a greater purpose in colonial spaces than it did in Scotland itself, fabricating for Scots abroad a homogenized and readily portable sense of “Scotland” and Scottish identity, even as standardized English remained the language of class mobility and intercultural exchange.¹⁰

There could be no better example of dialect’s complex position in British colonial spaces than the work of Scottish poet Thomas Pringle (1789–1834). I focus in this essay on a series of ballad-like poems that Pringle published both in Scotland and in South Africa, showing how the ballad form allowed him to navigate among varying ideas of Scotland and home. Pringle came from humble origins, raised on a farm near Kelso, about forty miles to the southeast of Edinburgh, not far from Shiels’s Oxnam.

⁷ James Beattie, 1768 letter to William Forbes, quoted in David E. Shuttleton, “‘Nae Hottentots’: Thomas Blacklock, Robert Burns, and the Scottish Vernacular Revival,” *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 37, no. 1 (2013), 40.

⁸ Robert Crawford, *The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009), p. 186.

⁹ Robert Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Kilmarnock: John Wilson, 1786), pp. iv-v.

¹⁰ A note on terminology: I follow J. K. Chambers and Peter Trudgill in not distinguishing between “dialect” and “accent.” As Chambers and Trudgill note, “we are used to talking of accents and dialects as if they were well-defined, separate entities: ‘a southern accent’, ‘the Somerset dialect’.” Usually, however, this is actually not the case. Dialects and accents frequently merge into one another without any discrete break” (J. K. Chambers and Peter Trudgill, *Dialectology, Second Edition* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998], p. 5).

Injured while still an infant, Pringle for his lifetime required crutches to walk, and was therefore unfit for agricultural work; he turned instead to literary studies, eventually earning the attention of James Hogg and Walter Scott.¹¹ Though he worked as an editor for a range of Scottish journals, including the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* (the precursor to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*), and though he managed to publish a volume of his own poetry, "*The Autumnal Excursion*" and *Other Poems* (1819), Pringle failed to achieve security in either his literary or financial circumstances. A crucial turning point was 1820, as the British government moved to fund an emigration scheme to South Africa, "a political manoeuvre by a Tory Government" that was "desperate" in the aftermath of the Peterloo Massacre "to demonstrate public concern for the unemployed in order to stave off pressures for more radical reform."¹² Pringle joined the effort, along with his wife and extended family, setting sail for the Cape colony on 15 February 1820.

Historians estimate that Scottish emigrants made up only about ten percent of the four thousand to five thousand original "1820 Settlers."¹³ Yet in Pringle's account in his *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (1834), the British settlers are firmly Scottish, and they are even pulled ashore on landfall by dutiful Highland soldiers who rush to ease their arrival. Pringle writes:

I spoke to [the Highland soldiers] in broad Scotch, and entreated them to be careful of their country folks, especially the women and children. It was delightful to witness the hearty outburst of nationality and kindly feeling among these poor fellows when I thus addressed them. "Scotch folk! are they?" said a weather-beaten stalwart corporal, with a strong northern brogue—"never fear, sir, but we sal be carefu' o' *them!*" and dashing through the water as he spoke, he and his comrades hauled the boats rapidly yet cautiously through the breakers; and then surrounding the

¹¹ David Finkelstein, "Pringle, Thomas (1789–1834)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004; web ed. 2009); available online at <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22807>>.

¹² J. B. Peires, "The British and the Cape, 1814–1834," in *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1840*, ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1989), p. 474.

¹³ See John M. MacKenzie with Nigel R. Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, Identity, Gender and Race, 1772–1914* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2007), p. 48.

party, and shaking them cordially by the hands, they carried them, old and young, ashore on their shoulders, without allowing one of them to wet the sole of his shoe in the spray. Being Highlanders, these men had no connection with our native districts; but the name of “Auld Scotland” was a sufficient pass-word to their national sympathies.¹⁴

In Pringle’s recounting of their landing, which itself appears in standardized English (Pringle does not transcribe his own use of dialect), the Broad Scotch dialect transforms the foreign South African beach into a scene of reunion, perhaps even of homecoming. The scene is notable in no small part because the Broad Scotch dialect was not one that normally would have been spoken by Pringle or by the Scots Borderers traveling with him, who would have spoken a version of Lowland Scots. The Highland soldiers themselves would likely have spoken Gaelic as their first language. Pringle settles on Broad Scotch, then, as a common ground for all those on the South African shore, a “national” language overriding local dialects. Pringle’s enthusiasm toward the Highland soldiers notably challenges the view of historian T. M. Devine, who argues that Highlanders and Lowlanders outside Scotland would not normally have sympathized much with one another: “there was precious little sign of ethnic solidarity” between “Catholic Highlanders, who mainly supported Toryism, [and] . . . Protestant Lowlanders, many of whom were committed to a more reforming agenda.”¹⁵

To the contrary, Pringle’s Broad Scotch “outburst of nationality and kindly feeling” captures precisely what Benedict Anderson has called “unisonality,” the phenomenon whereby the shared sounds of language and song instantiate “the echoed physical realization of the imagined community.”¹⁶ In this instance, the identification with Scotland—“Scotch folk! are they?”—unifies Pringle’s emigrants and the Highland soldiers,

¹⁴ Thomas Pringle, *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa. A New Edition* (London: Edward Moxon, 1835 [1834]), p. 11. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

¹⁵ T. M. Devine, *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland’s Global Diaspora, 1750–2010* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2011), p. 18.

¹⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), p. 145.

the sounds of dialect acting as affective glue to hold them together. We see in Pringle's account part of a larger phenomenon whereby markers of local or provincial identity come to stand in for a more generalized national identity once one moves outside the nation. "Scottish culture" becomes roughly homogenized abroad, allowing for a sense of collectivity among Scots emigrants who, back in Scotland, more likely would have understood themselves as belonging to distinct local and regional cultures. Robert Burns's own poetry exemplifies this shift from the local to the broadly national. Burns's original publications show the poet "positioning himself as bard of his locality" (Crawford, *The Bard*, p. 191). However, the places specific to Burns's birthplace, Ayrshire, immortalized in poems such as "Tam O'Shanter" (1790)—"Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses / For honest men and bonnie lasses"¹⁷—ultimately come for Burns's global readers to stand as universal signs of Scottish identity and culture. Through Burns's poetry, especially as it circulates among nineteenth-century Scots abroad, local places such as Ayr's Brig o' Doon (the bridge over the River Doon) signal a universalized "Scotland," even for those born far afield from Ayrshire.

Pringle was in many ways primed to think in terms of a broad Scottish fraternity. He came of age in an era of ballad collecting and ballad-like metrical romances that contributed to what Ian Duncan calls Scotland's "new nationalist ideal of a mystic secular totality": a post-Enlightenment "epoch" epitomized by Scott's novels and the essays John Gibson Lockhart and John Wilson published in *Blackwood's*.¹⁸ Pringle's first significant publication included a ballad in Alexander Campbell's 1816 *Albyn's Anthology; or, A Select Collection of the Melodies and Vocal Poetry Peculiar to Scotland and the Isles*. As Matthew Gelbart has shown, Campbell's volume focuses on "the similarities rather than the differences between the traditional Highland and Lowland music, collecting

¹⁷ Robert Burns, "Tam o' Shanter," in *The Poetical Works of Robert Burns*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1904, 1950), p. 1, ll. 15–16.

¹⁸ Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007), p. 48. On the uses of ballad poetry to instantiate a sense of national belonging, see Meredith Martin, "'Imperfectly Civilized': Ballads, Nations, and Histories of Form," *ELH*, 82 (2015), 350.

them together in a single work and asserting that both owed a greater debt to other Celtic music than to any English influence.”¹⁹ Campbell makes explicit in his introduction this argument about Scottish homogeneity:

the melodies of the Scoto-Gael, and those of the Scoto-Saxons. . . . do not essentially differ; and their shades of difference are really so imperceptible, as frequently to elude discrimination. The truth is, that the present Editor made repeated trials of this fact during his late journey to the Highlands and Western Isles, by singing to the natives several of the Lowland melodies, and some of the Border airs; when these tunes were immediately recognised as old Hebridean and Highland melodies.²⁰

Strikingly, Campbell finds similarities not just within music from around Scotland, but between Scottish and Chinese music, too (*Albyn's Anthology*, p. ii), fully supporting Maureen McLane's claim that “Scottish song distresses any stable concept of cultural or national authenticity and distresses as well the category of literature itself.”²¹ If Highland and Chinese music resonate with one another, to what degree could either be considered “national” in origin? Campbell's introductory essay seemingly deconstructs his volume's commitment to the “poetry peculiar to Scotland and the Isles” of his title, finding instead broad universalities both throughout Scotland and between Scotland and the outside world. Pringle's understanding of Scottish fraternity works in a similarly universalizing register, allowing him to identify warmly with the Highland soldiers in South Africa. The soldiers' “outburst of nationality and kindly feeling” thus reflects a principle of shared Scottish nationalism that had become foundational to the Scotland that Pringle left behind.

Enthusiastic as his Highland greeting appears, we find very little dialect in Pringle's published poetry. “The Banks of Cayle;

¹⁹ Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music”: Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, rpt ed. 2011), p. 132.

²⁰ Alexander Campbell, “Preface,” in *Albyn's Anthology; or, A Select Collection of the Melodies and Vocal Poetry Peculiar to Scotland and the Isles: hitherto unpublished*, ed. Alexander Campbell (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1816), p. ii.

²¹ Maureen N. McLane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), p. 108.

or, *The Maid of Lerdan's Lament*," one of the poems in the 1816 *Albyn's Anthology*, offers a rare and important exception:

In Warwick halls while minstrels gay
 Delight the festive band,
 Awake, my lute, the melting lay
 Of Teviot's lovely land!
 *O, bonny grows the broom on Blaikla knowes,
 And the birk in Lerdan vale;
 And green are the hills o' the milk-white ewes
 By the briery banks o' Cayle.*
 (*Albyn's Anthology*, p. 37; emphasis in original)

As a dialect poem, "The Banks of Cayle" takes a distinctly oral form. *Albyn's Anthology* includes music, "A Border Melody" (see Figure 1), to accompany the "little ballad," making explicit its nature as song; a later reprinting of the poem in *The Autumnal Excursion* indicates simply that the air "The Demon Lover" might serve as a model for the poem's song.²² Music here encourages what Yopie Prins calls "generic recognition," signaling to readers the oral, sung origins of the ballad form. The dialect itself appears in the form of a "melting lay."²³ The poem's narrative tells the story of an "orphan heiress" who was, in Pringle's own words, "compelled by King Edward the First, in one of his desolating incursions [into Scotland], to give her hand to an English Knight of his retinue" (note, in *Ephemerides*, p. 162). The unfortunate Scottish heiress is brought unwillingly to England's Warwick Castle, where she pines nostalgically for her native Teviotdale: "*O bonny grows the broom on Blaikla knowes*" is her repeated lament in "The Banks of Cayle" (*Albyn's Anthology*, p. 37). That Pringle was himself born on Blaiklaw Farm must be significant to the

²² See Thomas Pringle, *The Autumnal Excursion, or, Sketches in Teviotdale; with Other Poems* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1819), p. 86. Pringle reprinted "The Banks of the Cayle" in *Ephemerides; or, Occasional Poems Written in Scotland and South Africa* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1828), pp. 59–62, but he retitled it "Lament of the Captive Lady," making the connection to "The Scottish Exile's Song" less explicit. Pringle's term "little ballad" comes from a note in *Ephemerides* (p. 162). Further references are to this edition of *Ephemerides* and appear in the text.

²³ Yopie Prins, "'Break, Break, Break' into Song," in *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Jason David Hall (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2011), p. 132.

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The Bank o' Cayle?

Moderately
Slow and
Expressive.

In Warwick halls, while minstrels gay de-light the fes-tive band, a-
wake, my lute, the melt-ing lay of Te-viot's love-ly land! O bon-ny grows
the broom on Blaikla-knowes, and the birk in Ler-dan vale; and green are the
hills o' the milk-white ewes, by the briery banks o' Cayle.

FIGURE 1. "The Bank o' Cayle," in *Albyn's Anthology; or, a Select Collection of the Melodies and Vocal Poetry Peculiar to Scotland & the Isles* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1816), p. 36.

poem's sense of place; the dialect song specifically laments the heiress' distance from what would be (centuries after the present time of the poem's story) the site of Pringle's own birth. Pringle's

most significant turn to dialect thus corresponds with an account of the particular local landscape of the poet's own childhood.

We will return eventually to "The Banks of Cayle," but for now let me note that nearly all the remaining poems published before Pringle's emigration avoided any dialect whatsoever. As Matthew Shum has shown, the poems of *The Autumnal Excursion* were written almost exclusively "in a mannered, often cramped, and always decorous neo-Augustan register," suggesting the poet's self-consciousness "of the necessity to write within linguistic norms and stylistic conventions" and thereby "distance himself from a Scottish regionalism."²⁴ Though Pringle locates his poems in the Border region of his birth, Teviotdale, his style privileges standardized English as the best instrument for communicating via the printed page. Pringle points out in a note that Teviotdale, located on the southeastern border between Scotland and England, has "had the rare good fortune to have given birth to . . . a greater number of distinguished poets than probably any other district of the British empire" (*The Autumnal Excursion*, p. 115). Nonetheless, Shum notes, for all the poet's pride in his home county, Pringle's poetic models would have been not Burns or James Hogg, the "avowedly vernacular poets" of southern Scotland, but instead Thomas Campbell and James Thomson, poets "whose work successfully entered the English mainstream and gave little indication of its Scottish provenance" ("Improvisations of Empire," p. 23). Pringle thereby participates in the larger project of universalizing English that Aamir Mufti has addressed as "fraught" with "scenarios of linguistic and literary acquisition, assimilation, and dissemination."²⁵

The sounds of Scottish dialect figure importantly in Pringle's *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*, but rarely in the written text itself. After their adventurous Highland welcome to Algoa Bay, Pringle and his compatriots encounter a "Scotch gentleman," Mr. Hart, who had been living in the South African colony for two decades. Pringle describes Hart, long removed

²⁴ Matthew Shum, "Improvisations of Empire: Thomas Pringle in Scotland, the Cape Colony and London, 1789–1834" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 2008), pp. 22–23.

²⁵ Aamir R. Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2016), p. 12.

from the sounds of his home soil, as intensely moved by the speech of his compatriots. He writes:

The Scottish accent, seldom entirely lost even by the most polished of the middle ranks of our countrymen, was heard from every tongue; and the broad “Doric dialect” prevailed, spoken by female voices, fresh and unsophisticated from the banks of the Teviot and the Fields Lothian. Hart, a man of iron look and rigid nerve, was taken by surprise, and deeply affected. The accents of his native tongue, uttered by the kindly voice of woman, carried him back forty years at once and irresistibly . . . to the scenes of his mother’s fire-side. (*Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*, p. 28)

Following such enthusiasm for dialect, one might reasonably expect the “accents of his native tongue” to play a prominent role in the poetry Pringle composed while in South Africa, but this is not the case. John M. MacKenzie suggests that the absence of Scots dialect is perhaps due to Pringle’s desire for the widest possible readership.²⁶ But the issue may also have been one of genre. Both before and after his emigration to South Africa, Pringle associates Scots dialect primarily with song and spoken language rather than the more expository and “literary” poems such as “Afar in the Desert” (1824), his most anthologized work. The difference, that is, seems to be between notions of oral and printed culture, with Scots dialect in all its permutations siding firmly with the oral (this explains why the unfortunate maiden in *Albyn’s Anthology* sings her lament in dialect). Pringle’s vociferous welcome to the Highland soldiers at Algoa Bay, and his description of Mr. Hart’s pleasure, make sense within this framework of an oral, sounded culture. Pringle’s printed description of these scenes, however, takes the form of standardized English; he registers the effect of Scots dialect in his printed text, but rarely the dialect itself.²⁷

²⁶ See MacKenzie, *The Scots in South Africa*, p. 54.

²⁷ Katie Trumpener points to the distinctions between the written language and the culture in eighteenth-century Scotland: “Scotland’s long-standing linguistic complexity also made Scottish intellectuals particularly sensitive to the intricate relationship between oral and written literatures; effectively monolingual (standard English) in its intellectual and official writings, eighteenth-century Scotland remained bilingual in its speech (with large repertoires of poetry and song in Erse/Scots Gaelic and in Scots English) and trilingual (Erse, Scots, and standard English) in its literary life” (Katie



The story of “The Banks of Cayle” and its relation to dialect, place, and national identification does not end with Pringle’s emigration. One of Pringle’s first published poems in South Africa, “An Emigrant’s Song” (1824), calls to mind “The Banks of Cayle” both structurally and thematically, but with some important twists. Published in Cape Town’s *South African Journal*, which Pringle edited with his friend John Fairbairn, the poem features an English woman in South Africa lamenting her distance from the landscape of her birth:

By the lone Mancazana’s margin grey,
 A heart-sick Maiden sung,—
 And mournfully poured her melting lay,
 In England’s gentle tongue:—

O! lovely spreads th’ Acacia grove,
 In Amakosa’s glen;
 But fairer far the home I love,
 And ne’er must see again!²⁸

Like “The Banks of Cayle,” “An Emigrant’s Song” invokes the idea of song. Situated in a South African landscape, on the “margin” of the Mancazana river, the nostalgic maiden sings of her homeland much as in “The Banks of Cayle” the Scottish heiress sang of hers. A footnote to the poem informs readers that the poem had been “sent . . . by an esteemed Correspondent . . . from the English Settlements on the Eastern Frontier,” where emigrants from the 1820 settlements “suffered most severely” (“An Emigrant’s Song,” pp. 24–25n). Contrary to what the footnote suggests, Pringle himself authored the poem and no doubt intended its publication to help raise funds for those on the frontier (his volume *Some Account of the Present State of the English Settlers in Albany, South Africa* was also published in 1824; by the end of 1825 more than £10,000 had been raised to support

Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997], p. 73).

²⁸ [Thomas Pringle], “An Emigrant’s Song,” *South African Journal*, 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1824), 24.

the unfortunate emigrants, among whom were several of Pringle's own relatives).²⁹ Pringle's English maiden thus serves the explicit political purpose of raising sympathy and funds for long-suffering settlers, English and Scottish alike.

We know Pringle authored "An Emigrant's Song" because his later poetic volumes—*Ephemerides; or, Occasional Poems, Written in Scotland and South Africa* (1828) and *African Sketches* (1834)—include versions of that original 1824 poem. These later versions, titled respectively "The Scottish Exile's Song" and "The Exile's Lament," notably replace the original English maiden with a Scottish one:

By the lone Mancazana's margin grey
 A heart-sick maiden sung;
 And mournfully pour'd her melting lay
 In Scotland's Border tongue—
 ("The Scottish Exile's Song," in *Ephemerides*, p. 122)

"Scotland's Border tongue" here replaces "England's gentle tongue," but the differences between "An Emigrant's Song" and "The Scottish Exile's Song" have only just begun. In place of the 1824 song "O! lovely spreads the' Acacia grove," Pringle substitutes none other than the dialect song from his 1816 "Banks o' Cayle":

*O, bonny grows the broom on Blaikla knowes,
 And the birk in Lerdan vale;
 And green are the hills o' the milk-white ewes,
 By the briery banks o' Cayle.*

Pringle's Scottish maiden thereby pines nostalgically from South Africa for the specific place of Pringle's own birth. More than that, she pines in an explicitly musical register; Pringle indicates that the printed words on the page should be sung to the air "*The Banks o' Cayle*," the music printed originally in *Albyn's Anthology*. Through that ballad song, the poem oscillates between two riverbanks: Scotland's Cayle and South Africa's Mancazana. The poem also moves temporally between two specific moments:

²⁹ See Finkelstein, "Pringle, Thomas," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, para. 6.

the present of Pringle's South Africa and the past of fourteenth-century Scotland, where the original "Banks of Cayle" is set. The ballad links the Scottish emigrant in South Africa, singing in the poem's present moment, to a Scottish past she "mournfully" imagines: a Scottish past she ventriloquizes through "The Banks of Cayle."

The conceit of Pringle's 1816 "The Banks of Cayle" is that the poem printed on the page was overheard while someone sang it, and it was subsequently transcribed, committed to ink and paper; the conceit of the later South African poem is that the Scottish emigrant knows the same ballad from oral tradition—either that, or she learned it from Pringle's original volume. Assuming the former, more likely interpretation, Pringle's South African poem approaches ballad poetry as part of what Paula McDowell calls "a *living* oral practice" that is also mediated by print.³⁰ For Pringle, dialect signals that process of oral transmission through the medium of the printed page: "an encounter," as Meredith McGill writes in her contribution to this special issue, "between orality and literacy," which, argues McGill, is "the central drama of the ballad" as a genre.³¹

More broadly, the song echoed in "The Banks of Cayle" and "The Scottish Exile's Song" suggests that recollections of home—and cultural identifications with the place of one's birth—manifest most powerfully via this encounter between print and oral tradition. The poems that precede "The Scottish Exile's Song" in the *Ephemerides*, in particular "Evening Rambles," are marked instead by names of vegetation and animals particular to the South African landscape, all of which Pringle footnotes for the unacquainted British reader: "spekboom" and "erythrina" (local plant life), "reebok" and "duiker" (antelope

³⁰ Paula McDowell, "'The Art of Printing was Fatal': Print Commerce and the Idea of Oral Tradition in Long Eighteenth-Century Ballad Discourse," in *Ballads and Broad-sides in Britain, 1500–1800*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Press, 2010), p. 48.

³¹ Meredith L. McGill, "What Is a Ballad?: Reading for Genre, Format, and Medium," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 71 (2016), 161. See too Paula McDowell, who argues that "eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ballad critics, responding to the perceived dramatic spread of print in their own time, contributed significantly to the emergence of our modern secular concept of 'oral tradition'" ("The Art of Printing was Fatal," p. 39).

and gazelle) (*Ephemerides*, pp. 104–5). Pringle seems keen to distinguish the South African landscape and its inhabitants from the Scottish landscape of his youth, noting the differences between the “swart [Khoikhoi] Shepherd” of South Africa and “Fair Scotland’s jocund swains” (p. 108). In the absence of those jocund swains and the comforts of a familiar landscape, Pringle turns to the internalized song of his earlier poetry, the “portable property” that—memorized, internalized—offers comfort, perhaps, in the way his friend Hart was “deeply affected” by the sounds of “Teviot and the Fields Lothian,” carried back “at once and irresistibly . . . to the scenes of his mother’s fire-side.”

Insofar as songs and ballads at the turn of the nineteenth century were associated with national cultures *tout court*, poetry was an especially vital component of portable culture. James Mulholland notes that collective singing in the poems of the mid-eighteenth-century Scottish poet James Macpherson, for example, “is figured as an act of remembrance”; in works such as *Fingal* (1761), which Macpherson claimed to have translated from the Gaelic, “bardic voice functions as a custodian of traditions.”³² Such forms of oral tradition offer ways of thinking about culture and portability that resonate with Catherine Robson’s work on poetry and memorization. Robson herself understands poetic memorization and recitation, a compulsory part of grade school curricula throughout the nineteenth century, as mechanisms for establishing “collective identity.”³³ Nineteenth-century writing on ballads often presented British oral culture in similar terms, as “song which is peculiarly national,” as William Motherwell puts it in the introduction to *Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern* (1827), “that body of poetry which has inwoven itself with the feelings and passions of the people, and which shadows forth, as it were, an actual embodiment of their Universal mind.”³⁴ An important component of the shared culture that Scottish emigrants believed they carried to the colonies would

³² James Mulholland, *Sounding Imperial: Poetic Voice and the Politics of Empire, 1730–1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013), p. 98.

³³ See Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2012), p. 74.

³⁴ William Motherwell, *Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern, with an Historical Introduction and Notes*, 2 vols. (Boston: William D. Ticknor, 1846 [1827]), I, 6.

have been poetic in form and oral in nature, either literally or figuratively—that is, spoken, sung, or printed so as to invoke a speaker or singer. Whether these poems were recited by emigrants to themselves or to others, whether they were published and circulated in book form or scrolled by hand in journals or commonplace books, whether they were copied down dutifully or rewritten in critical or parodic registers, the memorized poem and its oral performances served emigrants as a powerful tool for maintaining and adapting Scottish culture abroad. Poetry, as Michael Cohen argues, is “a mode of socialization,” and it was all the more so in nineteenth-century colonial spaces, where the work of cultural identification was under especial strain.³⁵

Back home in Scotland, much of what emigrants abroad found unifying might have been disparaged as “*inauthentic*,” “defined by a mystified—purely ideological—commitment to history and folklore,” as the editors of *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* put it: “a series of kitsch, fake, more or less reactionary ‘inventions of tradition,’ from Ossian and Scott to Fiona MacLeod and *Brigadoon*.”³⁶ Once outside Scotland, emigrants were more likely to indulge in a bit of romance, valuing kitsch alongside dialect as vehicles for transforming foreign spaces into home, and simultaneously for understanding fundamental ties among Scots settlers. In Svetlana Boym’s terms, kitsch “domesticates every possible alienation,” satisfying the needs of homesick exiles the world over.³⁷ Pringle no sooner steps ashore at Algoa Bay than he begins imagining the South African landscape as a scene of especial welcome to the Scottish immigrants: “the grandeur and the grace” of the mountainous coastline, “majestic and untamed,” inspires in Pringle and his compatriots “stirring recollections of their native land” (*Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*, pp. 6, 7). The sincerity of Pringle’s connections here matters more than reality. Even more powerful than those visual connections are the *sounds* of Scotland’s past: the dialect and

³⁵ See Michael C. Cohen, *The Social Lives of Poems in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. 29.

³⁶ Ian Duncan, Leith Davis, and Janet Sorensen, “Introduction,” in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Duncan, Davis, and Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), pp. 1–2.

³⁷ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 279.

ballad song that, through scenes of nostalgic recognition (invented though that recognition may be), bring together Highland soldiers and Borderer emigrants. No surprise, then, that the Scottish exile of Pringle's later poem overhears a ballad in dialect as she wanders mournfully along the South African river. The overheard ballad, as Pringle orchestrates the scene, is part of the exile's internalized soundscape of home. That her home is specifically the place of Pringle's own birth, Blaiklaw Farm, highlights the work of the ballad in "domesticat[ing]" the emigrant's "alienation."

Nearly a decade after Pringle's juxtaposing of Scottish and South African ballad song, John Stuart Mill would argue that "poetry is *overheard*": "All poetry is of the nature of soliloquy."³⁸ The songs of both the Scottish heiress and the South African emigrant might well be characterized as overheard; readers likely imagine these isolated women singing to themselves. But their songs arrive for our eyes and ears through complex processes of textual and oral mediation, the work of transmission that, as scholars of the ballad have long shown, was under scrutiny at the turn of the nineteenth century.³⁹ The nature of poetry is for Mill, as it was for William Wordsworth, an individual pouring his or her feelings out onto a page: the attention rests with the act of production. Ballad poetry instead turns our attention to modes of circulation—the mediation of print and oral cultures—and to the invocation of community foundational to the genre. Through the ballad genre, the local particulars of Pringle's Teviotdale transform into broad markers of Scottish nationality, just as in Campbell's *Albyn's Anthology* the specific sounds of Scottish music elide into a mostly unified totality.⁴⁰ Like the earlier identification between Pringle's emigrants and the Highland soldiers, whose sense of identity within

³⁸ [John Stuart Mill], "What is Poetry?" *Monthly Repository*, n.s. 7 (1833), 64, 65.

³⁹ See especially Susan Stewart, "Scandals of the Ballad," in her *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 102–31.

⁴⁰ Similarly, the local particulars of the South African landscape transform, as J. M. Coetzee suggests, into "a generalized landscape of the Romantic sublime dotted with the more celebrated African mammalian fauna" (J. M. Coetzee, "The Poems of Thomas Pringle" [1990], in his *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays, 1986–1999* [New York: Viking, 2001], p. 206).

Scotland would have been distinct (antagonistic, even), “Teviotdale” and the Borderland song of “The Scottish Exile’s Lament” point to a shared Scottish sensibility made possible through an idea of oral culture. Though the overheard dialect and the particulars of the landscape in Pringle’s poem signal a specific Scottish region, the exile’s song ultimately functions at the level of genre. That is, at the point of remove from Scotland, the specificity and regionalism of dialect evaporate and the sounds of Scotland become *generic*—and, as a result, shared and portable.

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ABSTRACT

Jason R. Rudy, “Scottish Sounds in Colonial South Africa: Thomas Pringle, Dialect, and the Overhearing of Ballad” (pp. 197–214)

This essay uses Scottish ballads to think through the ways poems circulated in nineteenth-century emigrant communities. Dialect was a significant feature of colonial poetry, capturing the particular sounds of localities: the borderlands of Scotland, for example. Given the long association between dialect and oral culture, dialect in the context of ballad poetry signaled an especially communal form of identification. Scottish dialect poems in emigrant communities had an especial power to invoke a communal consciousness, a sense of being together that arose from having come from the same place. I take the Scottish poet Thomas Pringle as an example of a larger phenomenon, tracing the revisions he made to ballad poems as he moved from Edinburgh to South Africa and then London.

Keywords: Thomas Pringle; ballad; dialect; Scotland; South Africa