

Improvisations of Empire: Thomas Pringle in Scotland,
the Cape Colony and London, 1789-1834.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all acknowledgements have been properly made. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. It has not been previously submitted for any other degree or examination in any other university.



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ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers an extended examination of the writing of the 1820 Scottish settler Thomas Pringle. Though the primary focus of analysis is Pringle's poetry, the dissertation also engages extensively with Pringle's prose writing, particularly the *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (1834), as well as the archival records of his personal and official correspondence.

As the title suggests, the dissertation works through three distinct periods of Pringle's life, in each of which it locates different but related colonial postures or dispositions. In this schema, Pringle's Scottish writing is understood as obeisant to British cultural and linguistic norms, which it reproduces in a fashion that may be considered colonial in its deference to metropolitan standards. The Scottish context also provides Pringle with examples of people considered marginal to the developing modernity of the Scottish state (such as gypsies), who provide, I argue, baseline models for how Pringle will come to represent colonised indigenous peoples. In addition, the general principles of Scottish Enlightenment thought, in particular the four stages theory of historical development, supplied Pringle with a model within which to conceptualise the colonial state and its future evolution.

Chapters two and three focus on Pringle's colonial career in the Cape Colony. Here I argue that Pringle's poetry of this period provides evidence of two distinct phases. In the first and most difficult period of settlement Pringle wrote poetry of troubled lyric interiority which reflected an incommensurable gap between colonial experience and the expressive expectations and conventions which he brought to it. Following his fallout with Governor Somerset and a *de facto* alliance with the mission humanitarians, Pringle's poetry moves away from a Romantic preoccupation with the self and begins to engage larger public issues, such as the treatment of indigenous people. In this mode, Pringle very often assumes an indigenous persona and I examine the extent to which such a gesture might be considered both appropriative and incipiently transcultural. As indicated earlier, I also examine the generic and representational models which might have informed Pringle's treatment of this subject. The chapters also consider Pringle's colonial politics, and emphasise that his reputation as a 'radical' is a misleading one; there are, furthermore, no easy conjunctures to be established between Pringle's allegedly radical politics and a radicalism of representation in his poetry (a commonplace critical assumption).

In the final chapter I examine the complexities of Pringle's London years, which require that we bring into focus both his Scottish and his South African experience and their mediation by this new context. Here the broad focus of my argument is that we must take account not

only of Pringle's standing as an abolitionist-humanitarian and Secretary to the high profile Anti-Slavery Society, but also his position as a respectable man of letters, particularly his role as editor of the influential but genteel 'annual', *Friendship's Offering*, from 1829-1835. These dual public roles reciprocated one another, I argue, in that Pringle's reputation as a poet of 'elegance' and 'taste' also lent credence to his reputation as an ethically exemplary humanitarian. This reciprocation of roles is strongly evident in Pringle's best known poems of this period, "The Bechuana Boy" and "The Emigrant's Cabin", which rewrite colonial experience in a way that conforms to the expectations of his metropolitan readers. During his residence in London, Pringle also produced a number of poems in the subgenre of what could be described as evangelical redemptionism. These hortatory and proselytising pieces were mainly published in missionary magazines, and though South African in subject matter they could equally be set in any area of empire where mission work was being done. This subgenre I analyse as an offshoot of the extreme evangelical and abolitionist enthusiasms of the 1830s, with their belief in their divinely mandated mission to fully Christianise the British empire and emancipate all its subjects.

In conclusion, this study argues for an understanding of Pringle's work as being intersected by differences in imperial location and status, as well as by a significant degree of instability and contradiction in its representation of the colonial project. Far from being cohered around a teleological liberal vision of an emancipated future, Pringle's work, both prose and poetry, repeatedly reveals a contradiction and contrariety that suggests fundamental irresolution rather than firm conviction.

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INTRODUCTION

Thomas Pringle has always occupied a privileged place in the cultural imaginary of English-speaking South Africans, both as the producer of the first substantial body of literary work about this country, and as an exemplary figure for the liberal values of press freedom and racial tolerance. In this combination of the ethical and the aesthetic, Pringle is commonly considered a crucial, if not *the* crucial, agent in the events around which “the core foundational myths of South African liberalism have been constructed” (Dubow 2006: 27). And yet – as one strand of my argument runs – scant attention has been given to the diffractions of circumstance which attended the production of Pringle’s work as well as the motivations for his public actions. Pringle’s life and writings, particularly his poetry, are the product of a complex conjoining of different contexts. As the title of this study indicates, Pringle must be located within, and amongst, three national or geographical spaces, all of which exerted an intermingled influence on him.

As I shall argue, there are cogent reasons to understand Pringle as being formed by a transnational set of influences, and only in a curtailed sense as the product of a specifically South African experience. In suggesting this I do not claim that Pringle should not be regarded as ‘indigenous’ to the forms of white South African experience. I would rather argue that, even in a larger context, questions of identity should not be addressed under the sign of a national singularity. Instead, it should be acknowledged that for colonised and coloniser alike the formation of identity is determined by a multiplicity of factors. Insofar as Pringle’s role in the “core foundational myths” of South African liberalism is concerned, one must emphasise that “myths”, as Dubow calls them, are just that: retrospective constructions which seek to read the past in tendentious ways. In the case of Pringle, I shall argue, the myth-making process has been unusually unrestrained, particularly in regard to his allegedly ‘radical’ politics. In seeking to correct these and other views, my aim is not to debunk or to discredit Pringle, but to restore to

him the full measure of his complexity and contradiction - where, to my mind, he becomes a much more interesting figure.

Despite Pringle's status there presently exists only a single monograph devoted to the most significant and durable aspect of his literary production: the poetry. However, John Robert Doyle's *Thomas Pringle*, published in 1972, is disappointing. Described by the Scottish critic Angus Calder as "not very penetrating in literary or biographical judgement" (1982:11), Doyle's book is dutiful and scholarly in its exposition, but limited by a formalism which fails to engage the often charged, and always changing, contexts out of which Pringle wrote. More recent full length studies are the unpublished doctoral dissertations of Patricia Morris (1982) and Damian Shaw (1996). Morris's dissertation, "A Documentary Account of the Life of Thomas Pringle, 1789-1834", I have found very useful indeed. It offers by far the most comprehensive biographical profile of Pringle currently available, and is a considerably more consequential study than Jane Meiring's biography *Thomas Pringle: His Life and Times* (1968) which is flawed not only by unsubstantiated speculation, but by a failure to provide verifiable documentation of her sources. Damian Shaw's thesis "The Writings of Thomas Pringle", offers an engaging and useful approach to its subject, yet it seems to me somewhat uneasily divided in its focus: Shaw's account of Pringle's poetry is weighed down by historical and biographical detail, and it is too often citational rather than analytic. Needless to say, this dissertation has benefited from this existing research, as well as from the scores of critical articles published on Pringle's work.

A central methodological approach of this study is to track the writings of Pringle through his varied imperial affiliations or emplacements. My argument here is that Pringle occupied different colonial locations, in both a geographical and an experiential sense, and that these varied positions register in his writing in distinct ways. Though this study unfolds along a chronological axis, and follows Pringle's writing through the three distinct 'phases' of Scotland,

the Cape Colony and London, it does not construct a line of successive development but rather considers these emplacements as intertwined and recursive. Within this larger approach, my analysis relies on an extended interlocution with the writings of Pringle, particularly the poetry, in which I attempt to allow this writing to speak to the contemporary reader in the full range of its often challenging perplexity. In adopting this approach, known in more familiar terms as close reading, I have deliberately sought to avoid the conceptual vocabulary of the 'postcolonial', which invariably subordinates the intricacies of the colonial text to the mandates of the theoretical. This is not to say that theoretical discourse stands dismissed, but that its use is conditioned by its ability to elucidate the texts under consideration rather than reduce them to a subset of another discourse altogether.

The first chapter considers Pringle's Scottish writing and the influences which informed it. As a university-educated Lowland Scot with aspirations to gentility, Pringle was notably deferential towards English linguistic and cultural practices; in this obeisance there existed a distinctly colonial element. An examination of these early Scottish texts is particularly productive for an understanding of his later work, since this writing is already involved in the working through of problematics that are by no means unrelated to those which Pringle encountered in the Cape Colony. Two key areas of Pringle's engagement are with gypsies and with landscape. In the case of the former, the gypsies might be regarded as a proto-colonial people in that they refuse social and cultural interpellation into the regimes of modernity, and in attempting to understand gypsy archaism and gypsy intractability, Pringle resorts to a figural solution: the gypsies become a resource for 'picturesque' representation. I shall argue that the 'wild' picturesque of the gypsy character forms one of the baselines for Pringle's representations of South African indigenes. Insofar as landscape is concerned, my argument is that in Pringle's writing about the Scottish landscape – and this is particularly evident in the poetry – we already discern a disjuncture between actual place and the conventions for locodescriptive poetry which derive from English landscape models. While this disproportion between the formal and the

topographical becomes very much more pronounced in the South African writing, the fact that Pringle has already encountered a version of it in his Scottish writings has significant implications for our understanding of him as 'colonial' or derivative writer. These and other concerns – such as the conceptual paradigm of four stages theory, which clearly influenced Pringle's understanding of the evolution of a colonial society – form the basis for my opening chapter, whose general argument, necessarily anticipatory, is that these Scottish writings act as an indispensable template for understanding the South African writing which is to come.

The second chapter covers the difficult, initial phase of Pringle's 'residence' in South Africa: the two-year period he spent in a remote area of the Eastern Frontier of the Cape Colony as head of a party of Scottish agriculturalists. During this period Pringle's experience of colonialism was fraught with difficulty and insecurity, and the poetry and other writing he produced on the frontier is very often characterised by marked generic and perceptual dissonance. Two of the best known poems, "Afar in the Desert" and "Evening Rambles", explore a troubled lyric interiority in which a notable feature is an estrangement between consciousness and its surrounds, to a degree far more extreme than anything we encounter in the Scottish poetry. My argument is that poems like these still speak to us, with a startling immediacy, of the shocks and abrasions which attended the early colonial experience. To illustrate my contention, in conjunction with an analysis of the poetry I examine several extended descriptions of landscape from Pringle's *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (1834), focussing on the intersection of landscape with historical event, in the light of ideas of the sublime and the picturesque. These ideas, considered as ordering conceptions which give shape to phenomenal experience, undergo significant reshaping and even reversals under the impact of colonial conditions. This chapter also raises the question of Pringle's colonial politics (often understood to be impeccably liberal, if not libertarian). I analyse key passages from the *Narrative* and consider in addition a pamphlet published in 1824, *Some Account of the Present State of the English Settlers in Albany, South Africa*. In this publication, Pringle protests against the treatment of the educated class of settler

by the colonial government and here my explication traces the uneasy intersections of race and class, in which an odd conjuncture between class rigidity and an at least nominal racial egalitarianism is revealed. Though Pringle sets out a social hierarchy whose top tiers are occupied by educated British Protestants (“able in affairs, in books well read” as he put it in a later poem), he allows that the intermediate ranks are more open to occupation by the converted, ‘civilised’ indigene than they are by the more reprobate and undeserving of the British lower orders (for whom Pringle displays a marked intolerance). The point of my argument in this section — which also examines how the lower-class settlers understood their own situation — is that to conceptualise Pringle’s colonial politics as motivated by an irreproachable conviction is an idealism which permits little understanding of the compromised contingencies of colonial life.

The third chapter has two areas of focus: in the first I examine Pringle’s South African journalism, as it appeared in the *South African Journal* and the *South African Commercial Advertiser* (Pringle was joint-editor, with his Scottish associate John Fairbairn, of both publications). As is well known, both the *Journal* and the *Advertiser* were shut down by Governor Somerset for their alleged subversion of the colonial state. I discuss this journalism, which has hitherto received very little scholarly attention, both with regard to Pringle’s Scottish inheritance and to how this inheritance translated into colonial registers, particularly insofar as a nascent ‘civil society’ was conceived. Among other things, this journalism sheds light on Pringle’s understanding of the social function of literature, and on his early attitudes towards indigenous people, and in these he was entirely conventional. The chapter then charts the disruption of Pringle’s immediate colonial career precipitated by the fallout with Somerset. For approximately two years he drifted around the frontier districts of the colony, briefly settling back again with the Scottish party, before sailing back not to Scotland, but to London. During this unsettled interlude, Pringle began to write the type of poetry with which his name is often reflexively associated — i.e. a poetry which, through the persona of an indigenous person,

protests against colonial rule — and to produce a polemical journalism attacking colonial governance in the Cape Colony.

That section of this chapter which examines Pringle's use of an indigenous persona or voice begins by tracking precedents for this move within his writing, and examining the assumptions implicit in what would seem to be an entirely unwarranted claim to the experience of the others. My position – developed through close readings of passages from the *Narrative* and other sources – is that Pringle's representations of indigenous people are, for a start, very uneven. His first endeavours to render vernacular voices are nothing less than a comic diversion, before modulating into more serious attempts to enter the tenor of local African speech. Pringle's single extended effort to describe indigenous people from an exterior position (a racially varied group of inmates in a rural jail) is notable for the imperial assessment of his gaze, in which African bodies are aesthetically arrayed within recognisably European hierarchical and evaluative registers. The chapter ends with an extensive analysis of Pringle's two best-known poems of this period, "The Song of the Wild Bushman" and "Makanna's Gathering". Both poems make use of indigenous personae and both of them articulate, in different ways, an opposition to colonial rule. In the case of "The Song of the Wild Bushman" I point to the extraordinary collocation of circumstances surrounding its composition (Pringle was at the time engaged in requesting colonial militia to hunt down a party of Bushmen that were raiding the livestock of the Scottish settlers). This incident, I propose, is an example of the distance separating Pringle's poetic, figural Bushman and his abject historical counterpart. I attempt to account for the acuteness of this contradiction by suggesting, among other things, that a disjuncture between figurative elaboration and social fact was not unknown to the poetry of the Romantic period, and that, further to this, Pringle was already familiar with the dissociation between the aesthetic and the factual which attended the representation of the gypsies. A similar situation obtains in "Makanna's Gathering". On the face of it a poem which advocates Xhosa retaliation against the injustices of British colonial incursion, it might also be understood as a generic

variant of the picturesque in which a 'wild' African figure is depicted in a context of dramatic incident. In suggesting that both poems might be understood as variations on familiar generic templates, however, I am not arguing that such affinities exhaust the meaning of the poems, which continue to resonate suggestively beyond their formal stylistic enclosure. The chapter ends with an assessment of Pringle criticism, both in the nineteenth century and the present. I am interested here in the fact that contemporary critics tend to read poems such as "Makanna's Gathering" in a quite literal way, as though Pringle were unproblematically an advocate of violent insurrection against colonial rule. Often this assumption is based, I believe, on the belief that Pringle's coevals read him in this manner. Yet the archival evidence overwhelmingly suggests that this was not the case, and that the poems were read primarily as poeticised or ornamental constructions of settler experience.

During his period of residence in London, Pringle's relation to his colonial experience obviously underwent significant changes, not least because he succeeded in refashioning himself both as a minor 'man of letters' on the London literary scene, and as an abolitionist-humanitarian closely connected to the most prominent members of a reform group through his position as secretary to the Anti-Slavery Society. While Pringle's abolitionist activities are well known to critics, and serve to reinforce an understanding of his poetry as 'politically' motivated, little attention has been paid to Pringle's role in the London literary marketplace, particularly his role as editor of the annual, *Friendship's Offering*, from 1829 to 1834. These popular annuals, aimed at the genteel, female reader, were influential markers of polite taste and literary and artistic decorum. When we consider that in his day Pringle's public reputation rested just as much on this editorial profile as it did on his South African writing and his abolitionist-humanitarian activities, we begin to apprehend the triangulated structure of location, influence and affinity which informed the writing of this period. In broad terms, I suggest that while Pringle was conscious that the 'African' quality of his poetry guaranteed him a certain market niche, he was also aware of the need to reshape his colonial experience into forms that were accessible to his

metropolitan audience. In pursuing this argument, I focus in particular on two poems, “The Bechuana Boy” and “The Emigrant’s Cabin”, which I take as typifying the revisionist turn in Pringle’s poetry. In analysing these poems I am conscious, among other things, of their appeal to categories of aesthetic affectivity such as sympathy, and of their being dependent on notions of colonial life which are congruent with the expectations of the polite middle class reader.

Alongside this dominant strain in Pringle’s later work is another one, which constitutes something of a subgenre within his poetry, and which has gone completely unnoticed. I refer here to what one might call the poetry of evangelical redemptivism, a proselytising genre whose chief intention is to exhort the indigenous unbelievers to a recognition of the darkness in which they dwell or to celebrate, in terms that often invoke the miraculous, the conversion of the African subject. These poems are extraordinary either in their exaggerated wishfulness, or in the sheer anxiety of their imploration, and they sit anomalously in the context of Pringle’s work as a whole. Most of the poems were first published in missionary magazines directed at a large transnational audience, and though South African in subject matter they are so generalised and stereotypical in religious posture as to apply to any area of empire in which evangelical missionising was prominent. I examine the significance of these poems within the context of the evangelical-abolitionist movement, which in the late 1820s and early 1830s believed itself to be an agent of world-historical change.

In closing this analysis of the final phase of Pringle’s poetry I also draw attention to something like a counter-strain of pessimism and blunt satire running through this work. Sometimes oblique or submerged, sometimes startlingly overt, this vein of Pringle’s poetry may be discerned in poems such as “The Honeybird and the Woodpecker” (ostensibly intended for juvenile readers), “The Caffer Commando” and “The Desolate Valley”. Poems such as these, I argue, work directly against the grain of Pringle’s later poetry which is often infused with a confident Christian imperialism. Throughout the course of this study I seek to demonstrate

how such a bifurcation or splitting runs through Pringle's writing more generally, both in the poetry and, to a less exclusively examined extent, the prose. This lends his work an inherent instability and a tendency toward repeated contrariety or contradiction which has not been given sustained credence in existing Pringle criticism. In restoring this dimension to Pringle's work, it is my hope that he emerges as a figure for the present, a time in which a constitutive uncertainty once again dominates the white South African imagination in an emerging African future. Such an emergence into the exigencies of the present will, I hope, facilitate an understanding of Pringle – and indeed of other settler or traveller writers of this period – as resources for the present rather than relics of the colonial past.

CHAPTER ONE

SCOTLAND: 1789-1820

In a 'postscript' to *Waverley* written in 1814, Walter Scott described contemporary Scotland as the product of a rapid, forced march to modernity. "There is no European nation", he wrote, "which, within the course of half a century, or in little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland". Scott's description of this transformation, although neutral in tone, makes it clear that for such change to be accomplished the "destruction" and "eradication" of an entire class of people was necessary:

The effects of the insurrection of 1745 – the destruction of the patriarchal power of the highlands chiefs – the abolition of the heritable power jurisdictions of the lowland nobility and barons – the total eradication of the Jacobite party, which, averse to intermingle with the English, or adopt their customs, long continued to pride themselves upon maintaining the ancient Scottish traditions and manners – commenced this innovation. The gradual influx of wealth, and extension of commerce, have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth's time ... [T]he change, though steadily and rapidly progressive, has, nevertheless, been gradual; and like those who drift down the stream of a deep and smooth river, we are not aware of the progress we have made, until we fix our eye on the now distant point from which we have been drifted. – Such of the present generation who can recollect the last twenty or twenty five years of the eighteenth century, will be fully sensible of the truth of this statement; especially if their acquaintance and connections lay among those, who, in my younger time, were facetiously called 'folks of the old leaven', who still cherished a lingering, though hopeless, attachment to the House of Stuart. This race has now almost entirely vanished from the land, and with it, doubtless, much absurd political prejudice – but also many living examples of singular and disinterested attachment to the principles of loyalty which they received from their fathers, and of old Scottish faith, hospitality, worth, and honour. (1985:492).

There is an evident tension in this often quoted passage between the desire to present historical change as a "gradual" evolutionary "drift" down the unperturbed surfaces of a "deep and smooth river", while at the same time asserting the "steadily and rapidly

progressive” nature of these changes. Similarly, there is an attempt to retrieve “old Scottish” values despite the fact that “ancient Scottish traditions” had to be “eradicated” to enable the “present people of Scotland” to achieve the “progress we have made”. Neither in this passage, nor anywhere else in the postscript, does Scott manage to extricate himself from these uncomfortable antitheses. This is especially ironic since Scott was so prodigiously active, and so conspicuously successful, in recreating the ethos of that “entirely vanished” Jacobite past and infusing it into the social imaginary of early nineteenth-century British society. For our purposes, however, the passage highlights a central tendency in those historical moments (especially colonial ones) when the modernisation process is accelerated by violent enforcement. Saree Makdisi argues that “the process of imperial modernisation [was] not only located outside of Britain, but inside it as well” and cites the “radically and violently redefined” Scottish Highlands as the most prominent example of this internal colonisation (1998:76).¹ The analogies between the Scottish context and the colonial process then unfolding in the distant Cape Colony are by no means exact; but there are, I would suggest, sufficient resemblances to offer us the outer limits of a framework for understanding what resources a minor Scottish poet, whose major claim to fame at that time was a ventriloquial reproduction of Scott’s verse, might bring to the representation of such a situation.

Thomas Pringle was born in 1789, to a family of tenant farmers. Of his ancestry he wrote that they had “for four generations at least ... belonged to the class of plain, respectable Scottish husbandmen, and their near connections were of the same class, or of a corresponding rank in society” (1966:xxii). In the “three-decker” social structure of the rural Scottish lowlands, Pringle’s family would have occupied the intermediate position: above them a “small proprietorial class” and below them “a low-status class of labourers” (Lenman 1984:114-15). But a “plain, respectable” Scottish tenant farmer was what Pringle could never be; an unfortunate displacement of his right hip in early infancy

obliged him to use crutches for the rest of his life. This disability meant that, unlike his siblings, he received a protracted formal education, first in a local grammar school (where Walter Scott had been a pupil), then at Edinburgh University with a primary emphasis on Latin and Greek. Pringle did not complete these studies and enter a profession, as his family must surely have wished; instead he developed an interest in literature. Josiah Conder, Pringle's first biographer, relates that:

He did not ... extend ... his classical knowledge. His readings ... consisted chiefly in the Belles-Lettres of his mother tongue. He was much more conversant with English poetry and criticism at the time, than students of his standing generally were; and he had not been many months in town (Edinburgh), before he assisted in organising a small weekly club, where his general attainments were available, either in himself producing, or in criticising, an essay in prose or verse, written by the members in turn. (in Pringle 1966:xxv)

Pringle would never earn a living through writing alone, and his “too great confidence in the profitableness of literary employment” (xxvi) and the “difficulty of fixing on any plan of life from his unprofessional *status*” (xxvii) led to “attacks of depression” in the years after he left university. Conder's italicised “*status*” tells us a great deal about the professional and social uncertainty Pringle faced as a young man, and, correspondingly, his anxiety to place himself – as a poet (Conder refers to his “correct taste”), as a person of sensibility and a “gentleman” (as he sometimes referred to himself). John Guillory has commented on the “immense social significance of polite letters as a transformative cultural force” at this time, and their function as an “arena ... of upward mobility and of the cultural unification of the ruling classes” (1993:118). Pringle's preoccupation with “belles lettres” and his desire to fashion a social identity synonymous with his literary endeavours was a risky undertaking for the son of a tenant farmer being squeezed into penury by the ‘improvement’ of Scottish agriculture. As it was, Pringle's modest degree of literary success would never be sufficient to earn him a living, and he was to remain on the precarious margins of the middle class until the end of his life. In a discussion of the social profile of Nonconformist missionaries to South Africa during this period, John

and Jean Comaroff note that they were the “bearers of anomalous, contradictory social positions: neither of the rich nor the poor, of the ruling nor the ruled” (1991:58).

Pringle’s insecure social positioning was of a similar order, and he differed from the missionaries only in his vocational ambitions; it is not at all surprising that, matters of conviction aside, Pringle would develop a very close association with this class cohort throughout his colonial career.

In approximately 1808 Pringle began formal employment for the first time at the General Register House, the “earliest purpose designed record repository in Britain” (Lenman, 1984:137) where he was responsible, among other things, for transcribing documents from Latin into English. This employment would sustain him, in the most meagre way, over the next twelve years. During this period Pringle established a modest literary reputation and participated in the Scottish antiquarian revival by recovering and recycling old Border ‘airs’, sometimes with the aid of his sister, Mary. In 1817 he began a brief and inglorious period of employment in periodical journalism when he and an associate edited the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* and *Constable’s Edinburgh Magazine* over the period 1817 to 1819. The original scheme for the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* had been jointly hatched by Pringle and James Hogg, whose acquaintance Pringle had made in 1816 when he published a poem in Hogg’s *Poetic Mirror*. They approached the Edinburgh publisher James Blackwood with their idea, but Hogg backed out of editing the magazine on the grounds that he did not, and would not, live in Edinburgh. Pringle then assumed co-editorship with James Cleghorn, an experienced journalist. The convolutions of Pringle’s involvement in this venture with Blackwood, and its notorious conclusion, will not be pursued here² What does need emphasis is the fact that Pringle’s editorial undertakings appear to have ruined his Scottish prospects for a literary career. For a start he fell out with Blackwood, a publisher of considerable influence, and was then subjected to scurrilous and rather cruel mockery in the infamous “Chaldee

Manuscript”, which was written by Hogg and the two editors who succeeded to the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* after the litigious departure of Pringle and Cleghorn. The “Chaldee Manuscript” parodied Pringle and Cleghorn in a fake biblical style drawn from the *Book of Revelation*. Though nobody was mentioned by name, the keys were fairly obvious. Pringle’s agnomen was “the lamb”, a play both on his allegedly mild-mannered nature, and “lamiter”, which in Scottish dialect means lame person (Morris 1982:100). Although the satire reads rather innocuously by today’s standards, it provoked considerable scandal at the time. As late as 1851 an observer of the Scottish literary scene would write that the “Chaldee Manuscript” “raised such a commotion at Edinburgh that nothing like it was on record in our literary annals” (Gillies, quoted in Morris 1982:105).

John Lockhart and John Wilson would go on to establish the renamed *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Review* as a leading British journal, and in retrospect the editorship of Pringle and Cleghorn has been regarded by historians of Scottish periodical literature as incompetent and uninspired. Patricia Morris (1982:118) cites four sources for this view. Although Morris herself argues, on the basis of circulation figures, that these “accusations of inadequacy are incorrect” (118), there can be little doubt that the fallout from the whole affair was damaging to Pringle. This initial misfortune was then compounded when, eighteen months after the “Chaldee” scandal, Pringle and Cleghorn again found themselves in litigious circumstances when their editorship of *Constable’s Edinburgh Magazine* was terminated after they failed to attract subscribers in sufficient number. This “undoubted failure” (122) must surely have comprehensively sunk Pringle’s chances of making a literary living, to say nothing of the damage inflicted on his self-esteem by the “malignant and unwarranted derision”, as he put it, that he endured at the hands of Hogg, Wilson and Lockhart and the “ruin of his circumstances” consequent on this.³ Pringle had also managed to alienate Blackwood and Constable,

Edinburgh's two most powerful publishers. He was never to have contact with either of them again.

It is significant that in 1826 Pringle, after suffering yet another professional failure in South Africa - albeit of a very different sort - chose to return to London and not Scotland, to "resurrect the self that had been done to death by slanderous tongues in Edinburgh" (Morris 1982:115). Save for a brief visit in 1830, Pringle would never again return to his native land, and even on that occasion public memory of the events of more than ten years earlier would continue to dog him.⁴ The severance from Scotland is all the more unusual in that Pringle's early Scottish verse and prose, as well as some of the later writings, indicate a deeply felt attachment to his homeland and his writings about South Africa are, as one might expect, pervaded by Scottish influences on a number of levels.

Pringle's writings before 1820 are not, in themselves, of particular interest. They are largely derivative and were he to be remembered by them alone, Pringle would long ago have faded into the briefest of historical footnotes. The writings include two books of verse, a small number of anthologised poems and ballads, and some scattered journalism. Little is known about the circumstances surrounding the publication of the first book *The Institute*⁵, but the second book, *The Autumnal Excursion* was privately printed, and though politely received, left Pringle in debt. However, these early Scottish writings offer substantial insights into the general frames of literary, cultural and historical reference which he brought to South Africa. These frames of reference might have undergone a certain refraction during Pringle's six year stay in South Africa, or have been added to in significant ways, but they nonetheless remain indispensable templates for understanding his responses to this country and the forms in which these responses were articulated.

To begin with the poetry. Pringle's early output can be divided into two broad, but not always distinct, categories: ballads and songs composed in the spirit of the Scottish antiquarian revival (in which Scott was the leading figure) and neo-Augustan verse, largely of a sentimentalising and moralising nature, intermixed with vaguely Wordsworthian conceptions of nature, childhood and memory. It is often assumed that Pringle's pre-South African poetry drew primarily on the resources of a generalized 'Romanticism', in which the influence of Wordsworth was paramount and that this influence extends, with the necessary modification, into his South African writing⁶. This assumption is misleading insofar as it ignores the extent, obvious in the case of Scott, of the Scottish influence; it also ignores the problematic relationship between English and Scottish Romanticisms, since until very recently the latter was widely considered to be

... an *inauthentic* Romanticism, defined by a mystified - purely ideological - commitment to history and folklore. Rather than being a site of Romantic production, Scotland's fate is to have become a Romantic object or commodity; glamorous scenery visited by the Wordsworths, Turner, Queen Victoria ... a series of kitsch, fake, more or less reactionary "inventions of tradition", from Ossian and Scott to Fiona MacLeod and *Brigadoon*. Nor is this simply an English story, since Scottish nationalist critics have devised a compelling variant, denouncing their modern tradition as inorganic, self-divided, alienated from its vital sources – the proof of that alienation ... being Scotland's lack of a genuine Romantic movement. (Davis et al, 2004:1-2)

The authors of this article (the editors of a collection which vigorously contests these views) begin by quoting Wordsworth's acerbic comments on Scottish literature in a letter to a friend written in 1815. "What a hobbling pace the Scottish Pegasus seems to have adopted in these days", he complains, and cites specifically the "insupportable slovenliness and neglect of syntax and grammar, by which James Hogg's writings are disfigured". If Hogg's lack of polish is at least excusable, "from his education", no such absolution extends to Scott who "ought ... to do better". "They neither of them" asserts Wordsworth, "writes a language which has any pretension to be called English" (2004: 1). The habit among English literati of denigrating all things Scottish was by no means a new development. Forty six years earlier, Samuel Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of*

Scotland (1775) infamously provoked nationalist ire among Scots with, as one Scottish commentator at the time put it, “its incurable impressions of a national prejudice, a religious prejudice, and a literary prejudice”(quoted in Trumpener 1997:68). The university-educated Pringle, with his immersion in “English poetry and criticism” must surely have been aware of this English animus towards Scottish writing and Scottish cultural resources. The question that needs to be asked is how Pringle’s Scottish writing reflected or responded to this marginalisation. We might begin by looking at Pringle’s very minor role in the Scottish antiquarian revival, a movement which ostensibly encouraged the revitalization of a national identity under threat from English cultural hegemony.

The Scottish antiquarian revival, like its counterparts in Wales, Ireland and England, looked back to the preindustrial past and the tradition of oral transmission at the very time when a nascent modernity, and a newly commercialised print literature, was rendering these forms of communal expression residual, if not entirely obsolete. Such revivals coincided with the political agenda of a renewed nationalism, and were immensely influential in shaping the poetics of Romanticism – consider, for example, the widely acknowledged influence of Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) on the first generation of Romantic writers, even though the authenticity of his material was vigorously contested by contemporaries like Joseph Ritson (cf Butler 1999: 331-333). But this return to an oral past was at every point mediated by the literate present and the literary production of this era is littered with fakes and ‘untutored’ geniuses from the lower orders whose allegedly spontaneous versifying was in fact the product of autodidactical reading. In Scotland, the problems of authenticity were notoriously aggravated by the publication from 1760 to 1763 of James Macpherson’s *Ossian* poems, purportedly “translations” of a third-century Gaelic bard. The fallout from this incident did much to damage the credibility and cultural status of the Scottish

retrieval of the past, reinforcing claims that a dissembling “vacuity”, as Johnson put it, lay at the bottom of these endeavours. More recent critics, however, have maintained that the Scottish antiquarian revival, like its Welsh and Irish counterparts, needs to be understood in substantially different terms. Katie Trumpener, for example, has influentially argued for the neglected significance of what she terms “bardic nationalism” in the cultural peripheries of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In Trumpener’s reading, these revivals of the resources of the cultural past took on a very different form in the cultural provinces which eschewed the English focus on a dissociated aesthetics and “cultural autonomy”(xv) for more specific and situated understandings in which the aesthetic was for the first time understood as “the expression of cultural situatedness ... in which literary form itself becomes legible as a particularly rich and significant kind of historical evidence”(xv). For Trumpener the literatures of these peripheries, far from being adjunct to the center-stage unfolding of canonical English Romanticism, were in fact at its centre: “The period’s major new genres ... its central models of historical scholarship and literary production ... have their origin in the cultural nationalism of the peripheries” (xi). Trumpener additionally contends that these literatures catalyzed the development of the “transcolonial consciousness and transperipheral circuits of influence to which empire gives rise”(xiii).⁷ If Trumpener’s reading of the Anglo-Scottish antiquarian revival is sensitive to its cultural innovation and its hitherto underestimated influences across national boundaries, like many other critics she concedes that the attempt by literate Scots to culturally credentialise themselves in the new Union by constructing a textually indigenous Scottishness was problematic since it rested on a discernible distance from the lived experience of those people, mainly Highlanders, in whom these indigenous qualities were supposedly embodied: “The new, middle-class cultural nationalism and antiquarianism ... are based ... on a new degree of imaginative sympathy and community with countrymen more directly oppressed and at the same time on a rhetorical

appropriation of their situation and customs as if they in fact they constituted a shared tradition”(32). Trumpener’s position on this is much more muted than that of other critics. Penny Fielding, for example, diagnoses a deliberate and tendentious fabrication of a national past appropriate to the national present:

Those Scots who sought to benefit from the opportunities of Hanoverian Britain were anxious to shake off the stigma of what was commonly seen as a pre-Union feudal past ... Scotland’s modern condition needed to be authenticated by its pre-modern past, yet it was this very past, devalued by unenlightened feudalism, which threatened Scotland’s modernity in British eyes. Rather than simply abandoning such a past, Scots ... mythologised it into a romance that could be a more appropriate precursor for British Scotland. (1996: 8)

It is worth noting, however, that the jury remains out on whether the antiquarian revival, and Scottish Romanticism in general, is centrally characterized by what Cairns Craig calls “Romanticism-as-evasion” (2004:23) in which Romanticism in Scotland is “disablingly retrospective in character” and forged as an “evasion of ... real history”(22). Craig argues that the unavoidable entailment of such readings is that the evasive Romanticisms of Scotland (and Ireland) are negatively counterposed to an authentic English Romanticism whose centrality to modern culture remains beyond dispute. I will not pursue here the argument Craig mounts for a contrary case, in which he maintains that Hume’s theory of association, rather than Kantian/Coleridgean notions of the transcendental imagination, underpins the aesthetics of Scottish Romanticism and that Humean associationism’s ambit of influence widens considerably during the nineteenth century. What needs to be taken into account is his contention that Scottish Romanticism had informing conventions of its own, which marked it off, and made it distinct from, an English Romanticism of which it was always seen as a failed subset. We need also to locate Pringle’s Scottish literary output, modest though it might have been, within this general context, and, later, to consider whether the poetry he subsequently

wrote while based in the Cape Colony and London can be understood as distinctively Scottish poetry, or whether it takes on the colouration of a more diverse set of influences.

Pringle's use of the ballad form, as well as his evocations of the Scottish past, were marked by an adherence to conventional practice that never wavered. His first known contribution to the ballad revival form was in 1816, when a song by Pringle, "The Banks of the Cayle", was published in *Albyn's Anthology*. The song was described by the editor as being based upon a "fine original air" discovered by Pringle's sister, Mary, and he included an example of the original stanzas with the comment that they were "a curious specimen of that quaint play on words, which was much in fashion during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" (quoted in Morris, 1982:57). "The Banks of Cayle" is sung/narrated by a female voice and tells the first-person story of a "Scottish maid" (circa 1745, and thus a probable reference to the hostilities which climaxed in Culloden in 1746) whose intended husband, "the gallant Lord of Yair" has been killed in battle by the British ("My true love for his country died/On Biggar's fatal field"). The narrator has been forced into marriage with the man who killed her intended husband, needlessly slaughtered her parents, and seized her father's lands:

And Edward, Scotland's deadly foe
Has pledged my captive hand
To him, who wrought my kindred's woe
And seized my father's land

While approximately half the poem focuses on "... the fiends of war and woe/Impatient to destroy", the remaining stanzas elegiacally celebrate the Scottish landscape, "youth's enchanted hour", and the ephemeral joys of "plighted vows". The refrain, ("O bonny grows the broom on Blaikla-Knowes,/And the birk in Lerden Vale" etc) anchors the poem in specifically localised settings, as though the geographic persistence of these

locations, or their actuality in the present tense, provide bona fides for the poem's sentiments. The concluding stanza is unapologetically defiant:

But though the treacherous tyrant's yoke
My country still must bear,
A Scottish maid his power shall mock
He cannot rule despair!

It is something of a critical commonplace that products of the Scottish antiquarian revival, like this poem, do not encourage a nationalist revival against the “treacherous” Hanoverian regime, despite the appearance of doing so. The historian Bruce Lenman remarks that by 1820 vernacular culture was “Tamed, provincialised and fading”, its primary purpose “to buttress the status quo”(1984:135). This ornamental or “depoliticised nationalism” (Womack,1989:147) might have invoked and celebrated a certain image of the Scottish past, but its occasional tones of strident protest, such as we see in “The Banks of the Cayle”, should be understood as a formulaic aesthetics rather than an outcry against the oppressor. It is of considerable interest that Pringle should first have been anthologised in a form which anxiously requires that a deliberately and violently destroyed pre-capitalist past be conjured into an aesthetics of ‘organic’ immediacy to underwrite the cultural legitimacy of the lettered classes – for such tactics are by no means absent from the South African poetry either. In the case of Scotland, such reworkings of the past were even more strongly putative than their English counterparts, insofar as the ‘pacification’ and ‘improvement’ of the Highlands was an ongoing project.⁸

Pringle's Scottish poetry was not exclusively occupied with the recasting of oral forms. But both as poet and archivist he was actively involved in the antiquarian revival, and evidence of the convergence of these activities may be found in the poem that followed “Banks of the Cayle” when it was reprinted in *The Autumnal Excursion*. “Lady Grizel's Lament” is a transcription of a ballad, with Pringle's additions, that he found among the

Mss. of Sir William Campbell of Marchmont House, who had requested Registry House to make an inventory of the historical material in his possession. Grizel Bailie (1665-1746) was the daughter of the Earl of Marchmont and “supposedly ... the first aristocratic writer of the seventeenth century to become interested in national songs” (Morris, 1982:59). The first eight lines of the “Lament”, allegedly written by Lady Grizel herself, eulogise a pastoral scene (“O the ewe-bughting’s bonny, baith e’ening and morn” etc) but hint at personal tragedy (“But alas, my Dear Heart, all my sighing’s for thee”). In the remaining twelve lines, Pringle expands the latter emphasis. The speaker laments the banishment of her shepherd swain (“Sandy”) and invokes destruction on those responsible for his banishment:

O wae to the traitors! an’ black be their fa’,
 Wha banish’d my kind-hearted shepherd awa!
 Wha banish’d my laddie ayont the wide sea
 That aye was so leal to his country and me.

The poem ends with a warning to the “cruel oppressors” that vengeance will be exacted: “Wi Freedom to Scotland, and Sandy to me”. Although the specific historical details here are not clear, Pringle again ventriloquizes the voice of the oppressed and invokes an archaic Scottish nationalism. Furthermore, this is one of the rare occasions when Pringle uses the dialect form. Despite his own rural, Border background, Pringle wrote almost all his poems of this period in a mannered, often cramped, and always decorous neo-Augustan register. This suggests that despite his avowed attachment to the Scottish landscape and local history, Pringle was very conscious of the necessity to write within linguistic norms and stylistic conventions derived from the English “Belles-Lettres” in which Conder reported him to be so engrossed. Robert Doyle observes of the poems collected in the *Autumnal Excursion* that “Almost everything collected in this volume suggests the author was conscious of the methods used to become accepted” (1972:83). This anxious conservatism also suggests that Pringle’s poetic commitment was not, in any

primary sense, configured around place and its scenic and linguistic localisations, so much as around the demonstration of a certain sensibility for which the local is not the substance but a pretext. This is not to claim that Pringle wished to purge himself of all things Scottish; but it does indicate that, like so many of his contemporaries, he sought to distance himself from a Scottish regionalism. In this respect, his models were poets like James Thompson and Thomas Campbell, whose work successfully entered the English mainstream and gave little indication of its Scottish provenance, rather than avowedly vernacular poets like Burns and Hogg.⁹

Pringle's most substantial poem of this period was *The Autumnal Excursion*, the very title of which unavoidably alludes to Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, published in 1814. The publishing history of Pringle's poem is of some interest insofar as its convolutions reveal the difficulties he had in establishing a distinctive voice. The first version of the poem was published in *The Poetic Mirror*, an anthology published by James Hogg in 1816. Hogg, with whom Pringle was acquainted, had originally intended to assemble an anthology containing poems by the leading poets of the day. When the poets concerned did not come forward, Hogg decided to write imitations of their poetry himself. Among these poems was one written by Pringle, entitled "Epistle to Mr. RS". Pringle had not intended this poem as an imitation at all, and the dedicatee was his friend Robert Storey. Reviewers of the anthology, however, aware of its imitative intents, classed the poem as an imitation in the manner of Scott, and assumed it was dedicated to Robert Southey, the poet laureate.¹⁰ This reception did not please Pringle, but the publication of the poem had one important consequence: it came to the attention of Walter Scott, who declared that "he wished the original notes had always been as fine as their echo" (quoted in Morris, 1982:55). Scott's recognition resulted in a distant and largely epistolary relationship between the two men, and Scott's patronage was to prove crucial to Pringle's South African venture in 1820.

The Autumnal Excursion, published in its full version in 1819 when Pringle was 30, announces two main intentions: to celebrate the locality of Pringle's birth and boyhood ("to hail/The scented heath, the sheafy vale,/The hills and streams of Teviotdale") and to evoke from this locality the still exemplary experiences of childhood and nature, ("Though hope's young dreams like shadows melt -/Yet nature still is lov'd and felt"). The redemptive power of nature, the persistence of the "sacred scenes of youthful loves" and their ability to replicate their 'aura' in adulthood, are obvious Wordsworthian themes. Aside from implicit allusion and apparent thematics, however, the poem owes little to Wordsworth. There is no exploration, for example, of the operation of memory, and the poem digresses frequently from its Wordsworthian *topoi* into Scottish history, local lore (thus following the example of Scott's narrative poetry), childhood memories of phenomena other than nature and religious sentiment - all of which are enveloped in an ethos of "feelings pure" and "thoughts sublime". *The Autumnal Excursion* is "heavily conventional in the late Augustan manner" (Clouts 1971: 17) and nowhere more so than in the rhyming couplets that duplicate themselves throughout its entire length. As with the brief selection of the earlier poems I looked at, my primary interest is not in the poem's formal structure and thematic focus. Rather, my intention is to extract from the poem, somewhat tendentiously, its use of certain conventions of representation and historical understanding which might enable a more informed reading of Pringle's South African poetry.

Pringle's renditions of landscape in *The Autumnal Excursion* obviously owe a debt to the protocols of locodescriptive or picturesque poetry: the desire to envisage, and to invent, landscapes with variety and differentiated aspects. I will not traverse the heavily mined critical terrain of the picturesque at this point, since those speculations are more relevant

to Pringle's most overtly picturesque production, the early South African poem "Evening Rambles". For the moment let us rest with a standard definition, in which the "distinctive characteristics" of the picturesque are "the idea of variety in landscape, revealed through an interest in irregularity, ruggedness, rusticity, intricacy, singularity and chiarascuro" (McCalman, ed. 1999:646). Despite its formulaic nature, the *Autumnal Excursion* is by no means entirely straightforward in its evocations of a picturesque landscape. On the contrary, Pringle quite explicitly locates a problem with the picturesque, or at least with a Scottish picturesque. Consider the following lines:

But yet my friend there is an hour
 (Oft has thy bosom owned its power)
 When the full heart, in pensive tone,
 Sighs for a scene more wild and lone.
 Oh, then, more sweet on Scotland's shore
 The beetling cliff, the breakers roar,
 Or moorland waste where all is still
 Save wheeling Plover's whistle shrill,
 More sweet the seat by ancient stone
 Or tree with lichens overgrown, -
 Than richest bower that Autumn yields
 'Midst merry England's cultured fields.

The "wild and lone" Scottish scene, bereft of diversity of detail, its paradigm the unadorned planes of a "moorland waste", is set in contrast to the "richest bower" and "cultured fields" of an England rich in natural life and human productivity. Pringle must have been aware that the Scottish Lowland landscape was considered by English literati to lack the visible signatures of the picturesque. The *locus classicus* of this view is to be found in Johnson's notorious derogations of Lowland scenery, especially his unending complaints of a landscape "naked of all vegetable decoration" (1984:45). The following passage is typical:

From the banks of the Tweed to St Andrews I had never seen a single tree, which I did not believe to have grown up far within the present century ... The variety of sun and

shade is here utterly unknown. There is no tree for either shelter or timber. The oak and the thorn is equally a stranger, and the whole country is extended in uniform nakedness". (39)

We might find suspect Johnson's confident reading of this landscape as one of depletion – a depletion which acts further to confirm his anti-Scottish prejudices – but there can be little doubt that Pringle must have written this poem with an awareness that the picturesque, which emphasized "variety", was not a category readily associated with the Lowland countryside in which he grew up. For Pringle, the Scottish landscape he describes in the excerpt above is "more sweet" because ancestral, but it is nonetheless marked by its difference – which Pringle fully acknowledges – from the normative "merry England". It is not a difference, however, which Pringle shows any inclination to explore. Immediately after this passage he invites his companion to "seek/Old Cheviot's pathless mossy peak", and from this elevation, itself significantly ancestral ("Where Cimbrian sages dwelt of yore"), a conventional picturesque unfolds:

-Fair sister streams, that wend afar
By bloomy bank or blighted scur
Now hidden by the clustering brake,
Now lost amid the mountain lake,
Now clasping, with protective sweep
Some mould'ring castle's moated steep

In contrast to the flat contours of the "moorland waste" and the visual stasis of "all is still", this scene is punctuated by rapid differentiation as the streams traverse a constantly changing landscape: "blighted" follows "bloomy" and the iterative "now" introduces sudden shifts in location. In addition, what Alan Liu calls the "metamorphic passions" (1989:92) typical of picturesque description are evident in the streams' "clasping" and "protective" closeness to the castle's "moated steep". The presence of this passage in immediate adjacency to the one previously quoted would seem, then, to suggest that the Scottish landscape can in fact be made to do the work of the picturesque, despite the

geological, botanical and agricultural deficiencies of its “wild and lone ... waste” when compared with England’s “cultured fields”.

Similar contradictions are apparent in other sections of the poem as well. In the following passage the poet again stands on elevated ground and records a variegated “prospect”:

-Oft from that height I lov'd to mark
 Soon as the morning rous'd the lark,
 And woodlands rais'd their raptured hymn,
 That land of glory spreading dim;
 While slowly up the awakening dale
 The mists withdrew their fleecy veil,
 And tower, and wood, and winding stream
 Were brightening in the golden beam.

This view from above, complete with its varied ensemble of tower, wood, streams, beams, birdsong, and patternings of light and shade, is immediately counterposed to another view, presumably from the same vantage, in which the conventional components of the picturesque are notably absent:

-Yet where the westward shadows fall
 My eye with fonder gaze would dwell,-
 Though wild the view, and brown and bare,
 Nor castled walls, nor hamlets fair,
 Nor range of sheltering woods, were there –
 Nor river's sweeping pride between,
 To give *expression* to the scene.

The italicised “*expression*” clearly identifies this “scene” as being resistant to the compositional requirements of the picturesque because, although appropriately “wild”, it lacks variation in colour (is uniformly “brown”) and differentiating detail (is “bare”). This resistance is further annotated through a series of negative phrases that detail the absent scenic elements. Readers of Pringle’s South African poetry will be aware that this

method of description through privation is often employed to describe the South African landscape. Much as he does in the South African poems, Pringle ducks the issue of an aesthetic more appropriate to the “wild” Scottish landscape. In this particular case the difficulty is averted rather disingenuously. What lies where the “westward shadows fall” is in fact his childhood home, the location of which Pringle proceeds to render in conventionally picturesque terms (even though this homely landscape lacks the grander articulations of “castled walls”, “hamlets fair”, broad “sweeping” rivers and so on):

There stood a simple home, - where swells
 The meadow sward to moory fells, -
 A rural dwelling, thatched and warm,
 Such as might suit the upland farm.
 A honeysuckle clasps the sash,
 Half-shaded by the giant ash...
 Below the silvery willows shook
 Their tresses o'er a rambling brook,
 That gamboll'd 'mong its banks of broom
 Till lost in Lerdan's haunted gloom.

Nothing “wild”, “brown” and “bare” about this! Pringle’s vacillation between landscapes explicitly marked as lacking the vital elements of the picturesque repertoire and landscapes, presumably in the same location, in which the conventional components of the picturesque are indeed present, suggest his disinclination to depart from acceptable poetic practice. This deliberate aestheticising of the Scottish landscape was not uncommon. “[B]y the third quarter of the eighteenth century”, writes Simon Schama, as the success of Union became ever more apparent “there began to be a market for more picturesque depictions of Highland scenery” (1996:467). These depictions were similarly reliant on artful alteration. Schama gives the example of Paul Sandby, a draughtsman, who was employed in a topographical survey of the Highlands in the 1740s. Three decades later he would “drastically” alter a pen drawing of a Highland landscape to satisfy the compositional requirements of the picturesque. The view which in 1747 had looked “innocuous” was made “more dramatic, with loftier peaks and crags” and “the upland

meadows replaced by the suggestion of gorse and heather” (467). From a South African point of view it is surely significant that the resistance of the local landscape to metropolitan paradigms of landscape description, so often registered in Pringle’s private listing of scenic absences, should not automatically be read as an index of a ‘colonial’ sensibility unable or unwilling to attune itself to local conditions. Even on the margins of the metropole the pressure to conform to generic norms when writing ‘polite’ verse was, as this example shows, acutely felt.

J.M. Coetzee describes the *Excursion* as “a poem that shows Pringle still closely wedded to eighteenth century models of landscape verse, and in particular to the conventions of the picturesque” (1988:45)¹¹ This compositional propriety is evident in other aspects of the poem as well, as indeed it will be evident in much of what Pringle is to write. It is worth reminding ourselves here that the picturesque, with its technical and aesthetic repertoire, was a particularly generative form in the production of a middle class ‘sensibility’ while at the same time it served to occlude the crude pragmatics of a socioeconomic order committed to the improvement and enclosure of the actual landscape. Consider, for example, that the Lowland countryside which Pringle celebrates was itself undergoing a massive depopulation, a fact that Pringle alludes to in his notes but which does not obtrude into the formulaic design of the poem. These lines occur after a passage celebrating the “heroic tale” of Border resistance to British militarism:

-Oh, ne’er shall he, whose ardent prime
Was fostered in the freeman’s clime,
Though doom’d to seek a distant strand,
Forget his glorious native land –
Forget – mid far Columbia’s groves
Those sacred scenes of youthful loves!

In the notes the present inhabitants of the “glorious native land” are not inhabiting a “freeman’s clime”:

Though doom’d to seek a foreign clime – P.13

Owing to the general and severe pressure of distress which succeeded the late war, combined perhaps with other unfortunate causes, the tide of emigration to America from the Border districts has recently increased to a deplorable extent. Last summer about fifty individuals emigrated from the small town of Jedburgh alone; and from its immediate vicinity not fewer than seventy families, of whom many had been reduced from competent and even affluent circumstances to this melancholy resort. (1819:128-9)

The “melancholy resort” of emigration, soon to be the fate of Pringle and his family, was primarily the result of ‘improvement’ in agricultural practices: “the desire to rationalise production in the name of commercial gain” (Dickson et al, 1980:147). The accomplishment of these ends was achieved by “enclosure and the consolidation of small tenancies into fewer and larger tenanted farms, making possible improved methods of cultivation and an increase in the total rental of the land” (1980:48). While Pringle is correct to observe that the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 resulted in peacetime depression, the “other unfortunate causes” to which he refers had much to do with the aggressive development of a nascent Scottish capitalism, something which he showed no sign of ever opposing. Furthermore, the same dynamics which were depopulating the Lowlands and depriving his family of their traditional occupation were closely linked to “Scotland’s sacrifice of political independence to the pursuit of economic gain” (1980:128). In short, Pringle’s picturesque is composed at a significant remove, political as well as topographical, from the society he actually inhabited.

A similar dissociation from actually existing circumstances occurs when Pringle digresses into Scottish history. References to the Scottish past are uniformly hostile to “the oppressor’s pride”, “the despot’s champion”, “Southron’s coward treachery”, and so forth.

It is quite clear, however, that these effusions are consigned to the past tense. Hence we have:

Of men who dared alone be free
 Amidst a nation's slavery;
 Yet long for them the poet's lyre
 Shall breathe its notes of heavenly fire;
 Their names shall nerve the patriot's hand
 Uprais'd to save a sinking land

And shortly after this:

But now, all sterner thoughts forgot,
 Peace broods upon the peasant's cot;
 And if tradition still prolongs
 The memory of his father's wrongs,
 'Tis but the grateful thought that borrows
 A blessing from departed sorrows.

There are awkward questions here: if in the present (“now”) “all sterner thoughts” are “forgot” by the peasant victims of past English injustice, why is the poet so committed to their memory? Furthermore, the characterisation of the peasant as embowered in rustic tranquility (“Peace broods upon the peasant’s cot”) is misleading: the “peasant’s cot” was being evacuated at an unprecedented rate in the Lowlands (and razed to the ground in the Highlands). The assertion that peasant memory of “his father’s wrongs” is a contrite “grateful thought that borrows/A blessing from departed sorrows” is, to say the least, wishful.

In a later section of the poem, a more individuated peasant makes an appearance: a shepherd who worked for Pringle’s father.

Nor yet shall faithful memory fail
 To trace the shepherd's homelier tale;
 For wild and willing was the strain,
 Rehearsed by that kind-hearted swain,
 Of sports where he a part had borne

In boyhood's blithe and cloudless morn;
 Or pious words and spotless worth
 Of friends who long have left the earth;
 Or legends of the olden times,
 And rural jests, and rustic rhymes;-
 While aye as he the story told
 Of Scotland oft betrayed and sold,
 With ancient grudge his wrath would glow
 Against that faithless *Southron foe!*

Let us bear in mind here that calling down imprecations upon the English is not the prerogative of the shepherd; this is frequently done, as noted above, in the poet's own voice. In a footnote to the section just quoted, Pringle writes of the Shepherd that "The person here alluded to might be justly described as a genuine specimen of the old Scottish peasant in his most perfect character". The "genuine specimen" jars slightly, but Pringle speaks admiringly of the shepherd's personal qualities. He then comments:

My old friend, however, was not without the common prejudices of his rank and nation; he always spoke of the Union as the "*ruination* of Scotland"; and one of his deepest feelings was a determined hatred of the "Southron" of ancient times, and a sovereign contempt for those of the present. He was, and I believe still remains, a common shepherd, like his fathers before him. (1819:133)

We are back to Scott's postscript to *Waverley* with which this chapter began: an all but vanished "race" of the "folks of the leaven" with their "absurd political prejudice" but withal "living examples" of "old Scottish" virtues (and, for Scott, a rich representational resource). Pringle's shepherd functions both as living relic and a reminder, in the present tense, of the archaic absurdity of opposition to the Hanoverian regime. The poet's own invocations of "dying patriot's blood" and the "notes of heavenly fire" that "nerve the patriot's hand", etc, thus serve the paradoxical function of sealing the past into artifice, a representational effect that acts as an aesthetico-historical surety for full Scottish membership in "the British empire". I use this last phrase advisedly: it is Pringle's own,

and occurs in a lengthy footnote to a line in the poem which describes the “Border Hills” as “The boast of chivalry and song”.

The footnote concerned is the longest in the *Excursion* and seeks, with considerable help from Walter Scott, to establish a historical lineage for the “poetical celebrity” (1819:111) of the Border region, or as Pringle puts it, “this romantic region”. Pringle reaches back to a “remote period” to establish the founding of this lineage, when “The eastern heights of Teviotdale formed ... the well contested frontier between the aboriginal tribes of the Cumbrian Britons and their Saxon invaders” (1819:112). Pringle adds that though the Britons were “subdued” they were not “extirpated” and that “their poetic spirit and romantic lore survived their national independence” (1819:112). The assertion that an aboriginal (Celtic) repository of poetry and lore ‘survives’ invasion and subjugation and continues to inform “chivalry and song” raises literary functions to a historically transcendent level and enables Pringle, citing the authority of Scott, to construct an unbroken linguistic and poetic lineage for the Border region:

“The Invaders”, says Mr Scott, in his excellent introduction to *Sir Tristrem*, “have in every country adopted, sooner or later, the traditions, sometimes even the genealogies, of the original inhabitants, while they have forgotten after a few generations, those of the country of their forefathers. One reason seems to be, that tradition depends upon locality. The scene of a celebrated battle, the ruins of an ancient tower, the ‘historic stone’ over the grave of a hero, the hill and the valley inhabited of old by a particular tribe, remind posterity of events which are sometimes recorded in their very name. Even a race of strangers, when the lapse of years has induced them no longer to account themselves such, welcome any fiction by which they can associate their ancestors with the scenes in which they themselves live, as transplanted trees push forth every fibre that may connect them with the soil to which they are transferred”. (1819:113)

Scott then goes on to explain, or postulate, that the fusion of dialects produced by this situation, combined with other factors, created the “peculiar circumstances under which the English language was formed in the lowlands of Scotland and north of England” – circumstances which were more congenial to “the use of the poet in that country than in the more Southern parts of the sister kingdom”. It is to these “peculiar circumstances” that Scott

ascribes “the flow of romantic and poetical tradition which has distinguished the Borders of Scotland almost down to this present day” (1819:114-115).

Scott’s determination to fuse English and Scottish literary genealogies rested on a theoretical “acrobatics”, according to his latest biographer, and even at the time his conclusions were challenged (Sutherland 1997:92-3). Our interest is not in the veracity of Scott’s assertions, however, but in their interlocking attitudes to locality, literature, and national identity. For Scott, “tradition is locality”, rooted in the physical lineaments of place: graves, towers, scenes of battles, etc. Paradoxically, however, “invaders” of a territory alien to them, a “race of strangers”, can, after a “lapse of years”, artificially attach themselves to the land by the use of “fiction”, or in modern parlance “invented traditions”. This fictive or imagined attachment is illustrated by the organic metaphor of a transplanted tree sending forth its roots. Locality is everything – and yet nothing, since it can over time absorb the alien into the indigenous and accommodate different strata of identity. Language, on the other hand, retains both its “lore” (Scott insists that the invading Saxons abandoned their own national mythologies and embraced “with greedy ardour the fabulous history of Arthur and his chivalry” (113)) and its linguistic matrix, enabling it to persist through time in an unbroken “flow ... almost down to the present day” (115). Leaving aside the unexplained ambiguity of the “almost”, it is clear that a claim is being made that Scottish literature is in fact authentically and aboriginally English. In the sentence which immediately follows the lengthy Scott quotation, Pringle adds his own elaboration to this claim: “To the above remarks we may add, that these Southern Highlands have had the rare good fortune to have given birth to, or been the favourite residence of, a greater number of distinguished poets, than probably any other district of *the British empire* (italics mine) (1819:115). Pringle then goes on to supply a list of poets dating back to the Celtic Merlin of Caledonia and ending up with Scott, the “Ariosto of the North”. Included in the list is that most anglicized of Scottish poets, James Thomson, praised for bringing “back the English (sic) public to nature and true poetry” (1819:116). In a footnote, Pringle appends

the remark that “*Armstrong, Leyden, Hogg*, and many other genuine poets might be added to the list”(115), but the absence of Burns from this lineup of Scottish literary champions indicates how uneasy Pringle must have been with the ‘other’ tradition or lineage of Scottish writing¹². What these remarks do indicate, however, is that Pringle regarded himself as writing within a British and imperial tradition even before emigrating to the Cape. We also note that his approving citation of Scott’s ideas clearly did not extend to his (other?) colonial experience, where the invasion of a “race of strangers” was an occasion for the imposition of their traditions, rather than the absorption of these traditions into local manners and customs.

Thus Pringle’s Scottish poetry – in broad outline. For a study whose central concern is Pringle’s writing in and about South Africa, this poetry offers invaluable interpretive clues to the later writing since it adumbrates, in significant ways, the problems that inhere in attempting to write from a margin to a center. In *The Autumnal Excursion* the tension between a Scottish localism and the compositional demands of the picturesque form is one example of such problems, while the repeated elision, or euphemisation, of actually existing circumstances, along with the aestheticising of political and military conflict, points to a desire not to unsettle Scottish status in “the British Empire”. In the South African poems we shall encounter a greatly magnified version of these same difficulties - and some entirely new ones as well.

* * * * *

In turning from Pringle's Scottish poetry to Pringle's journalism we again confront the persistence of the archaic in the modern, but here in the form of a "repository" or stockpile of anecdotal and archival knowledge. This time the subject is a peculiarly 'unvanishing' race: the Gypsies. First a very brief word on gypsies. The word gypsy is derived from "Egypt", since it was originally believed that this was their country of origin. In fact the original site of gypsy dispersion was India, where they were forced to leave for reasons unknown in the first millennium AD. Their wanderings spread the gypsies through Asia, central Europe, and North Africa, and they first arrived in Great Britain in 1500. They negotiated rights of passage or in some cases settlement with the countries they traversed, and in Scotland itself they were granted limited rights of tenure as far back as 1505. At no point were the gypsies assimilated into the body politic of the societies in which they lived or through which they wandered. As figures of alterity, the Gypsies predated the indigenes of the colonial era, and the reactions of European people to the gypsy presence has often been read by scholars as a dry run, as it were, of later racial attitudes. Various particularities attended the presence of the gypsies in Scotland, not the least of which was that the unstable and often violent social conditions of pre-Union and medieval Scotland were in fact hospitable to outcast groups who could make strategic alliances. By the time of Pringle's "Notices" in 1817, however, the gypsies were an embarrassing atavism in a society undergoing a rapid rate of social change or 'improvement' and whose central conceptual paradigm, the four stages theory, identified progress as the motor of history.

Pringle's "Notices Concerning the Scottish Gypsies" was published in three parts, in May, June, and September 1817 issues of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, of which Pringle was co-editor. The articles possess no sequential or argumentative design, and consist of what Pringle calls "desultory notices"; he later modifies this description slightly in identifying two sources for the articles: "public annals" (from the Register House) and "more *private and personal anecdotes*" (1817:49). Despite their heterogenous structure, the articles are unvarying in their

antipathy towards gypsies and their way of life. Pringle's introductory comments in parts one and two set the tone for this antipathy ("vagrant hordes", "dark, deceitful and disorderly race", etc); they also reveal how the "licentious liberty", as one contributor puts it, of the gypsies constituted a troubling and irresolvable affront to Pringle's conceptions of the "progress of civilisation" and the educative influence of "external nature":

That an Asiatic people should have resided four hundred years in the heart of Europe, subject to its civilised polity, and commingled with its varied population, and yet have retained almost unaltered their distinct oriental character, customs, and language, - is a phenomenon so singular as only to be equalled, perhaps, by the unaccountable indifference with which, till very recently, this remarkable fact appears to have been regarded.
(1817:43)

The gypsies' obdurate 'orientalism' in the "heart of Europe" strikes Pringle as a perverse and anomalous refusal of "civilised polity", and he accounts himself equally distressed by public indifference to this "remarkable fact". How exactly Pringle would have liked the public to react to the gypsy presence is clarified only at the end of the first notice when he commends with "particular approbation a little work published by Mr Hoyland of Sheffield, entitled 'A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and present State of the Gypsies; designed to develop the origin of this singular people and to promote the amelioration of their condition'" (1817:58). Pringle's enthusiasm for "amelioration" might foreshadow his later humanitarian concerns – as we shall see below – but it also signals a refusal to tolerate the singularity of social difference, the stranger within the gate. After giving some details of Hoyland's "great pains to procure information", including "circular queries" to magistrates and personal visits to gypsy encampments, "for the purpose of setting on foot some plan for their improvement and civilisation", Pringle continues:

Mr Hoyland, we understand, is a member of the respectable society of friends or Quakers – whose disinterested and unwearied exertions in the cause of injured humanity are beyond all praise. It is enough to say of the present object, that it is not unworthy of that Christian philanthropy which accomplished the abolition of the slave trade. We shall account ourselves

peculiarly happy, should our humble endeavours in any degree tend to promote Mr.H's benevolent purpose, by attracting attention to this degraded race of outcasts – the *Parias* of Europe – thousands of whom still exist in Britain, in a state of barbarism and wretchedness scarcely equalled by that of their brethren in India.- From such of our readers as may have had opportunities of observing the manners, or investigating the origin and peculiar dialect of this singular people, we respectfully invite communication. Even solitary or seemingly trivial notices on such a subject ought not to be neglected: though singly unimportant, they may lead collectively to valuable results. (1817:58)

The “Notices on Gypsies” have as their primary intent, then, the gathering of information about “manners” and “dialect” – the construction, as it were, of a gypsy archive. Such an archive, it is implied, will facilitate (“set on foot”) the process of gypsy “improvement and civilisation”. We note here that this body of information blends together criminal statistics (“queries to magistrates”) with the “seemingly trivial notices” of anecdote, observation and lore and that these may “lead collectively to valuable results”. For Pringle (himself an archivist) the gathering of information is the necessary prelude to the restructuring of the gypsy lifeworld. “[C]hristian philanthropy” intersects with a proto-ethnography which “gathers into our repository scattered facts, hints and observations,- which more elaborate and learned authors may afterwards work up into the dignified tissue of history or science” (1817:43). If, to take a well known formulation, “Colonial discourse ... is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences” whose “dominant strategic function is the creation of a space for ‘subject peoples’ through the production of knowledge in which surveillance is exercised...” (Bhabha 1994:154) then one may recognise in Pringle’s “discourse” a distinctly colonial element. Pringle’s didactic and administrative ambitions for the gypsies are, however, complicatedly intermingled with a figural investment in gypsies as a resource for “the finer associations of poetical and picturesque description” (1817:43).

Pringle’s earlier exasperation at the “unaccountable indifference” of the (reading) public toward the “singular” phenomenon of the gypsies exempts one group from this collective

incuriosity: “our poets and novelists”. He distinctly separates this category from “men of letters”, “philosophers” and “literati”, all of whom have “disregarded” the gypsies:

The paradox of these claims is itself striking. How is it that the “vagrant hordes”, so urgently in need of reclamation into the social order, and stern punishment in the interim, nonetheless furnish polite letters with seemingly edifying (“finer associations”) material? A paradox then compounded by the assertion that fictional representations of the gypsies are of so high an order (“executed their task so well”) that the executors of the real (“historians”) have “merely to extend the canvass” before signing on the dotted line of the fictional’s historical veracity.

Before attempting to unravel these claims, we must take into account Walter Scott’s contribution to these articles (and Pringle’s unabashed admiration for Scott). The articles were unsigned at the time of their publication and contain copious (but clearly attributed) quotations from Scott. In a revised 1829 edition of *Guy Mannering* (1815), Scott’s introduction “quoted from his sections of the articles on gypsies, and acknowledged his authorship. The phrasing of his acknowledgement has led bibliographers to assume that Scott alone wrote the articles” (Morris 1982:48). This authorial confusion seems unnecessary given the clear citation Scott receives in the articles and furnishes another example of how Pringle’s early literary career was marked by his tenuous association with Scott, then at the height of his considerable fame. Scott’s evident presence in the articles, plus the fact that Pringle had recently been introduced to him by the director of the Repertory House, James Thomson (to whom *The Autumnal Excursion* was dedicated), must have meant a great deal to Pringle. Mere acquaintance with the “wizard of the North” was a considerable asset in the pursuit of a literary career, and Pringle’s enthusiasm for the historically legislating power of fictions might well have been a bow in the direction of the potentate of Scottish letters, whose “role in the

culture”, as Susan Stewart observes, “becomes more and more that of an archivist charged with the invention of the archive” (1991:131).

The (to us) very evident incommensuration of gypsies as “favoured subject for delineation” *and* an invasive “vagrant horde” requiring social policing would not have struck contemporary readers as especially incongruous. From (at least) the publication of Jerome McGann’s *The Romantic Ideology* in 1983, a swathe of critical work on this period has emphasised an evasion or denial of history as characteristic, even constitutive, of Romantic poetry, particularly when the poetry deals directly with displaced, degraded or oppressed groups of people whose very condition attests to faultlines in the social order. In Thomas Pfau’s summary formulation, such outcast groups, or their iconic representative (Pfau has in mind the beggar woman in Wordsworth’s *An Evening Walk*) are “axiomatically grasped as literary sign and aesthetic figure” by an audience schooled not to “object to the dissimulation of empirical and social reference by the aesthetic” (1997:105). Pringle’s choice of extracts from poems by Hogg and Leyden to preface the first two articles furnish us with examples of how unstable figurations of the gypsy were: taken together, the two extracts cancel out the veracity of “social reference”.

In Hogg’s poem the gypsies are harmlessly indolent (“A vagrant crew, far straggled through the glade/With trifles busied, or in slumber laid”) and have, like Scott’s Highlanders, the curiosity value of a still extant “race of old”:

Their swarthy hue and mantle’s flowing fold,
Bespeak the remnant of a race of old:
Strange are their annals! – list, and mark them well –
For thou hast much to hear and I to tell.

By contrast, in the extract from Leyden’s poem, though gypsy women possess a suspicious degree of physical allure, the “race” is stigmatized as brutal and bloodthirsty:

Fell race, unworthy of the Scotian name!
 Your brutal deeds your barbarous line proclaim;
 With dreadful Gallas linked in kindred bands,
 The locust brood of Ethiop's sands
 In barbarous pomp they glut the inhuman feast,
 With dismal viands man abhors to taste;
 And grimly smile, when red the goblets shine,
 When mantles red the shell – but not with wine!

We note the invented African genealogy of Leyden's bloodswilling barbarians (elsewhere in the article it is conceded that the question of Gypsy origins is not fully resolved). Earlier described as a "sun-burnt swarthy race" from "Nubian realms", Leyden links the Gypsies to the allegedly fierce and warlike Galla people of Southern Ethiopia ("Galla" is derived from the Arabic word for "wild"), who have the additional demerit of being promiscuously prolific ("locust brood"). One can only speculate what Pringle's intentions were in choosing this extract, but one assumes that he did so respectfully since he briefly refers to Leyden's "elegant poem" in the body of the article. The Leyden extract might be read as a counter-example to the Hogg extract, where the treatment of the gypsies is in no way hostile, but even so there is nothing to diminish the impression that in 1817 Pringle was not uncomfortable with some of the more ugly stereotypes of African people, nor with the allegation that gypsy degeneration could be linked to an African origin.

Given the "crowd of unconnected facts and observations" (1817:620) which characterise the "Notices" it is to be expected that different opinions of the gypsies will be voiced. Pringle himself is notably enthusiastic about the exploits (fabled) of the gypsy woman Jean Gordon, the prototype for "that stern and intrepid heroine" (161) of *Guy Mannering*, Meg Merrilies. But Pringle evidently preferred the fabricated literary gypsy to the real thing, as his generalisations about the gypsies are unfailingly disapproving. Furthermore, Pringle is perturbed not by gypsy nomadism – as is often the case – but by their rootedness in the very region in which he grew up. This problem surfaces in the introduction to the second article, when Pringle informs us that the "most important settlement" of the gypsies in Scotland and

“the headquarters of their principal clans” (154) were located in the village of Kirk-Yetholm in Roxburghshire, the Border area where Pringle was born, and that they have inhabited this area since a “very remote period” (156). How is Pringle to square this long habitation with Scott’s assertion that “Tradition is locality”? Or his own invocations of the beneficent natural influences to be had amongst “the hills and streams of Teviotdale”? If indeed, as a footnote to the *Autumnal Excursion* has it, “The dormant energies of the mind are first awakened by external objects” (1819:115) then how does one explain the Gypsies’ signal failure to respond to the siren calls of location and landscape, since they too had passed their formative years amidst the “pastoral scenery”(115) of the Border region? Pringle’s attempt to think his way through this unhappy contradiction soon founders.

The general aspect of the surrounding country, however, cannot be said to bear any striking analogy to the more dark and savage features of the gypsy character. Though the mountains of Cheviot can never fail to waken in the breast of a Scotsman a thousand elevating emotions, there is little in their natural scenery that deserves the epithets of terrible or sublime. It is wild, indeed, but without ruggedness - and interesting rather than picturesque. Its chief characteristic is pastoral simplicity - with something of that homely and affecting *bareness* peculiar to Scottish landscape:- Like the Border scenery in general, the green banks of the Bowmont seem more calculated to soothe the fancy and soften the heart, than to exasperate the passions by exciting the imagination. To sources very different from the influences of external nature must be traced the strange peculiarities of these wild and wayward tribes. In the same Arcadian vallies, reside at the present moment a peasantry distinguished for superior intelligence, morality, and delicacy of feeling - whose moss-trooping ancestors, little more than a hundred years ago, were nevertheless sufficiently familiar with feudal rancour and bloody revenge - but the *moral causes*, which have happily changed the border reivers into a religious and industrious people, have scarcely yet begun to dawn upon the despised and degraded gypsies. (1817:155)

Pringle is clearly at a loss to explain the lack of “analogy” between the “surrounding country” and the “gypsy character”, nor does he hazard a guess as to the sources which might inform their “strange peculiarities”.¹³ The accumulation of adjectival phrases, “dark and savage”, “wild and wayward”, “despised and degraded”, leaves no doubt of the intense aversion felt by Pringle toward the gypsies: they are people out of history, as resistant to explanation as they are to amelioration. Even the well-nigh sacral “influences of external nature” have entirely lost their purchase.

If the gypsies offer a speculative dead end then this is because there is no way to accommodate them within a certain way of seeing the world; their enigma is a mystery, but also a threat. Absorbing them into the “dignified tissue of literature or science” or transforming their “strange and terrific character” into (carefully controlled) fictions are ways of defusing gypsy intractability, but not of erasing or ‘improving’ the gypsy presence. It is little wonder then that in one of the excerpts from the musings of Scott, he cites a patriotic Scotsman who, a century ago, “though the energetic and eloquent friend of freedom, saw no better mode of correcting [the excesses of the gypsies] than by introducing a system of domestic slavery” (1817:49). Scott did not endorse this expedient for his own time, when the “dreadful evil” of the gypsies had been diluted by a drop in numbers: “Their numbers ... are so greatly diminished, that, instead of one hundred thousand, as calculated by Fletcher, it would now perhaps be impossible to collect above five hundred throughout all Scotland” (49). Assuming the accuracy of these figures, ninety- nine thousand and five hundred gypsies would have disappeared from Scottish territory in the space of a century. How this drastic reduction in the gypsy population was accomplished is not entirely clear. In the section under consideration Scott refers to the “tribes of gypsies” becoming “few in number” with “many entirely rooted out” (49). In an earlier section Scott is more explicit and refers to some of the “most atrocious families” in Kirk-Yetholm as having been “extirpated”. Scott then goes on to report that the Sheriff of Roxburghshire, “with my assistance and concurrence, cleared this county of the last of them” (49) (ie the “most atrocious families”). Not enough evidence on the Scottish gypsies is available to me to enable an objective assessment of the clearing/extirpation of the gypsies. There is nothing either in the tone or the content of the “Notices” however, to suggest that the ‘removal’ of the greater part of the gypsy population was regarded with anything but approval. Pringle himself writes of the additions to the original inhabitants of Kirk-Yetholm that “They seem to have gradually retreated to this as their last stronghold, on being successively extirpated from their other haunts and fastnesses upon the borders” (156). The naturalization

of violence is so complete here that Pringle might just as well be writing about a dwindling species of badger.

The greater part of the passage quoted above deals not with gypsies but with their implied antithesis – the Border people, and with them the Border landscape, with its power to evoke “elevating emotions”. We notice however that Pringle ascribes to the landscape features that are neither picturesque nor sublime; to these features, of which the leading characteristic is “pastoral simplicity”, is attributed the specific efficacy of a calming and soothing effect (“to soothe the fancy and soften the heart”) rather than “to exasperate the passions by exciting the imagination”.¹⁴ Hence the problem of why the gypsies remain “wild and wayward” despite the tranquility of their environment. The belief in the psychologically salutary effects of certain landscapes is, however, historically belied not only by the gypsies, but by the “border reivers” who had only a hundred years previously been similarly “degraded”, despite their permanent residence in “Arcadian vallies”. The violence of that period has been described by a contemporary writer as being as “cruel and horrible in its way as Biafra or Vietnam” (Fraser 1971:6). Clearly, it was not only the gypsies who were immune to the soothing and calming influences of the Border landscape. Inadvertently, Pringle reveals the constructedness of his own categories and their inadequacy as explanatory formulae. We have already noted his attempts, in *The Autumnal Excursion*, to represent the Scottish landscape in such a way that it conforms to picturesque criteria. Here, the great social transformation wrought upon the population of the Border area (an alleged hundred year leap from a “savage” feudalism to a “religious and industrious” modernity) is attributed to assertively italicized, and entirely unexplained, “*moral causes*”. The historical record offers a somewhat grimmer causation, as well as a longer time span. The restoring of state control to the lawless Border region began with the accession of James to the English throne in 1603. “This was done ruthlessly and sometimes by means more than doubtful” (1964:193) writes J.M. Mackie, and included the establishment of a permanent police force with an unrestrained remit to hunt down offending

Reiver families. Fraser is more explicit and describes the period as one in which the Border area was turned “into a police state which was most barbarously administered” (1971:364) by an authority whose “policy was one of wholesale hanging” (37). Pringle’s emphatic “moral causes” elide this brutal violence and perhaps reveal an anxiety about the transcoding, as it were, of ‘nature’ by history and the fact that his own ancestors (there were Pringles among the Border Reivers) were a good deal more sanguinary than the “despised and degraded gypsies” and had to be persuaded into “civilised polity” at the end of a rope.

There are two explicit references to a colonial situation in the “Notices”. In the first, Pringle refers pejoratively to the gypsies of Kirk-Yetholm as “colonists”, implying an illegitimacy in their presence in Scotland and a lack of attachment to their surroundings. He would, of course, never conceive his South African colonial experience in the same terms. In the second, Scott calls up the colonial analogy in comparing the gypsies to the “wild Indians” of America: “... the *pariahs* of Scotland, living like wild Indians among European settlers, and, like them, judged of rather by their own customs, habits and opinions, than if they had been members of the civilised part of the community” (49). Though it is unfair to conflate the opinions of Scott and Pringle, there is nothing to suggest that, at this period, Pringle would have been in anything but complete agreement with Scott’s equation of Gypsies and American Indians. Both groups occupy a “distant point” downstream of the river of History, and need either to be ‘improved’ out of their atavism, or if this does not prove feasible, to be “extirpated” – just as both groups, given their “wild” and “terrific” qualities, could qualify as a “favoured subject for delineation”.

We should be cautious, however, to rush to judgement on Pringle’s apparently narrow and prejudiced predisposition towards pre- or anti-modern peoples. David Simpson, in a consideration of the ways in which gypsies were depicted in the early nineteenth century, comments that they “were an alternatively attractive and repellent image for writers of the

period” (1987:44) and that this ambivalent “anxiety” was something that gypsies “inevitably carried for anyone living and writing around 1800” (55). Furthermore, Pringle’s South African experiences are not notable, within their abrasively racial context, for prejudice or intransigence towards indigenous peoples. In fact, given his often strident attitude toward the gypsies, Pringle’s subsequent ‘humanitarianism’ marks a number of new directions. Despite this, however, the broad frames of reference which underpinned Pringle’s aversion to the gypsies (and his desire for their “improvement”) are also evident, albeit tilted toward different objectives, in his attitudes toward the Xhosa, the Hottentot, the Bushman, and even the Afrikaner boer. To understand these attitudes and the ideas that informed them, we need to turn to their generative matrix: the Scottish Enlightenment, and more particularly its temporal theorizing of the progress from “rude” to “polished” societies.¹⁵

No information – aside from the mention of Ferguson and Stewart in *The Institute* - exists to indicate the extent of Pringle’s reading of, or response to, the leading figures in the Scottish Enlightenment (generally understood to be David Hume (1711-76), Adam Smith (1723-90), Francis Ferguson (1694-1746), Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) and William Robertson (1721-1793) – cf Chitnis 1976: 91-123)). But given Pringle’s educational background, his associates, and his literary enthusiasms, it seems very unlikely that he would not have been acquainted with the main currents of thought in this period. The details here are extremely numerous, and I shall concentrate chiefly upon the period’s central, or generative conceptual paradigm: the so-called four stages or stadial theory of historical development, and in particular the application of this theory to ‘underdevelopment’ in the Highlands.

The Scottish provenance of the four stages theory is commonly ascribed to Adam Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence* delivered in Glasgow in 1762-3; these lectures attributed to historical development a temporal and progressive nature which evolved through the four stages of hunting, pasturage, farming and commerce. Although it is foundational to his general theory of society, Smith was not to develop this theory at any length, and explicit comment on stadial theory occurs only intermittently in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). But other literati of the Scottish Enlightenment, such as Kames, Millar and Robertson, wrote extensively on the subject. Ronald Meek has reconstructed for us the fragmentary remnants of Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence* and tallied them with Turgot's *Universal History*. Both Turgot and Smith, maintains Meek, proposed a temporal model of historical 'progress' primarily modelled on stages of subsistence activity and came to these conclusions independently of each other in the early 1750s. As Meek remarks, what is innovative about the contribution of Smith and Turgot, and where their theory constitutes a decisive break with its theoretical prehistory, is the conception that a mode of subsistence, that is, an essentially *economic* activity, acts as the predominantly determining element in the "total situation" (1976:6). Both the Scottish and the French theorists were influenced by the literature on the indigenes of America, which supplied, as it were, a laboratory example of man in his most primitive hunter-gathering state. They were also provoked by the fact that their own countries were characterised by extremely uneven development, in which the pastoral and the 'commercial' coexisted in the same national space. As an exemplification of four stages theory Meek quotes a passage from the conjectural historian Andrew Robertson's *History of America* (1777), part of which reads:

... the disposition and manners of men are formed by their situation, and arise from the state of society in which they live. The moment that begins to vary, the character of a people must change. In proportion as it advances in improvement, their manners refine, their powers and talents are called forth. In every part of the earth, the progress of man has been nearly the same; and we can trace him in his career from the rude simplicity of savage life, until he

attains the industry, the arts, and the elegance of polished society. (quoted in Meek 1976:141).

Despite the distance between the "rude" and the "polished", and with this a hierarchising of the "state[s] of society", it is evident that there is nothing in four stages theory to suggest that differences are innate, that it is possible to essentialise racial types - in short that stadial theory is a form of occidentalism without racism and hence a good deal more benign than the scientific racism which was to come. Robertson could assert, for example, that "there is nothing wonderful ... in the similitude between the Americans and the barbarous peoples of our own continent" (1976:141); of course a corollary to this would be that a colonising mission could justify itself by claiming to accelerate the social development of a "savage" people, to modernise them in the name of a world-historical logic. Similarly, any internal group of people resistant to the benefits of the "commercial" (i.e. to wage labour) would find themselves, like the Highlanders, on the receiving end of enforced improvement into historical maturity.

Specifically Scottish factors also played a role in the development of such theories of historical progression. Anand Chitnis has commented that there is a "thin line between improvement and enlightenment" (1976:22) and leading figures in the Enlightenment were strongly committed to Scottish advancement on educational, commercial, and agricultural fronts. Crucial to these material endeavours, as well as their 'conjectural' formulation, was the alliance with England and the status of that country as the world's leading commercial centre. It is a central paradox of Scottish Enlightenment thought that the literati underwrote a Scottish marginalism: "the very fact that they identified the process of history with the development of the English state and of English culture ... actively peripheralised their own history and their own culture" (Craig 1996:116). We have already encountered this obeisance in Pringle's affirmation of Scotland as part of Empire, and in Scott's devious theorisation (endorsed by Pringle) of a fundamental linguistic and poetic affinity between English and Scottish or Gaelic

verse. The Scottish pursuit of social improvement (we are back here to Scott's "influx of wealth and pursuit of commerce" and its rapid "innovation" of traditional practice) was similarly allied to the integration of the Scottish into the English economy, a junior partnership which enabled the 'takeoff' of Scottish manufacture and development. In both its material exercise and its conjectural formulation, this drive to modernise and improve "shift[ed] effortlessly from principles to manufactures, and back to principles again: the seamless unity of religious, political, economic and cultural themes sp[oke] the confident ideology of Improvement" (Womack 1989:5).

How the exponents of stadial theory accounted (in both senses of the term) for the Highlanders is of particular interest since, along with the gypsies, these groups offer us the closest analogy we have to indigenous colonial people. The Enlightenment literati were unequivocal in their assessment of the civilisational distress of the Highlanders. Here is Robertson again:

There society still appears in its rudest and most imperfect form: strangers to industry, averse from labour, inured to rapine; the fierce inhabitants scorn all the arts of peace, and stand ready for every bold and desperate action. Attached to their own customs, from ignorance and habit, they have hitherto continued a separate people. (Robertson 1759, quoted in Womack 1989:22)

These "separate people" had, as we know, suffered military defeat at Culloden in 1745 and legislative evisceration thereafter. For the educated classes, from within whose ranks the categories of stadial theory were formulated, the Highlanders were feudal throwbacks, candidates for a forceful push into the rapids of modernity. More numerous than the gypsies, but less recalcitrant, the Highlanders became the object of intensive 'social engineering'. Like many indigenous peoples in the colonies, they were infamous for their aversion to wage labour and the demands of industrial discipline (cf Perelman 2000: 280-81). Similarly, in their clannish attachment to Lairds or Chiefs, and a propensity for hunting rather than agriculture, the

Highlanders were held to have no regard for law (acknowledging only fealty to a chief) or property (land was not privately owned but held on permanent lease).¹⁶ The violence of Highland clearance and improvement figures in stadial theory as a benign acceleration to the benefits of commercial society, a non-coercive “historical narrative in which they are stamped out impersonally by the progress of civilisation” (Womack 1989:25). But a curious reversal attended this process of improvement and cultural attenuation: as Highland resources were being historically depleted and their cultural practices proscribed, their representation as an emblematically ‘Scottish’ people became ever more pronounced. This “melancholy paradox” writes Peter Womack

can be demystified by considering Scotland’s position within the British Empire. By 1810 it was obvious that the Union with England was, in social and economic terms, working. Dependence on the more powerful economy to the South, which up until the mid eighteenth century had been an obstruction, fairly suddenly turned into an advantage; Scotland ceased to be a victim of ‘British’ imperial and commercial expansion and became instead a partner in it ... In this situation, the attitude of the indigenous ruling class towards its own Scottishness was inevitably a contradictory one. It needed to assert a national identity, if its junior partnership was not to collapse in a simple English take-over of its intra-Scottish functions. But such functions could not afford to have any serious economic or political content which might threaten the smooth and increasingly profitable running of the partnership itself. The solution was a depoliticised nationalism ... For the Scottish bourgeoisie ... the Highlands had the aspect of a residual historical nation ... an accreditation, held in reserve, of the national identity which was both required and eroded by their participation in the imperial adventure. (1989: 147-8)

This virtual or imaginary Scottish identity, so extensively popularised by writers like Scott, dissimulated a trauma of historical loss and even extinction, producing a “whole structure of national feeling in love with self-defeat” (147). I quote at length from Womack to emphasise how a Scottish writer of Pringle’s generation would have had to hand a model for the aesthetic lamination of an historically doomed or defeated people into the nostalgic gloss of lost nobility. Pringle himself produced formulaic verse about the Highlands as late as 1829, but it is in the South African poetry that deals with indigenous groups that we will find examples of people in

the past tense of progressive history heroised for the losses that colonialism has inflicted upon them.¹⁷ We must additionally consider that the Scottish experience of ‘internal colonialism’ was notably more acquiescent than that of other peripheral nations, such as Ireland. Luke Gibbons, for example, asserts that unlike the Irish, for whom the colonial experience was one of ongoing violence and trauma, the Scottish had a “civic investment in colonialism” and that “the Scottish Enlightenment did not hold out much hope for African or any other oppressed cultures ... wishing to throw off the shackles of colonialism” (2003:88). As Gibbons point out, the Scottish model of social progress is founded on a “clear hierarchy among cultures” (167); if such hierarchies were felt to be sufficiently persuasive to justify the social remodeling of Scotland itself, this greatly strengthened the case for their application elsewhere.

Finally, there is the question of Pringle’s religious and political beliefs and affiliations. To begin with religion: the details here are uncertain, since we have only fragmentary evidence of his devotional habits and allegiances. From what we do know he was certainly devout: his friend Story commented that Pringle’s habits “were exceedingly correct, as his thoughts and feelings were most pure; while amid the trials of an academic life, his devotional bias lost little of its power” (quoted in Morris 1982:32). We learn further that “Story and Pringle worshipped daily, and on Sundays worshipped at Rev. Dr. Thomas M’Crie’s meeting house” (1982:32). This impression of sustained dutifulness is offset somewhat by a letter of Story’s to Pringle’s wife, Margaret (Pringle married in 1817) in which he counsels her not to upbraid her husband for the “insufficiency” of his “religious feelings” (1982:135). Whatever the case may have been, it is not easy to establish the exact nature not so much of Pringle’s religious habits, but of his allegiances. South African critics commonly assume that he was “part of the religious revival of the early nineteenth century” (Voss 1982:24), that he “ca[ught] the spirit of religious revivalism” (Chapman & Pereira 1989:xv), and so on. But these are simply assumptions: no details are ever given. If we take the parallel case of John Philip, for example (born in Kirkcaldy in 1775), his religious affiliation is quite clear: Philip was an evangelical radical, a member of the Haldane

brothers “Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home”, a lay movement “detached from any formal connection with any church, established or dissenting” (Ross 1986:60). At the time that the young Philip joined this establishment in 1799, and beyond that when he became a lay preacher, the “Society” was regarded by church authorities as seditious, and its activities were proscribed (1986:60-1). Such groups were clearly an extension of the Wesleyan evangelical revival in England: they held open-air meetings preceded by the free distribution of tracts and pamphlets, established Sunday schools, and funded missionaries to carry out their work abroad. There is no evidence that Pringle ever belonged to such a group. In fact, given what we do know of his religious affiliations, he might even have disapproved of them. Consider Pringle’s regular worship at “the Rev. Dr. Thomas M’Crie’s meeting house”, for example. M’Crie was a well known Presbyterian “seceder”, a group that had broken with the Church of Scotland in the early eighteenth century because of doctrinal objections to the close relationship between Church and State (Lenman 1981:146). The author of a well known *Life Of Knox* (1811) and *Life of Melville* (1819), M’Crie was “ultra-conservative”, so much so that he was “outside the main currents” even of Seceder orthodoxy at that time (1981:147). Since “the various ‘Seceder’ churches ... condemned lay preaching and the new Sunday schools” (Ross 1986:62) a cleric like M’Crie would probably have strongly disapproved of the evangelicals, and though we have no evidence that Pringle would necessarily have agreed with him, the fact that he worshipped regularly under M’Crie would seem to imply that though he must have been aware of the Evangelical movement, he did not participate in it. Furthermore, in a footnote to the *Autumnal Excursion*, Pringle voiced a rare objection to Scott when he took issue with the depiction of the Scottish Covenanters in the latter’s newly published *Old Mortality* (1817). In defence of his view, Pringle quoted copiously from a hostile attack on the book written by M’Crie in an issue of the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* (cf. Sutherland 1996: 200). Such strong feelings about the Presbyterian past are unlikely to have been expressed by someone with evangelical leanings. The original edition of the *Autumnal Excursion* in the South African Library has an asterisk above the words “one of the ablest and best-informed authors of the day” and at the bottom of

the page, in Pringle's handwriting, "my excellent friend the Rev. Dr. M'Crie". Certainly Pringle would be involved with the Evangelical movement later in his career, but that is a separate consideration which must be understood within its specific context.

Our sense of Pringle's politics is similarly patchy: Morris (1982:42) provides evidence of his support for the Whigs (in a letter to a friend he displayed "indignation" at an attack on the Whig leader Fox in the *Quarterly Review*), but this is complicated somewhat by the fact that his major patrons were Tories. The first and most obvious example was Scott, a notoriously high Tory. Pringle had been introduced to Scott by Thomas Thomson (Morris 1982:47), who had employed him at the Register House and to whom the *Autumnal Excursion* was "respectfully inscribed" with "grateful regard" (Thomson himself was appointed as director of Register House because of his connections with the ruling Tory elite). Finally, it was M'Crie, also a Tory, who had recommended Pringle to Thomson for the job at the Register House. With patrons like these, it is unlikely that Pringle's politics, Whig or not, went above the waterline of acceptable opinion.

The dependence of even a marginal figure like Pringle on the patronage of his social superiors is itself a measure of the restrictions of contemporary Scottish society, where advancement and preferment invariably went hand in hand with the cultivation of the right connections. Scottish politics was then dominated by a Tory faction presided over by the Dundas family. Henry Dundas, who had died in 1811, was the driving force behind a dynasty which controlled Scottish politics by delivering it to Westminster in its least fractious form (i.e. almost solidly Tory). He was succeeded by his son, Robert, and the Dundas Dynasty held a more or less unbroken sway over Scotland for almost fifty years before collapsing in 1827 under the weight of its own obsolescence and increasing mismanagement. During this period "daily political life was dominated by the huge presence of the Melville interest [Dundas was created a Viscount in

1802], a political machine built on the sheer scale of the patronage at the disposal of the British government, and the gross venality, even by Scottish standards, of the Scottish ruling class, which was basically the landed interest and its urban sycophants” (Lenman 1981: 156). Under this regime, there was no tolerance of even the mildest dissidence. The “uncompromisingly authoritarian” (Sutherland 1995:49) Henry Dundas “automatically accused anyone in Scotland who would not buckle under his political will of embracing the unmentionable excesses of the French Jacobins” (Lenman 1981: 111). When dissent was real – or perceived to be real – Dundas was particularly harsh. In the early 1790s, for example, with feelings running high after the events in France and the declaration of war, a Scottish reform society calling itself the “Friends of the People” was swiftly suppressed and its leader, Thomas Muir, a respectable Glasgow advocate, sentenced to fourteen years of transportation to Botany Bay for the crime of “peacefully advocating universal suffrage and annual parliaments” (Sutherland 1995:49). As we shall see, there is a more than passing resemblance between Dundas and the autocratic Tory Governor of the Cape, Lord Charles Somerset, whose intolerance of even the mildest civic freedoms was to prove calamitous to Pringle’s colonial ambitions.

Pringle’s final years in Scotland were marked by the “heroic age of popular radicalism” (Thompson 1963:660) in Great Britain. Although in Scotland radicalism was never as extensive or agitated as it was in England, it existed with sufficient virulence to provoke Scott into exclaiming that “The devil seems to have come up amongst us, unchained and bellowing for his prey” (Sutherland 1995: 233). The occasion was the “radical War” of 1819-20, in which working class discontent spilled over into sporadic violence that threatened far more than it managed to deliver (Mackie 1964:314-5; Lenman 1981:152-3). The legislative response from the British government was harsh: *habeas corpus* had already been suspended and the Six Acts of 1820 “gave magistrates extensive powers to restrict public meetings and conduct searches for arms” (Wright 1988:74). The radical press was also targeted by the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act of 1819: “All cheap periodical publications were henceforth deemed

newspapers and liable for the fourpenny stamp duty in an attempt to place them beyond the pockets of working men” (74).

In his years at the Cape, and especially during his clash with Governor Somerset, Pringle would frequently invoke a language of rights and freedoms that he claimed as the birthright of a “British subject” (1966:189). Such invocations were perfectly legitimate in their context, but we ought not to lose sight of the tenuous nature of these hypothetical birthrights in their land of origin, nor the tendency of British government(s) brutally to suppress any form of what was perceived to be political radicalism. In the matter of press freedom, for example, Pringle never alludes to the legislation aimed at curbing the radical press in Britain that preceded his departure; nor does he refer to it again (as we shall see) in the period 1826-1834 when he was active in London’s periodical press and agitation against the Libels Act of 1819, still in force, became a public issue. In fact, there is no concerted evidence that Pringle was sympathetic to working class causes unless they fell within the more restrained ambits of Whig reform. Most of Pringle’s writing after 1820 is concerned either with the Cape, imperial policy in India, or the abolitionist cause, but the long convulsions of working class politics, with their very obvious parallels to the struggle of indigenous peoples and slaves, are simply ignored. The implications of this paradox for Pringle’s humanitarian colonial politics will be explored elsewhere.

Pringle’s attitude to those radical voices being silenced by the Act of 1819 can perhaps be partially inferred from an article published under his editorship of Constable’s *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* in 1819. This contribution, entitled “On the influence of the diffusion of knowledge upon the happiness of the lower ranks of society” denounces radical writers with some ferocity: “Now, such authors as Voltaire, and Volney, and Paine, are extremely dangerous to the habits of all half-educated persons, writing, as they do, in a plain, simple style,

when they sneer and play off their wit; and, in a gaudy and turgid manner, when they wish to conceal their poisonous dogmas and mysteries”(1819:126). Although we cannot automatically assume these views to be Pringle’s, they are in line with his modestly reformist politics, which clearly did not endorse the voice of radical reform. The writer’s attack on the “poisonous dogmas and mysteries” of Voltaire, Volney, and Paine (thus tainting the latter with Jacobite associations) emphasises that their audience of “half-educated persons” lack the sophistication to see through the sophistry. The implication is clear: the “lower ranks of society” are being exposed to the “diffusion” of the wrong kind of knowledge. The results are not promising: an “illiterate scurrility” is taking hold of the lower orders: “They become keen politicians and read with avidity every pamphlet and paper which will feed their heart-burnings and inflame their discontent. In our own country this is flagrantly notorious, from the increasing sale of anti-ministerial papers; and every sort of foul garbage is greedily swallowed” (1819:125). At this time the prospect of the lower orders moving beyond the influence of the reforming middle classes was causing more than occasional disquiet. In the same year, for example, Francis Jeffrey wrote in the *Edinburgh Review*: “We take the most alarming signs of the times to be, that separation of the upper and middle classes of the community from the lower, which is now daily and visibly increasing. The conduct of all parties, and of every branch of society, has contributed more or less to produce this unhappy estrangement between the two grand divisions of which the population consists” (1819:294). In the decade to follow this fear of a collapse in social hierarchy (“grand divisions”) was to incite the Whigs into a massive investment in cheap periodical literature for the working classes which would blunt the influence of radical voices by assisting the diffusion of “useful knowledge”. Like the writer of the article in the *Miscellany*, Jeffrey caricatures radical writers (Cobbett and Wooler are described as “mischievous, profligate, and insane”) rather than engaging with their views, which were distinct and articulate as well as emerging from a “public culture with a wide array of symbolic, communicative and organisational resources” (Gilmartin 1996:3). Leaving aside the complexities of this situation – to be addressed in a later chapter – what needs emphasis here is that Pringle’s discursive positioning

within the mainstream Whig reform camp had considerable implication for the nature of what he wrote, and even the way in which he wrote it. It is by no means incidental, for example, that in the early 1830s Pringle was to publish South African material, both prose and poetry, in the *Penny Magazine for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, the most prominent of the cheap, Whig-funded magazines aimed at countering the threat of the radical press by the wide distribution of 'improving' material. Furthermore, as worker organisations noted with great acrimony, the *Penny Magazine* was legislatively exempted from paying the government tax or "tax on knowledge" which had such a prohibitive effect on their own publications (cf Simon 1974: 227-231). When Pringle engaged in his journalistic ventures at the Cape, he stated his aims in language that reproduced exactly the Whig reformist agenda for the working classes: "the diffusion of useful knowledge throughout the colony ... was the great object of our ambition" (1966:181).

In his efforts to secure a passage to the Cape for himself and his family Pringle was significantly reliant on the good offices of Scott, who was well connected with influential members of the Tory administration. Through his interventions Pringle obtained audiences with Admiralty Secretary, John Wilson Croker, Under-Secretary for the Colonies, Henry Goulburn and John Barrow, then First Lord of the Admiralty. These meetings served to facilitate the application for emigration of the Pringle party, but they were also instrumental in providing Pringle with letters of recommendation for a civil post at the Cape; aside from Scott's recommendation there were letters, among others, from Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, and even Bathurst, the Colonial Secretary. (Morris 1982: 142-45). In a letter to Pringle, Scott confidently assured him that "you will be put on as good, if not a better footing than any who go out to the Cape" (quoted in Pringle 1966:5). Whether this was the case or not, Scott's exertions were invaluable to Pringle: they provided an entry into the upper levels of colonial society and, some two years later, led to his appointment, by Governor Somerset, as sub-librarian of the Cape Town library. They were also significantly helpful in establishing his family in the Eastern Cape. It is somewhat

paradoxical that Pringle owed a great deal to conservative Tory influence to establish himself in the colony, and that without this influence his South African residence, if it had occurred at all, might have been restricted to the Eastern Cape. Pringle's exertions on his own and his family's behalf were motivated, as he later put it, by "two special objects". The first was "to collect again into one social circle, and establish in rural independence, my father's family, which untoward circumstances had broken up and begun to scatter over the world" (1966:3) – or, effectively, to restore his family of agriculturalists to the mode of life which a modernising Scotland had deprived them of. His second object was to "obtain, through the recommendation of powerful friends, some moderate appointment, suitable to my qualifications, in the civil service of the colony, and probably in the newly settled district" (4). While we have to consider that these remarks are retrospective and therefore informed by a prudence that might not have existed at the time, one thing is clear: Pringle had no qualms about colonisation and was anxious, like so many Scots of that period, to use it to his advantage. Given what we know of his background, this comes as no surprise. What Pringle does not mention in his account in the *Narrative* are the journalistic opportunities that he saw opening up for him in the colony. "I am engaged to write some art[icle] of the colony, at least the new settle[ment]", wrote Pringle to Fairbairn in December 1819, "by the advice of Walter Scott, and Barrow has promis[ed to g]et it published here for me on liberal terms. If [you] will join me in this you shall share half the profits & I am almost certain that it will pay us handsomely. Barrow will review it in the Quarterly. He reviews all the Travels there" (FB 1:4B, December 12th 1819). The *Quarterly Review*, a leading periodical, was firmly Tory in its politics and targeted a "gentrified audience" (Klancher 1987:52) of upper class readers. Clearly, Pringle was at this stage more interested in vocational opportunity than colonial injustice.

A certain amount of mystification surrounds accounts of Pringle's Scottish years by South African literary critics, who routinely assert that he arrived in this country as a fully credentialised herald of 'progressive' Enlightenment values: a democratic enemy of absolutism, a

poet imbued with the libertarian ‘spirit’ of Romanticism, an evangelical Christian alert to the oppressions of the poor, and so forth. Two quick representative samples, the first in the editorial introduction to the only widely available edition of Pringle’s poetry, the second in an encyclopedia of postcolonial literatures: “the influence of writers such as Campbell, Moore and Byron made him an enemy of oppression in any form and a staunch advocate of freedom and liberal values. In inheriting the reason of the Enlightenment, while catching the spirit of religious revivalism and Romantic idealism ...” (Chapman & Perreira, 1989:xv); “As a young intellectual Pringle came under the lasting influence of the rational ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment and the moral ideals of the evangelical revival” (Klopper 1994: 1310). While in both cases considerations of space might have enforced a certain amount of compression, the generalized claims about Pringle are misleading. Phrases such as “rational ideals” and “reason of the Enlightenment” are weightless without the instantiation of specific detail and convey nothing other than a sense of early nineteenth-century political correctness. But the picture, as I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, is more complex than such accounts suggest. While Pringle did bring with him to South Africa a variety of intellectual resources and habits of perception which were formed by his Scottish context, it is not possible simply to read these off against his subsequent colonial experiences and writings as a fixed stock of unwavering responses. Such an approach all too easily allows an emplotment of Pringle’s career along the telos of an enlightened progressivism which culminates in the signing of the Emancipation Act in 1834 and takes in along the way his clash with Governor Somerset over press freedom in the Cape, and his subsequent humanitarian activities (most of which, it must not be forgotten, were conducted from London). In what follows I propose a very different narrative: one much more erratic, conflicted and contingent, in which Pringle’s background, with its collocation of influences, both shapes and is shaped by his unsettling colonial experiences in South Africa and a subsequent – and far longer – period of residence in London.

¹ For a general survey see Michael Hechter's *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British Nationalist Development, 1536-1966* (1975). In their "Introduction" to *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorensen emphasise how Scotland's "split condition" in this period had obvious colonial analogies. Despite enjoying obvious advantages as a result of Union in 1707, and developing a "dynamic and entrepreneurial middle class" and "one of the most advanced civil societies in Europe", Scotland also:

[H]eld within its borders a culturally alien, increasingly "backward" Celtic Fringe", the Highlands, in which something like colonial conditions prevailed: military and legal repression, economic underdevelopment. Scotland itself reproduced the split condition both of an imperial Great Britain and of the nascent world-system of which Britain was the political-economic core. (2004:2)

² A detailed account, to which I shall frequently refer, may be found in Morris, 1982: 64-137).

³ The phrase occurs in the official summons which Pringle served upon Blackwood, and is reproduced on p.113 of Morris's account.

⁴ Robert Blackwood, a relation of the publisher, wrote to his brother William describing Pringle's visit to Scott in 1830:

There is another very good joke of Sir Walter's. Pringle, the lamb of the Chaldee MS, has been in Scotland lately, and was on a visit at Abbotsford. Sir Walter got very tired of him (he is a great bore – that is my own) and told Lockhart that he has just turned Lamb out to grass on the holm. (quoted in Morris 1982:117).

Pringle appeared to be held in low esteem by his better known Scottish contemporaries. Scott's scattered remarks about Pringle are unflinchingly condescending, while James Hogg satirised what he saw as Pringle's stifling gentility and right-mindedness.

⁵ *The Institute* was co-authored by Pringle and a friend (Robert Story) when they were students at Edinburgh in 1811 and was never reprinted. *The Institute* is a mock heroic poem in four cantos which satirises the pretensions to scientific enlightenment of the university's Philomatic Society. The poem is a rather laboured production in the Augustan satirical tradition with rhyming couplets and a decasyllabic metre; it fails to rise above the occasion of its student production. For our purposes, however, it is useful to note that the poem exempts Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) and Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) from its hyperbolic arraignment of the more scientific aspects of late Enlightenment thought. Both were Edinburgh 'moral philosophers' whose conceptual histories and notions of historical development are integral to Pringle's later humanitarian colonialism.

⁶ Malvern van Wyk Smith, to take a typical example, writes of Pringle that "[H]e was a product of his time, and his ideological and conceptual faculties were shaped by the European intellectual movements of the age, notably the Scottish Enlightenment and an emergent English Romanticism ..." (2000:23). In tracing the influence of this "legacy", van Wyk Smith cites an "indebtedness to Wordsworth" as its most notable feature.

⁷ I will return to Trumpener's elaboration of the "transcolonial" and "transnational" character of the colonial writing of the peripheries in a consideration of Pringle's later work, which fed into an imperial network that traversed England, Scotland, India and the Cape Colony. As Trumpener remarks, the contemporary critical emphasis on the "transcolonial and international character" of postcolonial writing invariably fails to take into account that dispersal across region and nation has been a "constituent feature" (290) of writing in the wake of imperialism since at least the eighteenth century.

⁸ Marx, for example, observed with characteristic bluntness that the clearances on the Highland estates of the Duchess of Sutherland (a close friend of Scott's) turned "the whole county of Sutherland ... into a sheep walk. Between 1814 and 1820 these 15000 inhabitants, about 3000 families, were systematically hunted and rooted out" (1977:891)

⁹ Pringle's taste in poetry may partly be inferred from some poems he collected and dedicated to his sister, Mary, in 1814. Pringle entitled this collection "A Selection of Sonnets, Songs & Other Poems, Chiefly from the Works of Living Authors"(NELM, COLL: Pringle, Ms/103). The poet who features most prominently is Southey with five poems; also included are two poems by Wordsworth, two by Coleridge, and two by Byron. The other poems are by Scottish poets such as Leyden and Wilson, with the vernacular style kept to a minimum. Oddly, there is no poetry by Scott, although his long narrative poems are an obvious influence on Pringle (poems which, one might add, for all their immersion in Scottish lore and local history, are written in an accessible, standardised English). Also surprising is the complete omission of any poems by Burns – a poet in whom Pringle appears not to have shown any special interest. In their "Introduction" to the South African edition of Pringle's poems published in 1989, Michael Chapman and Ernest Pereira inform us that "At Edinburgh University Pringle ... developed a passionate interest in poetry and, more specifically, that of Burns and other Scottish poets"(xii). I have found no evidence to support the assertion that Pringle had a "passionate interest" in the poetry of Burns (see also note 12 below).

¹⁰ A reviewer in the *Scots Magazine* drew attention to the poem's derivation from Scott's *Marmion* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and commented that "This appears to us an uncommonly pleasing little poem, both as to sentiment and description. It also adheres pretty close to its model, to the best specimens of which it is little inferior"(quoted in Morris 1982: 54-55).

¹¹ Coetzee fails to notice that Pringle's treatment of the picturesque, though conventional, is nonetheless problematic. Although Coetzee also quotes the passages I have been dealing with here, he elides the lines that begin "Though wild the view ..." and end "To give *expression* to the scene" and unaccountably fails to comment on their incongruity.

¹² In an appraisal of the relationship between Burns and Wordsworth, Leith Davis notes that while Burns was "subjected to much repackaging by Scottish literati anxious to promote their own vision of a strong Scottish cultural nationalism within a united Britain" (1998:107) he was at the same time the subject of an imperious cultural assimilation by Wordsworth. Davis argues that although Wordsworth might have acknowledged the influence Burns exerted on him through the latter's employment of 'simple' speech in a Scottish vernacular, and Burns' paradigmatic status as the poet of the "low and rustic life" extolled in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth still sought to cut the teeth of Burns' localism by absorbing it into a homogenous 'British' poetry: "Wordsworth's incorporation and marginalization of the Scottish poet, whom he re-created as an inspired but flawed poet of nature, demonstrates his desire to overwrite the national differences that Burns represented and to create an assimilated nation of participants in the British cultural realm"(107). Hence Wordsworth's rebuke, to take one example of the limits he found in the Scottish poet, that Burns's poetry was insufficiently mediated by a developed consciousness and as a result gave away too easily to the "impulses of nature, both with reference to himself and in describing the condition of others" (quoted in Davis 1998:139). Wordsworth's uneasy relationship to Burns and Scottish localism further complicates our understanding of how he might have influenced Pringle (who must surely have been aware of the infamous attacks on Wordsworth and the English "Lake Poets" mounted in

the *Edinburgh Review*). We can at least state that, whatever the influence of Wordsworth might have been, Pringle must have been aware that in choosing the English poet as a model or exemplar he was at the same time turning his back on an alternate Scottish tradition.

¹³ It is interesting that Pringle raises the possibility that the “terrible or sublime” in nature might in some way explain gypsy deviance. Even though the conjecture does not in this instance apply, Pringle seems willing to allow that the “terrible or sublime” in nature (and the formulation here is obviously derived from Edmund Burke) might indeed work negatively on the formation of consciousness. See my discussion of Pringle and the colonial sublime in the next chapter. Also relevant here is Pringle’s earlier contention that gypsies might be characterised as “picturesque”, despite (because of?) their social backwardness. Peter Garside has shown how Scott’s depiction of Meg Merrilies in *Guy Mannering* (1815), the very same novel with which these “Notices” are associated, was regarded at the time as picturesque (he cites a letter from Wordsworth to this effect). Garside argues for “a shift in the use of the word ‘picturesque’ from its heyday as a golden rule of the 1790s to something more like ‘showily picture-like’” (1994:145). I shall later argue that Pringle’s poetic depictions of indigenous people in his South African poetry draws on this template of the picturesque as ‘wild’ figure rather than variegated ground.

¹⁴ We are back here to the problem of the Scottish picturesque, this time with an explicit acknowledgement that the Scottish landscape occupies an anomalous position in regard to the standard requirements of picturesque description.

¹⁵ A.E. Voss (1991:88-91) makes a case for the “intellectual equipment gathered in Pringle’s pre-South African experience”(88) by examining the influences he was exposed to as a student of Latin (Humanities), Greek and Logic while enrolled at Edinburgh University between 1805 and 1807. Referring to lecture notes made by a student in 1802 of a Latin course offered by Professor John Hill. Voss speculates that since Pringle was also enrolled in Hill’s course three years later, he was likely to have attended these same lectures, or some variant thereof and to have been cognisant of their “Enlightenment rationalist conception of universal humanity” (89). He then refers to notes of lectures “which offer a kind of sunset epitome of the Enlightenment” given by Dugald Stewart in 1806-7, and conjectures that “it is not unfair to consider the ideas these lectures express as a part of Pringle’s intellectual background” (89). Voss does not mention the admiration for Stewart expressed in Pringle’s university poem, *The Institute*, which makes it likely that Pringle did indeed attend these lectures, or at the very least knew of Stewart’s views and approved them. Voss goes on to cite Stewart’s monogenism, his denunciation of the slave trade, his sympathy toward the Negroes, and a “particular mention” of the Southern African “caffers” who are described in physically admiring terms: “tall”, “elegant”, “graceful”, “strong”, etc (90). Voss concludes by quoting a passage in which the “idealism and confidence”(90) of the Enlightenment is prominent. In this passage Stewart, with Panglossian enthusiasm, anticipates a “golden age” of “liberty” in which the free press will play a central role in “kind[ling] the flame of liberty over the surface of the globe”(90).

While Voss is certainly justified in drawing our attention to this “intellectual equipment”, and the more meliorist aspects of Enlightenment thought that it represents, I have chosen to work from *within* Pringle’s Scottish writings as the most relevant evidence available to us of his intellectual background. Where I do refer to the Scottish Enlightenment in more general terms (see above), I have focussed on its understanding of “rude” societies, both within and without its borders, because of the obvious parallels with the South African context.

¹⁶ Chitnis points to the central importance of property in Scottish Enlightenment thought, and in particular its function in distinguishing “savage and barbarous societies from those which are refined” (1976:100). Property was not understood only as land ownership. Smith, for example, wrote that:

The appropriation of herds and flocks ... introduced an inequality of fortune ... which first gave rise to regular government. Till there be property, there can be no government, and the very end of which is to secure wealth, and to defend the rich from the poor. In this age of shepherds, if one man possessed five hundred oxen, and another had none at all, unless there was some government to secure them to him, he would not be allowed to possess them. (quoted in Chitnis 1976:104)

In terms of these criteria groupings such as the Xhosa would be considered “barbarians”, since there was differential ownership of cattle and protection of property; the Bushmen would be considered “savages” (hunter-gatherers); the Hottentot would have been less easy to categorise because of their dispersed and uneven communal groupings and alliances. Though Smith was writing in the 1750s, there is much to suggest that categories such as these were implicit in Pringle’s understanding of the social formation of indigenous people in South Africa

¹⁷ In his *Dark Vanishings* (2003) Patrick Brantlinger argues that “proleptic elegy” or “extermination discourse” informs a wide range of colonial rhetorics in the first half of the nineteenth century pertaining to vanishing or extinct peoples. He describes proleptic elegy as “mourn[ing] the lost object before it is completely lost” (2003:4) and cites several examples of Pringle’s South African poetry as typical of this genre. This may be so; however, Brantlinger’s failure to take into account the fact that for Pringle proleptic elegy was first experienced as a Scottish phenomenon vitiates his argument. It is not simply a case, as Brantlinger maintains, of a “discursive formation” which arises “wherever and whenever Europeans and white Americans encountered indigenous peoples” (1).

CHAPTER TWO

THE EASTERN CAPE FRONTIER: 1820-1822.

The years 1820 to 1822 were fraught with difficulty for Pringle: not only had he and his party to establish themselves in a remote frontier area, but they did so under conditions which did not initially promise eventual success. The fringes of the Eastern Cape were in many ways a hostile zone, inter-penetrated by the unequal and competing claims of the Xhosa, the Khoisan, a scattering of Boer farmers, and the settlers, with any rivalries normally settled in favour of the latter groups, backed up by local commandos or colonial troops. So isolated was the Pringle settlement that it was initially guarded by a small garrison provided by the colonial government to provide defence against “marauders from the waste country to the eastward” (1966:44). These “marauders” consisted chiefly of dispossessed Bushmen or San against whom Pringle was obliged on certain occasions to call in commandos to rout them out and recover stolen livestock. After Pringle had left Cape Town in 1825 and resided again in this area prior to leaving for England, the situation had worsened, and he was once again obliged to employ violent means to secure the safety of the settlement. In a letter to Fairbairn in 1825, Pringle wrote of this incident that “ You see how back settlers grow all savage and bloody by coming into continual collision with savages”(FB:1:52:B) – a candid admission that life on the frontier had a tendency to make “savages” of all its inhabitants, including Pringle himself. It was a rare admission, however, and in what follows I foreground the difficulty Pringle found in reconciling the structural violence inevitable to colonisation with the humanitarian principles with which his name is reflexively associated. Part of the argument of this chapter will be that, contrary to the impression that Pringle himself helped to create, there is no convincing evidence that he was significantly attached to the humanitarian cause in these early years on the frontier. Nor was Pringle ever able to confront in its full implication his own complicity in “the deeds of blood ... by which the colony has been polluted” (1966:228), although the

aftershocks of these unsettling experiences are registered, often in refracted or displaced forms, in his poetry and prose. In this chapter I begin by examining how Pringle initially focused on the antinomies of class rather than those of race to explain the predicaments afflicting the first phase of settlement. I then move on to look more closely at these social dynamics before examining the available archival evidence relating to the Scottish settlement itself, and conclude with an extended treatment of landscape description both in the *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* and in the poetry written in or about this period. I will argue that though Pringle's various registers of landscape are often regarded by critics as merely preliminary to the social engagement that marked his later writing, they do in fact represent his most powerful and persuasive rendering of the colonial experience.

The Pringle party disembarked in Algoa Bay in May 1820, and the first chapter of the *Narrative* details this arrival and subsequent events before the party's departure to their allotted lands in the interior of the colony. Two passages in particular stand out in this chapter, both in themselves and for their striking apposition, and in both Pringle negotiates, from very different perspectives, the troubled registers of race and class in the new colony. The first of these passages concerns the temporary encampment of settlers on the shores of Algoa Bay, which gave Pringle his first opportunity to view the British emigrants in their varied collectivity. The majority of the settlers occupied a vast tent-town, but behind them, on an elevation, were "two or three pavilion tents ... among the evergreen bushes". Pringle comments on this other camp as follows:

These were the encampments of some of the higher class of settlers, and evinced the taste of the occupants by the pleasant situations in which they were placed, and by the neatness and order of everything about them. Ladies and gentlemen, elegantly dressed, were seated in some of them with books in their hands; others were rambling among the shrubbery and over the little eminences, looking down upon the bustling beach and bay ... It was obvious that several of these families had been accustomed to enjoy the luxurious accommodations of refined society in England ... Foreseeing as I did in some degree (although certainly by no means the full extent), the difficulties and privations inevitable in such circumstances, I could not view this class of emigrants, with their elegant arrangements and appliances, without some melancholy misgivings as to their future fate. (1966:12)

English comfort about them. There were watermen, fishermen and sailors, from the Thames and English sea-ports, with the reckless and weather - beaten look usual in persons of their perilous and precarious professions. There were numerous groups of pale-visaged artisans and operative manufacturers, from London and other large towns; of whom doubtless a certain proportion were persons of highly reputable character and reputable habits; but a far larger proportion were squalid in their attire and domestic arrangements, and discontented and uncourteous in their demeanour. Lastly, there were parties of agricultural pauper labourers, sent out by the aid of their respective parishes, healthier perhaps than the class just mentioned, but not apparently happier in mind, nor less generally demoralised by the untoward influence of their former social condition. On the whole they formed a motley and unprepossessing collection of people. Guessing vaguely from my observations on this occasion, and on subsequent rambles through their locations, I should say that probably about a third part were persons of real respectability of character, and possessed of some worldly substance; but that the remaining two-thirds were for the most part composed of individuals of a very unpromising description – persons who had hung loose upon society – low in morals or desperate in circumstances. Enterprise many of these doubtless possessed in an eminent degree; but too many appeared to be idle, insolent, and drunken, and mutinously disposed toward their masters and superiors. And with such qualities it was not possible to augur very favourably of their future conduct and destiny, or of the welfare of those who had collected them in England, and whose success in occupying the country depended entirely on their steady industry. (13)

Read in conjunction with the passage quoted above, this description offers us a miniature elaboration of class and manners on an abruptly descending scale: the “middling classes”, to which Pringle himself belonged, are allowed the attributes of comfortably stock characters, and people of settled but marginal trades (“watermen, fishermen, and sailors”) escape outright censure, their “reckless appearance” notwithstanding. But the “numerous groups of pale-visaged artisans and operative manufacturers” from the urban areas are regarded with an undisguised *distaste*. Though Pringle concedes that “a certain proportion” of this group might qualify for a degree of class respectability, they are in a clear minority, and no exemptions at all are granted to “agricultural pauper labourers”: all alike are “persons who had hung loose upon society” and are likely to continue to do so. Just as Pringle had read the upper orders through certain indices of taste, here he performs much the same kind of operation. The disaffected class of artisans is described as being “squalid in their aspect, slovenly in their attire and domestic arrangements, and discontented and uncourteous in their demeanour”. These alleged improprieties invert many of the qualities so approved in their social superiors (domestic arrangement, dress, deportment) and such negative mirroring works to create the impression of the lower orders as perversely immune to social

improvement. Pringle's conclusions about their fitness for the arduous tasks of colonisation are predictable enough. What is surprising, given Pringle's reputation as liberal and humanitarian, is his inflexible sense of class hierarchy and the evident fear of its disruption. Why, we might ask, is Pringle so adamant in his condemnation of a class of people of whom he cannot possibly have any intimate knowledge? (note that Pringle does not offer a *single* individuated instance of behaviour; all his observations are based on appearance alone). Add to this the fact that there were, according to Pringle, "nearly a thousand souls" (1966:8) camped on the fringes of Algoa Bay and one begins to get some sense of the peremptoriness of these judgements and Pringle's unperturbed confidence in his own powers of observation.¹

We must also consider that these derogations of the working class were made in the context of extensive proletarian protest in Great Britain: the so-called "Peterloo Massacre" had taken place barely a year before this time, and Pringle appears acutely sensitive to the possibility that the "lower classes of emigrants" were, if not actually insurrectionary, then certainly "mutinously disposed toward their masters and superiors". Given Pringle's well-nigh iconic South African status in the "pantheon of liberal heroes" (Keegan 1996:1997), how then to explain his very evident aversion to the general disposition of the working classes, and an obvious fear of the potential for colonial subversion represented by this class? To answer this question we need first to turn to the context of these observations: Pringle's *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*. Before doing so, we might parenthetically take note that Pringle's account of the settler camps supplants the classic version of the colonial encounter in which colonist and indigene confront one another across the gulf of their mutual apprehension. Pringle had previously mentioned, in passing, and without further comment, "Tall Dutch-African boors" and "half-naked Hottentots" frantically herding their oxen "like so many mad dervishes" (1966:10). It is the lower class of settlers, however, who provoke in him feelings of uncertainty about the future: here the inaugural colonial 'scene' of the moment of arrival is marked not so much by anxieties of the unfamiliar as by the possibility of a disturbing increment of the known.

The first edition of the *Narrative* came out in London in 1834, eight years after Pringle left South Africa in 1826. Its version of Pringle's South African years is for this reason retrospective, and though it draws on material written when Pringle was in the country (and recycled material previously published in the British periodical press) there is no doubt that a certain amount of expedient revision informs the content of the 1834 publication. The one other account we have of Pringle's first months in the country ("The New Settlement at the Cape of Good Hope: Extract of a letter", Dated Nov 25, 1820) was published in a London paper, *The Courier*, sometime in 1821 and omits entirely the events and conjectures which make up the parallel version in the 1834 *Narrative*. The letter in *The Courier* refers only briefly to the encampment on the beach and concentrates instead on the "exceedingly obliging and attentive behaviour" of the naval and military officers responsible for organizing the disembarkation of the settlers, and the "several parties and balls" these officers held for the more respectable class of settler. (SAL: A2: 968.7033. np). Pringle also mentions how his letters of introduction to the Acting Governor and Colonial Secretary had ensured "zealous and friendly" official attention both to the needs of Pringle himself and to his party of Scottish settlers. The omission in this article of the account of the settler camps in the *Narrative* suggests that Pringle might well have worked up these passages retrospectively. Even more telling, however, is the omission in the *Courier* article of that section of the chapter which immediately follows: a description of a visit to the mission station at Bethelsdorp, often quoted as an early exemplification of Pringle's humanitarian sensibilities. In the course of his visit Pringle encountered, or alleged that he had encountered, a Xhosa woman and her child who were soon to be "given off into servitude among the white inhabitants of this district" for the purported crime of "crossing the line of prescribed demarkation" (sic) (15). Pringle's characterisation of the woman, as well as his observations on the mission station and its inhabitants, invite a reading which juxtaposes these descriptions with the immediately preceding account of the embryonic settler society on the shores of Algoa Bay.

Within a few days of his arrival, Pringle made his first “journey into the interior” to visit the mission station at Bethelsdorp, “the well known Hottentot village, about nine miles from the coast” (13). Accompanying him on this excursion was a “Hottentot boy” who acted as a guide. Pringle describes the boy’s dress (“a pair of leather trousers and a loose mantle of sheep skin” (13)) but does not comment on his disposition, or the exchanges, if any, that they had. His reactions to the landscape (to be commented upon later in more detail) are muted: generally he finds it “sterile” and “unenlivened” by diversifying detail. As he approaches the settlement, though, Pringle’s expectations are suddenly heightened:

I came in sight of the village just as the sun was setting ... The smoke of the fires just lighted to cook the evening meal of the homecoming herdsmen, was curling calmly in the serene evening air. The bleating of the flocks returning to the fold, the lowing of the kine to meet their young, and other pleasant rural sounds, recalling to my recollection all the pastoral associations of a Scottish glen, gave a very agreeable effect to my first view of this missionary village. When I entered the place, however, all associations connected with the rural scenery of Europe were at once dispelled. The groups of woolly-haired, swarthy-complexioned natives, many of whom were still dressed in the old sheepskin mantle or *caross*; the swarms of naked or half-naked children; the wigwam hovels of mud or reeds; the queer-shaped, low, thatched church, erected by old Vanderkemp; the long-legged, large-horned cattle; the broad-tailed African sheep, with hair instead of wool; the strange words of the evening salutation (*goeden avond* – “good evening”), courteously given, as I passed, by young and old; the uncouth clucking sounds of the Hottentot language spoken by some of them to each other; these, and a hundred other traits of wild and foreign character, made me feel that I was indeed far from the glens of Cheviot, or the pastoral groups of a Scottish hamlet – that I was at length in the Land of the Hottentot. (14-15)

One could scarcely hope for a more pointed expression of the European desire for a landscape and its people to confirm a paradigm regained, and Pringle’s synaesthetic conjuration of a “Scottish glen” in the midst of a landscape notable only for its featurelessness has about it a slightly hallucinatory quality, as though his desire is rushing ahead of him, half-creating what it sees. Such conjurations occur with some frequency in Pringle’s South African poetry as well, suggesting that colonial consciousness – at least at this early stage of colonisation – is so intimately layered with memory that it traffics in the illusory in order to forge some identification with the real. The sudden evacuation of this pastoral vision inverts the earlier “associations” in the most thoroughgoing way and in a

single extended sentence Pringle passes from an itemisation of discomfiting details to the frank admission that he is in a land (“the Land of the Hottentot”) far not only from home but from his imagination of what home ought to be. Pringle ‘reads’ the Hottentot in a manner which entails multiple depreciations, or at the very least consistently notes deviations from an implied norm: hair, skin, dress/undress, childrearing, habitation, language. Even the local stock (“hair instead of wool”) fail to conform to type. These are a series of indices which we might consider in some ways cognate with those of class and character Pringle had earlier employed, but this time with an ethnographic tilt.

Pringle’s unselfconscious assertion of “Europe” as the measure of the human, and his disappointment at the Hottentot’s manifest failure to meet this measure are ironic when one considers that Bethelsdorp is a missionary village, not the site of an unmediated indigeneity but the product of colonial sociocultural engineering. This irony undergoes a further elaboration when, a short paragraph later, Pringle describes a “Caffer woman” about to be “given out in servitude”:

Though I did not understand a single word she uttered, I have seldom been more struck with surprise and admiration. The language, to which she appeared to give full and forcible intonation, was highly musical and sonorous; her gestures were natural, graceful, and impressive, and her dark eyes and handsome bronze countenance were full of eloquent expression. Sometimes she pointed back towards her own country, and then to her children. Sometimes she raised her tones aloud, and shook her clenched hand, as if she denounced our injustice, and threatened us with the vengeance of her tribe. Then again she would melt into tears, as if imploring clemency, and mourning for her helpless little ones. Some of the villagers who had gathered around, being whole or half Caffers, understood her speech, and interpreted it in Dutch to the missionary; but he could do nothing to alter her destination, and could only return kind words to console her. (16)²

Positioned somewhere between evocation and report, this passage is remarkable (in its context) for its dramatic shifting of the earlier bias against the Hottentot. The Xhosa woman reverses the bad epiphany of the Bethelsdorp dusk, and presents Pringle not only with an impassioned example of the protest of the “helpless” against “injustice”, but also with a compelling spectacle. I have already indicated below that there are cogent reasons to believe that this passage is a retrospective invention on Pringle’s part, calculated, perhaps, to

establish his humanitarian and abolitionist credentials at a time when, as I will argue, this was not fully the case at all. Be that as it may, the fabrication is of interest in itself insofar as Pringle chooses to aestheticise the Xhosa woman into something very much like an object of taste: her language is “musical and sonorous” (contrast the “uncouth clucking sounds” of the Hottentots); her gestures are “natural, graceful, and impressive”; her face and eyes “full of eloquent expression”. There is no mention of her (un)dress (or that of her children), no hint of the derogation that attached to the description of the Hottentots. Why, one has to ask, has the Xhosa woman been granted this status? Part of the answer to this question might well be that Pringle, in 1834, writing from within the abolition movement, felt the need to draw upon a long tradition in which “literary models ... could only “humanize” Africans by portraying their nobility as European in nature and carriage” (Kaul 2000:256). As Pringle’s account of the visit to Bethelsdorp develops, however, the sheer anomaly of this description of the Xhosa woman becomes ever more apparent. In the very next paragraph, Pringle describes the evening service at the mission:

The demeanour of the audience was attentive and devout, and their singing of the missionary hymns was singularly pleasing and harmonious. The effect of the music was no doubt greatly heightened by the reflections which the sight of this African congregation naturally suggested. I saw before me the remnant of an aboriginal race, to whom this remote region, now occupied by white colonists, had at no distant period belonged. As I sat and listened to the soft and touching melody of the female voices, or gazed on the earnest, upturned, swarthy countenances of the aged men, who had probably spent their early days in the wild freedom of nomadic life, and worn out their middle life in the service of colonists, it was pleasing to think that *here*, and in a few other institutions such as this, the Christian humanity of Europe had done something to alleviate European oppression, by opening asylums where, at least, a *few* of the race were enabled to escape from heathen darkness into the glorious light and liberty of the gospel.
(16)

The Hottentots, gathered together in an “African congregation” and performing the devotional rituals of “the Christian humanity of Europe”, lose some of the alterity which had initially so discomposed Pringle and are now much more amenable to a melioristic reading, in which there does at least exist the possibility of their eventual recuperation into “the glorious light and liberty of the gospel”. Pringle’s invocation of mission Christianity as the still centre of the turbulent colonial world, his insistent italicisation (“*here*”; “*few*”) of its

place and function, reads very much like a determined attempt to impose meaning on what has previously been an extremely recalcitrant context. If in the previous paragraph Pringle faced the prospect of multiplying barbarisms (“even greater barbarians”), here he forestalls the threat of this possibility by opposing the “Christian humanity” of Europe to “European oppression”, a form of splitting which bifurcates the colonial subject by setting one form of his historical formation (Christian humanitarianism) against another (slavery, and with it a whole set of *ancien regime* political practices). The presence of indigenous “heathen darkness” does not so much disrupt or triangulate this binary as confirm it: both the unredeemed (but redeemable) indigene and the recidivist European are opposed by the same position, and, it must follow, are eventually or potentially assimilable to it. These juxtapositions of race and class offer us some awkward configurations. The gentry or “refined society”, the respectable members of the “middling” classes and the (largely) reprobate members of the British lower classes move into an implied alignment with indigenous peoples. In this ensemble of groups the partially Christianised Hottentots of the Bethelsdorp mission, described by Pringle as possessing “an aspect of civility and decent respect, of quietude and sober-mindedness”, are more promising candidates for civic decency than the “idle, insolent, and drunken” members of the British lower orders. Occupying the apex of this apparently non-racial hierarchy, however, and granting and controlling its gradations, is the “Christian humanity” of the white European represented, it is fully implied, by the respectable middle class, or those with serious aspirations toward it, and the gentry. These classes are the repository of “Christian humanity” and its secular incarnation in “the manners and polity of civilised life” (Pringle 1824:103) and they represent the point towards which other races and classes should ideally tend. This steeply vertical politics of class might be racially inclusive, but its conditions of admission are British and Protestant. An abstract universalism is thus circumscribed by an empiricism of concrete particulars that allows full inclusion to those willing to abandon one set of identities for another.³ Then there is the ambiguous position of the Xhosa woman: despite her iconic appeal, and despite Pringle’s professions of sympathy, the woman is by no means assimilable into the “*here*” and “*few*” of missionary endeavour. “[D]enounc[ing] our injustice and threaten[ing] the vengeance of her

tribe”, the Xhosa woman represents a much more material threat to the emerging colonial society than do the disaffected lower orders, and Pringle’s description of her serves to displace this threat into an affecting aestheticism. He invests the woman with a rhetoric, but the logic of her position is not explored – a logic that has as one of its entailments the fact that Pringle’s presence as a settler was dependent on the subjugation and eviction of Xhosa tribes, and with it the imposition of the very boundaries that the woman has allegedly crossed.

Pringle concludes his visit with a closer inspection of the settlement on the following morning; this inspection reveals numerous (unspecified) problems - “impediments to be overcome, and defects to be remedied of no slight description” but concludes that the tenor of the converts’ conduct shows “little that could with propriety be called *savage*” (17).

Pringle’s summation of the mission’s achievement is revealing in its assumptions about what is civilised, what savage, that had earlier proved so slippery:

I shall content myself with observing that, even at this period, whatever there might be visible at Bethelsdorp of African wildness and want of the accessories of civilisation, there was little that could with propriety be called *savage*. There was, even among the rudest of the people, an aspect of civility and decent respect, of quietude and sober-mindedness, which evinced that they were habitually under the control of far other principles than those which regulate the movements of mere savage men. They appeared to be in general a respectable and religious native peasantry; as yet, indeed, but partially reclaimed from some of the indolent habits of nomadic life, but obviously *progressing*, and, in many instances, already farther advanced intellectually than externally. (17)

There are some notable shifts in this assessment of the Hottentots. For a start, Pringle seems to have banished the unnerving expectations of the “Land of the Hottentot” that marked the first stages of his visit. Then a different set of criteria are applied to civilisational progress: earlier, Pringle had located the epicentre of the civilising mission in the “glorious light and liberty of the gospel”; now it is to be found in the “control of far other principles than those which regulate the movements of mere savage men”. These “principles” (“civility”; “decent respect; quietude”, etc) point to nothing so much as a deferential “peasantry”; but what is most revealing is their antithesis, namely, “the indolent habits of nomadic life”. The

reproach here is directed not at “heathen darkness” but at undesirable economic practices: nomadism (read pastoralism) and indolence (read the failure to practice a concerted agriculturalism, or, alternatively, the failure to enter a labour market). The invocations of a “glorious light and liberty” are now yoked to a blunt pragmatism: a “savage” is a person of “indolent habit”, rather than a person “habitually under the control” of a more productive “civility”. The italicised “progressing” makes it clear that the bottom line of this narrative of social evolution is economic “progress” and assimilation into Western social models, of which the first steps are settled agricultural practice in the material realm and Christian conversion in the spiritual. This is stadial theory and ‘improvement’ in its colonial application, where it differs very little from its Scottish prototypes.

Finally, it must be pointed out that in writing about his visit to Bethelsdorp, Pringle was not innocently recounting an incident that occurred soon after his arrival in the colony. He was fully aware, at the time of the publication of the *Narrative* in 1834, that mission stations in general functioned as paradigms of the humanitarian project, and that the conditions which prevailed in them were considered a testimony to the success, or potential success, of that project. Bethelsdorp was the first mission to be established on the Eastern Frontier by the London Missionary Society and had achieved considerable “political significance” and left a “powerful impression ... upon South African history” (Mostert 1992: 345). It is not necessary to pursue here the full details of Bethelsdorp’s status as an exemplary (or a failed) site of missionary improvement, but clearly much was at stake in how the station was perceived.⁴ Pringle’s account of his visit is undoubtedly framed by the intention to present the Bethelsdorp of 1820 as a viable enterprise. At one point he uses a temporal marker (“even at this period”) which indicates the retrospective character of what he is writing and the passages we have just examined act as a coda to Pringle’s South African experiences, framing them in a particular moral perspective, rather than performing the introductory function the *Narrative* assigns them. The closures and selectivities this coda performs become more apparent when we turn to those other writings which Pringle produced during the early stages of his residence in South Africa: the archive of letters which he wrote to colonial and

British government officials during his two year stay on the frontier and his first South African publication *Some Account of the Present State of the English Settlers in Albany, South Africa* published by Thomas Underwood in London in 1824.

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The Scottish party of settlers, of which Pringle was the head, was settled not in the Zuurveld, or the district of Albany, where the majority of settlers, mainly British, were located, but further eastwards in mountainous territory near the source of the Baviaan's River and abutting immediately onto the so-called neutral or ceded territory established after the Frontier War of 1819 had driven the Xhosa further into the interior. The land immediately under their occupation had formerly been occupied by the Slagtersnek rebels, who had been evicted from it, and adjacent farms were occupied by the relatives of these executed Boer rebels. From the very beginning of their settlement it was evident to Pringle and his party of Scottish agriculturalists that intensive cultivation was not an option for reasons of soil, climate, sufficient irrigation and an almost total lack of accessible markets. Extended pasturage, on the model of the Boer farmers in the district, was the most profitable option, but for this to be accomplished the settlers needed considerably more land, cheap labour, and military protection; if you add to this list permission to trade with indigenous peoples, then you have precisely those demands which were, amidst much rapacity and violence, to form the cornerstone of the settler state which was to develop over the course of the nineteenth century. That the Scottish party, unlike their Albany counterparts, managed at this time to get land, labour and military protection was in no small measure due to Pringle's shrewd and opportunistic bargaining with local colonial officials and the Colonial Office in London. I will not here pursue the full details of how this was accomplished, but an examination of the written record of Pringle's pragmatic response to the very real dangers and deprivations of life on the Frontier reveals a disposition startlingly at odds with the humanitarianism with which he is usually associated (and, if we are to believe him, was already in place when Pringle arrived at the Cape).

To begin with land. From very shortly after his arrival Pringle petitioned local Officials, the Acting Governor and the Colonial Secretary for an extension of the lands allocated to his party. These petitions were all granted. In addition, shortly after Pringle's departure for Cape Town, Somerset approved an extension of the party's land into a particularly fertile region of the ceded territory. Within the space of three years the Scottish party's allotment had increased from 1,100 acres to 20,000 acres (Morris 1982:169), and generations of Pringles have farmed this land. The problem of labour was not so easily solved. The original prospectus for the 1820 settlers had stipulated that no indigenous labour was to be employed, and that unskilled manual labour should be performed by those settlers from the appropriate metropolitan class. This did not happen as planned and the result was an acute shortage of labour. In Pringle's party, for example, two ploughmen were "disposed to mutiny" (1966:42) on account of the dangers they faced and duly left. The settlement would have foundered completely - as many others did - without adequate labour, but Pringle managed to circumvent this problem by means of a legal subterfuge when he acquired a "dozen families" (1966: 108) of half-caste or "bastaard" Hottentots as hired servants or to work on the settlement in exchange for their tenancy; both groups also acted as armed guards. I will omit the various details of this transaction, but the upshot was that Pringle persuaded the relevant officials that it did not violate the Caledon Code of 1809, and that in fact it represented a "liberal" interpretation of this statute. However, Pringle interpreted the Code rather tendentiously: in his view it amounted to "a legal obligation to be under contract of servitude" (1966:109). According to Pringle, the people settled on his lands and exchanging their labour were "receiv[ed] ... on our grounds as tenants merely, without also indenturing themselves in every case as our servants" (1966 109). He further comments that "By this means we greatly strengthened our own hands, while at the same time we had the satisfaction of protecting and benefiting these oppressed and despised people" (1966:109). A.M. Lewin Robinson, the editor of the 1966 *Narrative of a Residence* from which I am quoting, points out in yet another valuable footnote that the proclamation in question "did not condemn Hottentots to servitude but made it desirable for them to contract to work for

farmers" (1966:109). Whatever the limitations of the Caledon Code, it seems clear that Pringle's interpretation of it disingenuously creates the impression that, in acquiring these tenants and servants, altruism and advantage worked hand in hand.

Because of its isolated position the Scottish settlement had been guarded, at the expense of the colonial government, by a small detachment of Hottentot militia. As Pringle explains in the *Narrative*, the arrival of these tenants greatly increased the settlement's firepower:

As every adult male among them possessed at least a musket and a horse, and they looked to me as their immediate protector, I now found myself in the novel situation of a petty 'border chief'; being able to muster upwards of thirty armed horsemen (including our own party and the six Hottentot soldiers) at an hour's notice. We therefore considered our location perfectly secure from any serious attack from the wild natives in the vicinity. (1966: 110)

Pringle's jocular reference to himself as a Scottish "petty 'border chief'" commanding feudal vassalage from his dependants is, in the case of these servants and tenants, probably a more appropriate description of their condition than he realises: temporary tenant or hired servant status should not entail the obligation to risk one's life for the preservation of the master's livelihood and property. Pringle's reference to the dangers of "wild natives" is one of the few, very muted adversions in the *Narrative* to the Xhosa and Bushman presence in the area and the fear of their hostility. The correspondence with officials, however, reveals that it was a very real fear, and that it was acted upon without compunction. Two incidents in particular are recorded in the letters that are not only absent from the *Narrative* but in direct contradiction to its humanitarian concern for indigenous peoples. In the first Pringle, writing to the Colonial Secretary on the 30th of September 1821, records that "Six Caffre women supposed to be spies were lately seized on our grounds, but with due vigilance we trust to repel any attempt from these marauders" (SAL. A.FOL.968.7033 PRI: 34). What happened to these supposed spies, under whose orders they were seized, and why the women were considered spies at all, is not commented upon. In the second incident Pringle wrote to Harding, the Deputy Landrost of Cradock, on October the 7th 1821 reporting the participation of his party in a commando raid on "a considerable party of Bosjesman lurking

in the immediate vicinity of this location" (35) and requesting that Harding assist further raids by granting permission for neighbouring Boer farmers to join in the commandos. The request reads as follows:

We propose to make another attempt upon them tomorrow, but, as they very probably have shifted their quarters, and as it is supposed that they have stolen many horses from the Tarka, I respectfully submit to your consideration whether such a party of Boers as can be hastily collected in that quarter might not be sent to assist us in hunting them out, more particularly as it is a public service and as in fact we have not yet suffered any loss by them. (35)

It is not clear what the outcome of this raid was; the only other reference made to it is in a letter to the Colonial Secretary on November the 2nd of the same year in which Pringle reports that the offending party of Bushmen "appear now to have retired without having occasioned us any material losses" (38). In the *Narrative*, however, Pringle assumes an improbably high moral ground on the matter of commandos. He inveighs against the "legalised butcheries" of the Bushman and cites as an example an incident, also in 1821, when a Boer from the Cradock District described an attack on a group of Bushman "who had committed depredations in the Tarka" (1966: 229). Pringle condemns in the strongest terms the "indiscriminate slaughter" (229) in which this raid resulted and concludes his account of this and other raids with the warning that: "The frontier colonists, be they Dutch or British, must of necessity continue to be semi-barbarians as long as the commando system - the system of hostile reprisals - shall be encouraged or connived at" (231). The fact that Pringle omits to mention his own role in these raids, as well as other aspects of his conduct on the frontier, underlines once again how these rhetorics sometimes dissimulated Pringle's own involvement in the practices he so decried.

My intention in bringing to light the discrepancy between principle and conduct in Pringle's two year stay on the Eastern Cape frontier is not to unmask him as a hypocrite, or to devalue the sincerity of his later humanitarian pronouncements. I would seek rather to emphasise what is ineradicable even from the most humane forms of colonialism, and that is a complicity with colonial process. To borrow a phrase from the Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe, colonial invasion and settlement is "a structure and not an event" (1999:163);

the original colonial incursion might subsequently produce folds and variations within the invading party, some of which might be sharply opposed to others, but the structure persists and does not disappear into the anteriority of a past historical event. Considerations of context also bear on Pringle's conduct: in general those who belonged to the humanitarian lobby were either missionaries, merchants behind desks in Cape Town, or politicians and lobbyists in the principal cities of Britain. With the possible exception of some missionaries in the field, such people were never required to participate in the unavoidably coercive aspects of colonial settlement. To be a vulnerable frontier farmer and to be a humanitarian at the same time is an impossibly tall order, and Pringle, understandably, failed to meet it. One has also to consider that humanitarian rhetoric concerning the Cape Colony was, by its very nature, more invested in public persuasion than in objective assessment. Far from acting as a relay for the voice of the oppressed, such rhetorics tended instead to construct these groups as in various ways amenable to the civilising mission.⁵

Though published in 1824, after Pringle had left the frontier and engaged a whole new set of concerns in the very different setting of Cape Town, the *Account* describes events which have a more immediate relation to Pringle's years on the frontier (from June 1820 to August 1822) and it is in this context which I shall examine it. The *Account*, written in Pringle's capacity as secretary to the Society for the Relief of Distressed Settlers, marks his print debut as an advocate of colonial causes and was published in order to highlight the plight of those settlers who had remained on the land as agriculturalists and were facing destitution following drought, plagues of rust, and the desertion of their labourers. More tacitly, it was a response to a perceived crisis in the management of settler affairs by the Governor, Charles Somerset, and in particular to the fact that Somerset's policies favoured the 'artisan' class of settlers at the expense of 'respectable' settlers, disturbing the class hierarchies upon which the settlement was initially founded. The *Account* was intended as an appeal for relief funds to the metropolitan public, as well as to the colonial public in India, and was extremely successful, raising some ten thousand pounds. As the title indicates, it offers an account of the troubled settlement from its inception, as well as an appendix of correspondence from

either" distressed" settlers or those who had observed their condition. Although Pringle claims that the *Account* is an unadorned "statement" and a "plain detail of facts" (1824:2) it very often relies on the explicitly emotive appeal of "calamitous tale[s] ... of disaster and destitution" (3) to rouse the sympathies of its readers. Despite its "charitable purpose" and apparently programmatic intents, the *Account* acts in some ways as an extension of the passages describing the settler encampment and in others as a plea for a new form of governance in the colony.

Pringle begins the *Account* with a vigorous attack on the "fanciful delineations"(4) of the official prospectus which lured settlers, and in particular agricultural settlers, to sign up for the 1820 emigration scheme, and the "utopian delirium" which these prospects "excited ... in the public mind about South Africa" (6). Pringle in particular censures those descriptions of the Albany landscape by various "travellers and tourists" (5) whose praise of the "alluring aspects" of this landscape neglected to "look farther below the surface" (6) to determine the capacity of the land for productive cultivation. In an odd contradiction of his own descriptive practices, Pringle mocks the artifice of the "pictured medium" and "picturesque scenery" (5) for constructing an impression of local terrain that bears as much relation to its referent as a "landscape in fairyland". This awareness of a disjuncture between landscape descriptions informed by the protocols of taste and landscape descriptions informed by knowledge of soil type and climatological variation (Pringle supplies several examples), would seem to indicate a wariness towards the tendency of the former type of description to conceal the realities of the latter. Yet this wariness is never in evidence when Pringle writes about landscape in other contexts, where 'picturesque' description signals the presence of aesthetic as well as social and material productivity. Even in the *Account* itself, Pringle describes the "general aspect of the country" (he is referring to the Albany settlement) as being "fresh, pleasing, and picturesque" (16). In this contradiction we may perhaps read an unconscious acknowledgement on Pringle's part that any description of the local landscape that departs from the baldly empirical will necessarily reflect the various projections and desires of the colonial imagination.

Throughout the *Account* Pringle displays an unremittingly hostile attitude toward the lower classes: it is as though the worst-case scenario glimpsed on the beach at Algoa Bay is fatefully playing itself out. Most parties, including Pringle's own, were composed of a gradation of classes, with "servants, apprentices, and mechanics" (31) occupying the lowest rung. Pringle's central complaint against the conduct of the colonial government was that it had set no measures in place to bind this class to the "educated and superior settlers" (37), or to make proper distinctions between them in the allocation of certain resources. One upshot of this was that the labouring classes deserted their parties and took up other forms of employment in which many of them prospered, while the condition of the landed gentry entered a serious decline. In fact the *Account* is a quite explicit appeal for responses to the "disaster and destitution" (3) afflicting the "respectable" settlers ("heads of parties ... and independent families") (33) and it is couched in terms which invoke an unnatural inversion of class hierarchy. In a letter written at the time, Pringle lamented that:

the pyramid (sic) of society is ... turned topsey- turvey, the classes who once occupied the upper grades ... must necessarily sink ... and will, ere long ... be degraded into the servants and dependants of the more fortunate mechanics and mendicants who came out under them. (quoted in Lester 2001: 51)

Descriptions of settler distress in the correspondence appended to the *Account* draw emotively on the portrayal of the penury suffered by "respectable" settlers. A letter from the Albany settler Thomas Philips, for example, describes the plight of a "Mr. -----", formerly a "merchant of some eminence" and a man of the "most perfect propriety and purity of manners" (79) who had been a welcome guest in Philips's home. The former merchant ceased these visits when penury prevented him from wearing the decent dress required by social calling; he then abandoned his unproductive land in a fruitless quest for a more viable means of making a living. Philips, requested by the Society to "look further around in quest of the distressed" sent his son to seek out the fate of the man. He was found living with his wife and three children in a hut "of the sort called by the Hottentots *Hartebeest-huisje*" and

“composed of a thatched roof, merely placed on the ground, without walls” (80). The letter goes on to describe the various degrees of destitution in dress and diet suffered by the man and his family and concludes with a rending account of childbirth in these conditions: “[M]y son learned ... that Mrs. _____ had only been a week ago in child-bed, without medical or even female aid; and that two days afterwards, when in want of every necessary of life, the poor, wretched, despairing mother had nearly perished in the delirium of anguish and unmerited destitution” (80). Another correspondent expresses a similar dismay over the downward mobility suffered by members of the respectable classes:

I could tell you of sights I have seen... of gentleman, formerly officers in the British army, without shoes or stockings, ploughing with their milch cows, and their daughters washing clothes and digging potatoes! (105-6)

Even John Philip, later to be Pringle's humanitarian mentor, who provided support and assistance to the Society and served on its committee, lent his voice to this chorus of class dismay – and he too emphasised the destitution suffered by genteel women:

You may see the fingers, which seldom moved but to paint for the eye, or to charm the ear, tying up cattle or stopping the gaps of their enclosure: females, on whom, in England, the wind was scarcely allowed to blow, exposed to all the rages of the pitiless storm; mothers with large families, who used to have a servant to each child, without an individual to assist them in the drudgery of the house, the labour of the dairy, or the care of their children. (quoted in Nash, 1982:63)

These alarming scenarios were intended for an audience well-schooled in the consequences of a collapse in the social order and Pringle, like Philip, does not hesitate to play on middle class fears of such subversion, dramatized mainly through the figure of the middle class woman removed from male protection and forced out of a gendered domestic space into a menial one. The precariousness of class-identity in the colonies has been well documented (cf Cannadine 2002; McKenzie 2004), but in the Eastern Cape of the 1820s the respectable classes obviously felt that their hereditary or earned identity was under excessive threat. As Alan Lester remarks, they confronted a “subversion of more than one naturalised order ... Not only was the established class hierarchy being undermined; so too was the respectable

male's patriarchal ability to shield the women of his class" (2001:53). While it may be the case that this class of settler did suffer unduly from being placed in situations which hindered their advancement and that they might well have deserved the special assistance the Society sought to provide for them, we need nonetheless to question the corollary assertion made by Pringle – i.e. that middle class decline had an inverse relation to lower class ascension. We might note, and this is a point to which we shall return, that these fears of class subversion are a colonial variant of fears of 'Jacobinism' and the 'radical' so widespread in Great Britain since 1789 and though Pringle and the correspondents in the *Account* do not employ a political vocabulary, the turning "topsy-turvey" of the colonial world is everywhere imbued with these associations.

The "mechanics and mendicants" as Pringle disparagingly calls them, are given short shrift in the *Account*. Colonial policy has led to their being "supported in idle and contumacious habits, to their own lasting detriment as well as that of their employers" (31); they have been "spoil[ed]", and "a good many of this class, and other ill-selected immigrants, have conducted themselves with much reprehensible idleness, improvidence, and presumption" (33). Though Pringle does concede that the fanning out into the colony of the labouring and artisanal class "will ultimately lead to beneficial results, both for themselves and the colony" (34), he is adamant that they do not deserve assistance of any sort: "[T]here can be little question that these classes have generally improved their condition by emigrating; and if any of them are *now* distressed ... it may be presumed, without breach of charity, that they deserve to suffer, and ought not to be inconsiderately relieved" (34). But how accurate is Pringle's assessment of the qualities of this class? If we go to the most comprehensive record we have of the rigours of the first years of emigration, the "mechanics and mendicants" tell us a very different story.

The Chronicle of Jeremiah Goldswain, described by its editor as "probably the fullest" (Long 1946: ix) account of the Albany settlement, covers the years 1819 to 1858 and consists of the daily records of a sawyer from Buckinghamshire. *The Chronicle* has considerable interest

not only for the account it offers of these years, but also because its rough literacy and unschooled directness might well tell us more about the experiential texture of frontier life than more lettered accounts conscious of the proprieties of reader expectation. We might bridle at Goldswain's description of, for example, "Theas Hottentots" as "the most disposable creatours that ever I saw" (20) or his fascinated revulsion at the elongation of Xhosa women's breasts ("when the child is older they women throw thear Brest over thear shoulder and after they have had three or four Children thear Brestes will ang down like two peaces of skin." (101)), but the very ingenuousness of such remarks leaves one in little doubt of their candour. When we come to Goldswain's depiction of class relations in the colony he tells a story which is significantly at variance with Pringle's account of the asocial behaviour of the lower orders. Goldswain came out in a party whose proprietary head was William Wait, a merchant. Both on the voyage over, and soon after their arrival, Wait proved an inflexible master with criminal tendencies (he had suborned his men to steal supplies when encamped at Algoa Bay). Matters reached a head between the merchant and his party of indentured workers when Wait attempted to hold them in thrall by refusing wages and provisions. Goldswain's version of these events runs as follows:

[A]nd when we saw Mr. and Mrs. Wait comfutley situvatied in their new howes and every thing were planted we now thought it Quit time to ask for sumthing for our selves as we ware giting nothing more then the ¾ of pound of meal ... and two pounds of verey poor meat ... we asked our master if he could not pay ous our wages or sum part of what was coming to us ... he informd us that he was not able to pay us aney part of it ... We then said whould he Give us our discharge: he posatively declard that he wold not: then we asked him if he wold give us more foode as the rashens was not serfishent for us to live on and to work so hard as we had don and more so thoues men that had wives and Children for the Children were crien for vities. At this time his ancens were: I cannot for the Government do not alow aney more ... (1946:23)

In a stubborn and moving quest for justice, Goldswain and other disaffected workers trekked by foot to Grahamstown to obtain redress ("We rived thear juest as the sun was setting with our feet blisterd so that I could scasley walk" (24)); after eliciting an official promise from Wait that he would respond to their grievances they returned to their settlement. Nothing came of this and so the landrost at Grahamstown was again petitioned. This time a constable

was sent out to the settlement with a summons for Wait; the men were then ordered to reappear in Grahamstown to press their charges. From there, however, they were obliged to walk a hundred miles to Uitenhage in order to appear before the appropriate official. But they arrived in Uitenhage only to be told that there had been an administrative blunder and that they were to return to Grahamstown. Eventually, after further delays caused by the dilatory and scheming Wait, the men were given their discharge: “we ware all to have our Discharge and that we ware not to have our clame on our Master or ware he to have aney clame what ever on ous and that only they marred men were ware to go to fetch our boxes and our things” (35). Goldswain’s expressive ambit does not encompass the abstractions of rights, redress and justice, but its very particularity reveals how high-handedly and indifferently lower class settlers could be treated by their settler superiors as well as by colonial officials.

Goldswain’s account of this matter makes it clear that more was at stake than mere “presumption” in the working class settlers’ revolt against their masters. Clifton Crais, for example, argues that “much of the ‘spirit of insubordination’” widely evident in the relations between British masters and servants, “stemmed from the fact that servants frequently shared the same idealised vision of the elite culture the wealthier immigrants hoped to establish” (1992:92). In the dispute over a free press at the Cape, Pringle never hesitated to invoke the ‘natural’ rights of British subjects in his disputes with colonial officials, yet his own conception of these rights was clearly class-based. In due course these class fractures within the settler community would close over as they found a common solidarity in the face of increasing indigenous opposition to their presence. The working class settlers who resisted the impositions of class hierarchy in the colonial context did not translate these egalitarian expectations into racial relations; in an ironic reversal, their politics have survived in historical memory as racist and rapaciously acquisitive, while the conservative, middleclass politics of humanitarianism are largely remembered as a positive, if limited, force for racial equality.

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Before coming to a consideration of the poetry Pringle wrote either during this period or dealing with this period, we need finally to consider those writings on landscape which occur with some frequency in the sections of the *Narrative* spanning the years 1820 to 1822, and making up nine of the fifteen chapters of that publication. First it must be remarked that the *Narrative*, at least in part, marks a new kind of writing about South Africa in that its perspectives are not solely governed by the expectations of the itinerant, journeying through the country, surveying its resources, and exhibiting the “mutual engagement between natural history and European economic and political expansionism” (Pratt 1992:38) typical of colonial travel writing in this period. Although there are occasions when Pringle also writes in this dissociated mode, often when describing natural phenomena, there are numerous instances when he writes from the perspective of someone whose own future is invested in what he sees – the passages about Bethelsdorp, however revised or invented, are an example of this. Very often Pringle’s writings on landscape, in particular, go well beyond the objectivity of topographical description towards a figuration of the possibility, or impossibility, of settlement itself – a figuration that then finds extension, and sometimes curtailment, in the poetry in which landscape is the predominant element. The chapters of the *Narrative* describing the first years of settlement on the frontier offer us a heterogenous mixture of landscape description, a taxonomy of fauna and flora, observations on animal behaviour, details of progress on the settlement, a medley of anecdotal accounts of historical and other events and so forth. The chapter subheadings, with their telegraphed condensations of content separated by dashes, might offer the appearance of coherence or susceptibility to summary but the paratactic yoking of discrete particulars (“Valley of the White River – Moravian Settlement of Enon – Anecdotes of the Kaffir Wars –”) indicates something different: the inability to cast the narrative into a containing or generically stable structure. This generic instability is especially evident in the final three chapters, hurriedly

written in the period immediately preceding the book's publication, which veer off into a customs and manners account of indigenous peoples and the aggrandized rhetoric which characterized Pringle's pronouncements on colonial reform at that time. Even though most of the book is plotted along a loose sequence following through from the first phases of settlement to Pringle's departure some five years later, this temporal scaffolding would collapse without the weight of the unrelated particulars that pile up around it. The disaggregated structure of the *Narrative* is also evident in the fact that many sections were first published in the periodical press in the 1820s and 30s as self-contained "Tales" or "Adventures". The *Narrative* is not really a narrative at all; it is something more like an eclectic catalogue of events, sights, incidents, observations, anecdotes, polemical interventions - and, as we have seen, retrospective self-inventions - strung together along a loose temporal line. The generic eclecticism of the *Narrative* is suggestive in its anticipation of later colonial fiction, which is also marked by formal instability, particularly the slippage between realism and romance; for our immediate purposes, however, this instability points us toward the difficulties of finding ways to fit the colonial into received templates of representation, a difficulty particularly evident in the descriptions of landscape where Pringle often registers reactions fraught with ambivalence and even fear. We should reiterate that for Pringle landscape description is not a matter of mere topographical detail: it is at the deepest level an investment in - or a divestment of - identity itself. Landscape, or the "face of the country", as travel writers of the period referred to it, as though it were a physiognomy whose decipherment could lead to a revelation of inner character, must be made habitable for the colonizer not only through acts of material transformation or classificatory control, but also through acts of imaginative reclamation whose "shaping perception ... makes the difference between raw matter and landscape" (Schama 1996:10).

The first extended depiction of landscape in the *Narrative* is a ship deck view of the Eastern Cape coast, just beyond the Knysna lagoon - approximately the territory in which the settlers were to be placed.

This [the ship's tacking off the coast] gave us an excellent opportunity of surveying the coast scenery of Auteniqualand and Zitzikamma, which is of a very striking character. The land rises abruptly from the shore in massive mountain ridges, clothed with forests of large timber, and swelling into the back ground into lofty serrated peaks of naked rock. As we passed headland after headland, the sylvan recesses of the bays and mountains opened successively to our gaze, like a magnificent panorama, continually unfolding new features, or exhibiting new combinations of scenery, in which the soft and the stupendous, the monotonous and the picturesque, were strangely blended. The aspect of the whole was impressive, but somber; beautiful, but somewhat savage. There was the grandeur and the grace of nature, majestic and untamed; and there was likewise that air of *lonesomeness* and dreary *wildness*, which a country unmarked by the traces of human industry or of human residence seldom fails to exhibit to the view of civilized man ... the sublimely stern aspect of the country, so different from the rich tameness of ordinary English scenery, seemed to strike many of the *Southron* [English] with a degree of awe approaching to consternation. The Scotch, on the contrary, as the stirring recollections of their native land were vividly called up by the rugged peaks and shaggy declivities of this wild coast, were strongly affected, like all true mountaineers on such occasions. Some were excited to extravagant spirits; others silently shed tears. (1966:6-7)

In this first sighting or “surveying” of the South African landscape, Pringle employs the two standard tropes of landscape description, the sublime and the picturesque, along with their usual connotations. They are, however, “strangely blended”, somehow not the usual sum of their parts: “[I]mpressive, but sombre; beautiful, but somewhat savage”. We might gloss the oxymoronic uneasiness of the above description as sublime but productive of the sombre rather than an exhilarating sense of the illimitable, and beautiful or picturesque but lacking ordered containment. Similarly, the “grandeur and grace of nature” is offset by (“there was likewise”) a simultaneous sense of the strongly scored “*lonesomeness* and *wildness*”.⁶ Despite these complications there is an imperious presumptiveness in the very syntax of these observations: the landscape offers itself to Pringle’s gaze with a passive allure - “opening”, “unfolding” and “exhibiting” - as though it were a vast and empty “panorama” laid out for survey by “civilized man” rather than another country with geographical and other features appropriate to its own social organization. Though Pringle’s gaze over the colonial landscape will often be directed by the imperious expectation that it is there to be commanded or to be mapped onto the co-ordinates of the ways of seeing he has brought with him, the landscape will - as this passage already demonstrates - in equal and sometimes greater measure also disturb these expectations.

In Pringle's subsequent experience as a settler, these initial apprehensions about the "aspect" of the country he was entering do not fully abate. In his first venture into the interior – as he rides from Algoa Bay towards Bethelsdorp – he complains of the emptiness and monotony of a landscape "unenlivened" by human presence, the blankness of its features "relieved" only by some "lofty and picturesque mountains" in the distance. The fact that Pringle immediately establishes such a polarity – let us call it a polarity between the monotonous and the picturesque – is a clear indication that the latter category possesses for him an associational significance that goes beyond mere 'pleasure'. It is as though Pringle is eagerly scanning the surrounding country for sights – and sites – that offer the legible differentiations of the picturesque rather than the unreadable blankness of landscape that is merely "monotonous". As Pringle's party later journeys toward the land allocated to them, he continues to read the landscape in terms which emphasise privation – "a country so waste and lonesome that it seemed almost totally devoid of inhabitants" (27) – occasionally punctuated by more picturesque detail. In the following short passage we see the often abrupt transition between the two types of landscape: "The features of the country changed alternately from dark jungle to rich park-like scenery, embellished with graceful clumps of evergreens; and from that again to the desolate sterility of savage mountains, or of parched and desert plains ..." (26). Pringle's use of the term "picturesque" is not definitionally specific; in general application it exists mainly as an antonym to the predominantly "waste" or "sterile" or "savage" character of the landscape. Its substantive applications are varied, as the following passage illustrates:

The scenery of the upper part of the dell is very picturesque. Accompanying the course of a stream, as it meanders through the meadows, you have, on the right, lofty hills covered with woods of evergreens, and broken by *kloofs* or subsidiary dells, filled with large forest timber. On the left the hills are lower, but also covered with copsewood, and in many places diversified by rocks and cliffs of deep red and other lively colours ... At every turn the outline of the hills varies, presenting new points of picturesque scenery; while, scattered through the meadows, or bending over the river margin, appear little clumps of evergreens, willows, and acacias; and sometimes groves of lofty forest-trees ... enrich the vale with a stately beauty not always met with in

South African landscape. This combination of the wild, the grand, and the beautiful, is heightened in its effect by the exotic appearance of the vegetation ... The meadows, too, or savannahs along the river banks, are richly embellished ... with large purple flowers ... ". (84-5)

There is a painterly attention to detail in this passage most evident in verbs which serve a compositional purpose by evoking variation in perspective, ("At every turn the outlines of the hills *varies, presenting* new points ...) or verbs ("diversified by", "enrich", "heightened", "embellished") which emphasise textural nuance. Pringle responds to this scene, which he acknowledges as atypical, with a lyricism of particularity rare in his descriptions of South African landscape. In contrastive terms, this is a veritable sanctuary of the picturesque, rich in the "variety, ornamentation, and detail" (Bermingham 1994:87) typical of picturesque taste. Even here, however, in what is the most extended picturesque description in the *Narrative*, this is not a made-to-order metropolitan picturesque but a colonial hybrid, a "combination of the wild, the grand, and the beautiful" even further "heightened" by the "exotic". The very fact that Pringle 'composes' this passage with such detail is an indication that such a landscape has a significance that goes beyond its topographical features: it is a landscape whose differentiated detail, despite its excess, is responsive to European aesthetic categories. In other passages the picturesque can encompass differentiations internal to a single landscape ("The verdant pastures and smooth grassy knolls formed an agreeable contrast to the with the dark masses of forest" (105) or it can be applied to an artful collaboration between the natural and the human ("these cabins looked extremely handsome and picturesque ... peeping out from the skirts of the ancient forest or embowered in some romantic wood or evergreen shrubbery" (106)). With the exception of the vertical rise of mountains and the strongly marked colours of rocks and cliffs in the passage quoted above, Pringle's representations of the picturesque emphasise the presence of vegetation and the association of detail permitted by a diversity of landscape features and arrangements. In short, the colonial landscape becomes picturesque when it resembles, however imperfectly, those metropolitan landscapes the picturesque is typically thought to describe.

We have already noted Pringle's use of picturesque conventions in *The Autumnal Excursion*, even though he clearly identifies the "wild", "brown", and "bare" Scottish landscape as being "pastoral" rather than picturesque, and attributes to this landscape a "simple and tender charm" whose compensations are "seldom surpassed by scenery far more varied and picturesque" (1819:117). For Pringle the prototypical picturesque is to be found in the "richest bower" of "Merry England's cultured fields" or what in the *Narrative* he calls the "rich tameness of ordinary English scenery" (7). In *The Autumnal Excursion* Pringle surmounted the resistance of the Scottish landscape to picturesque modelling simply by contriving more suitable surroundings, thereby suggesting that the picturesque is as much about a way of looking at landscape as it is about landscape itself. In his South African prose writings, the picturesque makes its appearance rather tentatively; it is occasional to the landscape, rather than its defining feature, and it is often "wild" rather than "tame" in its appearance, the lack of widespread cultivation no doubt playing a part in this.⁷ Curiously, Pringle never calls up his Scottish category of the "pastoral" to designate those aspects of the South African landscape that are also "brown" and "bare" and chooses instead to counterpose a version of the picturesque to a blank or lifeless landscape which evokes nothing but the desire to travel beyond it. Although nineteenth-century South African landscape evocations are thought by J.M. Coetzee to refuse the "rhetoric of the sublime", especially in relation to the "vast "empty" spaces of the hinterland" (1988:49), this is not altogether the case with Pringle. Pringle's sublime is not that of illimitable space but a geological or tectonic sublime whose inexpressible force is located in the earth itself; allied to this sublime, and in a slightly lower key, is a sublime of landscape infused with a disquieting sense of historical violence.

In March 1821, barely a year after his arrival there, Pringle left the settlement at Glen Lynden to accompany Robert Hart, the superintendent of a government farm in Somerset East, "on a journey which he had occasion to make through a part of the country very seldom traversed even by the colonists" (1966:77). The journey would take Pringle into mountainous and wooded territory that was both visually spectacular and the scene of violent conflict between the Xhosa and colonial forces a decade earlier. The first leg of the

journey was to a Moravian mission at Enon and required an ascent of the successive ridges of the Zureberg (Suurberg) mountains, and its initial stages are described by Pringle in terms already familiar to us: the landscape is “monotonous” and “enlivened only now and then” by the presence of indigenous fauna. As the ascent continues, Pringle finds distraction in the scattered novelty of bird, plant and animal life even though, typically, he recognizes that the terrain has no productive capacity and is “unprofitable for the occupation of civilised man”. Then, as if to counter this recognition, or at least to soften its implications, he invokes the religious language of providential design, the “beneficent arrangements of a creation where nothing – not even the sterile desert or naked rock – is placed without design, or left utterly unproductive” (80). Pringle then goes on to liken what he calls the “climate and productions” of the region to “ancient Palestine” and quotes from the *Psalms* to corroborate this comparison. The same sentiments were earlier expressed by Pringle shortly after the arrival at the Baviaan’s River settlement where he observed that: “On this and other occasions the scenery and productions of the country reminded us in the most forcible manner of the imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures” (38) before quoting again from the *Psalms*. On both these occasions it is as though Pringle, denied the productive associations of the picturesque, must go back to an older biblical template to map or make sense of the barrenness of the country. It is all the more curious, then, that immediately after Pringle appeals to providential design as evidence that the Zureberg is not simply a useless excrescence of nature, he should encounter a scene that entirely baffles his imagination. The occasion is a forced ascent to the top of a mountain ridge:

Here my companion had told me that an extraordinary prospect awaited us: but all my previous conceptions fell infinitely short of the reality. On the left, a billowy chaos of naked mountains, rocks, precipices, and yawning abysses, that looked as if hurled together by some prodigious convulsion of nature, appalled and bewildered the imagination. It seemed as if this congeries of gigantic crags, or rather the eternal hills themselves, had been tumultuously uptorn and heaved together, in some pre-adamite conflict of angelic hosts, with all the veins and strata of their deep foundations disrupted, bent, and twisted in the struggle into a thousand fantastic shapes; while, over the lower declivities and deep-sunk dells, a dark impenetrable forest spread its shaggy skirts, and added to the whole a character of still more wild and savage sublimity. (81)

This extraordinary passage, which splices back in time to the elemental or pre-human, traumatically disrupts the referential schemata into which Pringle has hitherto transcribed his experience of landscape. The usual perceptual or phenomenological distance between viewer and viewed evident in Pringle's other landscape descriptions undergoes a bewildering reversal: here the colossal, demonic landscape overwhelms the viewer, forcing him to confront it on terms which are entirely its own. The "imagination" which in the picturesque mode is transformative, working on the landscape, is stunned into "appalled and bewildered" passivity – and though Pringle does not allude to this, the appeal to providential "design" in the preceding paragraph is made to appear wishful. Even when Pringle's gaze shifts downward and away from the "billowy chaos" of the mountains, it encounters opaque and sunken forests whose "still more wild and savage sublimity" is rendered in metaphors of a disturbingly primordial sexuality. The unnerving and infernal intensities of this autochthonous or indigenous sublime threaten and abase the imagination and carry with them the danger of self-dissolution. Why, we must ask, does the sublime, so productive an aesthetic category in its European context, become utterly unbearable when transposed onto the experience of a South African landscape? I will work through other aspects of Pringle's response to a local sublime before returning to this question, but one might remark that approximately a week later Pringle returned to the same spot by a different route and in the early hours of the morning. This time the "savage scene" is rendered as follows:

[T]he mists which hung upon the mountain, lifting or lowering their fleecy folds as we advanced, partially revealed, and again enshrouded, the chaotic labyrinth which extended around and beneath us – presenting sometimes glimpses of wild sylvan beauty almost elysian, and then, on a sudden, unfolding just beneath us a gulf of black rocks and forests scathed by fire, such as poetic fancy might picture for the habitation of infernal demons. The scenery of the Zureberg far surpassed anything of the kind I had witnessed elsewhere, or formed a conception of from the descriptions of others. (95-6)

In this second viewing, the scene is softened and put into manageable perspective by being intermittent and framed in mist. The "chaotic labyrinth" no longer appalls and bewilders to quite the same degree: it allows controlled "glimpses" of both "wild sylvan beauty" and a blackened fire-ravaged landscape which, with an additive dose of "poetic fancy", might be

imagined as infernal. Despite this therapeutic lowering of the visual intensity of the scene, Pringle still marks it as exceptional, outside the range of his experience. What he does not do, at least in any self-conscious way, is pose to himself or his readers the possibility that scenes such as this might require a rethinking or a reworking of the aesthetics of landscape appreciation. We shall later examine how Pringle attempts to re-work the sublime within the context of the picturesque in “Evening Rambles”, a poem which reveals oblique and displaced traces of the Zureberg experience.

There is another poem, however, in which this experience undergoes the paradox of being registered and repressed at the same time. The sonnet “Enon” was first published in *The South African Journal* in 1824 where it bore the title “Sonnet. Written on a Visit to the Moravian Missionary Institution of Enon, or White Water, South Africa” and is dated April 1821. This means that Pringle must have written the poem immediately after his trip. It must be mentioned here that Pringle arrived at the mission, situated in a valley below the Zureberg mountains, at nightfall on the same day as the experiences described above. Pringle found Enon to be an exemplary site of missionary endeavour, in particular the meticulously organized regularity of daily labour and devotional practice. Pringle’s time at Enon might be said to constitute something like an inversion of the chaotic perceptual assault of the Zureberg, and what is fascinating about the sonnet, unexceptional though it might be, is how Pringle again sexualizes this visually convulsive experience, only to contain it within a redemptive Christian ethic of labour in the wilderness:

By Heaven directed, by the World reviled,
Amidst the wilderness they sought a home,
Where beasts of prey and men of murder roam,
And untamed Nature holds her revels wild.
There, on their pious toils their MASTER smiled,
And prospered them, beyond the thoughts of men,
Till in the satyr’s haunt and dragon’s den
A garden bloomed and savage hordes grew mild (ll. 1-8)

Pringle muffles the “savage sublimity” of the Zureberg by a double conversion: firstly, “untamed Nature”, associated with sexually demonic “revels” and a “satyr’s haunt”, submits

to the improvement of cultivation and becomes a pastoral garden in the wilderness; secondly, the “men of murder” and “savage hordes” who populate the area are brought under civilizing sedation. Thus Pringle recasts the savage sublime as transgressive and gives it a more fully sexual figuration than in the passage above, while at the same time erasing its affective power by consigning it to a pre-history and then writing it into a redemptive Christian narrative. The repressive and transferential aspects of this reconfiguring hardly need stating; for our purposes, though, what is of interest is that the sublime has been removed from a discourse concerned with landscape and been reformulated as a negative element within another discourse altogether: religion. Much as it does in the passages where Pringle likens the settler landscape to ancient Palestine, religious discourse works behind an aesthetics or poetics of landscape, filling in the gaps left by the failure of the latter discourse fully to account for or make adequate sense of its subject. I leave aside, for the moment, the providential narrative of colonial redemption in this poem. Suffice it to say that in this first poem Pringle sounds a note which will, in time, become the dominant motif of his South African poetry

Finally, there are those occasions when landscape is viewed not solely as the terrain of nature and its “scenes and productions” but as bearing the imprint of the historical. This is not to say that Pringle’s landscape observations, whatever form they might take, are not themselves fully historical, but that there is a marked tendency to elide those processes which made, and were still making, the landscape available for “survey” in the first place. There are occasions in the *Narrative*, however, when this is not the case. Pringle’s mention of “men of murder” and “savage hordes” in the “Enon” sonnet, for example, is a reference to an incident in the 1811 campaign to drive the Xhosa out of the territory later inhabited by the 1820 settlers, as well as to more recent acts of violence following the “invasion and devastation”(90) of the 1818 Frontier war. In a passage immediately after the second description of the Zureberg quoted above, Pringle writes: “In the midst of this mountainous scenery we arrived at a spot where the elder Stockenstrom, landdrost of Graaf-Reinet, had been treacherously slain by the Caffers in 1811” (96). Pringle then goes on to describe, in

some detail, the events which resulted in the death of Stockenstrom and fourteen of his men. He concludes this account as follows:

From this spot I looked round on the scenery which I have attempted to describe; and could well fancy the effect of the savage shout of exultation (described to me with sensations of horror by some of those who were present) pealed forth by two or three thousand barbarians, as they stood over their fallen enemies ... The sonorous power of the Caffer voice, the stern and stupendous features of the country around, and the dismal spectacle of the field of slain, must have given to the scene at that moment a character indescribably terrific and appalling. (101)

Here the visual scene is infused with historical memory and the violence of the colonial past impinges on the present in a manner that, like the savage sublime itself, threatens the limits of expressivity. The crucial difference is that Pringle's evocation of the events of 1811 is not the product of an intense immediacy; they depend upon the mediations of "fancy" to bring together landscape and historical event. Such imaginative moments might be rare in Pringle, but they signal the emergence of something like a historicized poetics of the landscape borne out of the colonial encounter itself.

Another such moment occurs when Pringle is again on an "excursion", this time into the 'ceded' or 'neutral' territory from which the Xhosa had been driven in order to create a buffer zone between them and the impending British settlement. Pringle was well aware of these circumstances: "During my residence at Eildon", he writes, "I made various exploratory excursions into the waste country lying between our valley and the New Caffer Frontier, which had remained totally unoccupied since the native inhabitants were driven out of it in 1819" (115). The reference to "waste country" acknowledges depopulation as an act of colonial intervention rather than an inherent attribute; nor is Pringle insensitive to the effects such interventions have on the landscape itself.

The scenery both of this and of the other chief branches of the Koonap river was of a very impressive character. The aspect of the country, though wild, was rich and beautiful. It was watered by numerous rivulets, and finely diversified with lofty mountains and winding vales, with picturesque rocks and shaggy jungles, open upland pastures, and fertile meadows along the

river margins, sprinkled as usual with willows and acacias, and occasionally with groves of stately geelhout ... But the remains of Caffer hamlets, scattered through every grassy nook and dell, and now fast crumbling to decay, excited reflections of a very melancholy character, and occasionally increased, even to the most painful degree, the feeling of dreary *lonesomeness* which the wild grandeur of the scenery tended to excite.
(117)

In a manner reminiscent of Pringle's earlier description of coastal scenery, this passage again underscores the contrariety of the local landscape: it has a "wild grandeur" that hints at the sublime, while being at the same time "rich and beautiful" in the picturesque mode. But it is the final sentence of the passage, which focuses our attention on the eviction of the land's original inhabitants, which even further complicates these already contradictory schemas. The "dreary *lonesomeness*" which afflicts Pringle is first of all attributed to the "wild grandeur of the scenery", whereas earlier a similarly italicized "lonesomeness" was held to result from the fact that the land was "unmarked" by signs of industry or habitation. In this passage "lonesomeness", the condition of feeling alone or having no sense of an integral relationship with one's surroundings, is a consequence of a colonial landscape which suggests sublimity but which does not invite any sense of participatory belonging. Adding to this original estrangement, and exacerbating it even to the "most painful degree" are the "melancholy" thoughts or "reflections" occasioned by the sight of the abandoned Xhosa villages which, unlike European ruins, do not bear the imprint of gradual temporal erosion and are instead abruptly disappearing into the landscape. Pringle does not elaborate on the nature of his "reflections", but we may reasonably assume that their "melancholy" cast is not unrelated to this evidence of the aftermath of colonial conquest and eviction. The chain of association here is interesting in that the sight of the derelict villages in the homely "nook[s]" and "dell[s]" does not only evoke feelings or thoughts of its own; it also increases the intensity of the alienating or estranging emotions already experienced as an effect of the landscape itself. Just as in the Zureberg, both 'literal' and 'historicised' landscape converge in producing appalled incomprehension, so here too landscape in its scenic aspect and landscape as bearing the imprint of historical events converge, first in the production, then in the intensification, of feelings of "lonesomeness".

In considering Pringle's traumatised renderings of scenes or imagined events that in a more accustomed context would be occasions for the expansion of being normally associated with the sublime, we need to ask why this should be so. Though never definitionally explicit, Pringle's use of the word "sublime" appears to be loosely derived from its theorisation in Edmund Burke's influential *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). In very schematic terms, Burke's conception of the sublime might be seen as moving away from the rhetorical or discursive sublime derived from Longinus by placing greater emphasis on the sublimity of external objects or spectacles, both natural and historical, and how they evoke certain ideas in the mind. This emphasis was in turn displaced by the Romantic sublime which regarded sublimity as subjective force arising from within, a more Kantian emphasis on the powers of the mind as opposed to the objects perceived. That Pringle's use of the word "sublime" is conditioned by broadly Burkean conceptions is evident in the fact that he always uses it in connection with an overwhelming impression derived from external sources, and we have already examined the occasions of this use. In a well-known passage on the sublime in nature, Burke begins by asserting that "The passions caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended in some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it" (1969:49). These lines describe, in an approximate way, Pringle's "appalled and bewildered" reaction to the scene at the summit of the Zureberg. But Pringle moves away from these prescriptions when this experience does not subsequently yield the positive payoffs of the Burkean sublime: "the ... effects [of] admiration, reverence, and respect" (49). One might speculate here that in the metropolitan context the experience of the sublime is likely to be intermittent, something only encountered out of one's daily round; the sublime has the force of novelty, but does not intrude into the conduct of everyday life. But in a colonial context where the social fabric is fragile or even non-existent, sublime experiences are more threatening because they are in no way counter-balanced by

the elaborate feminine sociality of the beautiful, whose relation to the sublime is also formulated by Burke in terms of the duality “Society and Solitude”. If one were to take the first of these terms and water it down almost to non-existence, it would change the homeostatic balance between the two categories. This might, in part, explain Pringle’s clear reluctance to embrace the sublime in conditions where “society” scarcely exists. We must also consider that for Burke the sublime, a notoriously unstable category anyway, is by no means always experienced as “delightful” and can, in the wrong circumstances, produce a terror unmediated by aesthetic distance: “When danger and pain press too nearly,” he writes, “they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience” (36). Sara Suleri has noted Burke’s alertness to the “potential historicity of the sublime” and in particular his tendency to deploy the sublime in colonial contexts (she has India in mind) where the European imagination must negotiate “the psychic proximity of aesthetic discourse with the concomitant intimacy of cultural terror” (1992:36). In a similar manner, Luke Gibbons observes the “volatile intersection between aesthetics and politics” (2003:5) evident in Burke’s evocation of an Irish “colonial sublime”, where the abuse of imperial power calls up an illimitable sense of suffering and reprisal. In both these instances, the sublime – albeit a sublime conceived from a metropolitan vantage – presents itself as an apposite category for the excruciating and conflicted experience of colonialism. The fact that Pringle admits the sublime in only the most fleeting manner and never develops it in the body of his work suggests, at the very least, that his experiences on the Eastern Cape frontier were calamitous to his understanding and that the shock of the sublime called not for representation but for repression.

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If we look back over this assemblage of landscape description in the *Narrative* it becomes all too clear that Pringle's engagement with the terrain of his new country was by no means a secure and confident reading of it into European registers. He seems, rather, to be more conscious of the resistance of the landscape to his gaze, its often abrasively novel character and its almost involuntary excitement of unexpected emotions. While there are also occasions when the landscape offers the reassurance of the familiar, these occasions are never sufficiently continuous to accumulate into something settled and durable. We should not forget here that for a frontier settler like Pringle, landscape is the predominant element in the physical world: there are no urban centres or even towns of any magnitude to set off the "wilds". How landscape is read, interpreted or acted upon, in both literal and figurative senses, is the first and indispensable step into the future: it is freighted with a significance that it would not necessarily have in its metropolitan context. Before going on to examine Pringle's setpiece landscape poem, "Evening Rambles", however, we need to detour into conventions informing the picturesque, the generic mode to which the poem is most obviously indebted.

The word "landscape" entered the English language in the late sixteenth century, via the Netherlands, and in its original form was spelt "landskip". It did double semantic duty, meaning both a representation of landscape and the actual physical terrain; sometimes the two meanings could fuse – in a landscaped garden, for example. In its original German form, *landschaft*, the word meant something like "land-shaping" and the word *landscape* still contains some of the original etymological emphasis on how human agency shapes landscape, whether through a medium of representation or through active intervention. As an object of artistic representation, landscape first came into prominence in pictorial form when it emerged as a new genre in the Protestant countries of Northern Europe in the sixteenth century as a foregrounded subject in itself rather than a background to religious or historical narratives. By various degrees of mediation, the British tradition of the picturesque arose out of this secularized pictorial representation of landscape: the word "picturesque" is an anglicisation of the Italian "pittresco" and the French "pittoresque", and the work of

Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa significantly encouraged enthusiasm for the pictorial representation of landscape. The fact that the eighteenth-century vogue for the picturesque embraced so many forms (poetry, landscape painting or sketching, landscape viewing, landscape design, treatises, landscape guides) attests to its pervasiveness as a form of practice, a way of attaining, or demonstrating, a certain social facility. Whatever forms the picturesque took, its key component was to view, or order, landscape according to compositional criteria originally drawn from painting but later applied, in various ways, to landscape. In a recent summary, Nicola Trott identifies three main sources motivating the picturesque: first, its utility in designating aesthetic experiences that fell between the beautiful and the sublime; second, the increasing popularity of visual art consequent on foreign travel and especially the Grand Tour; third, the growing interest in landscape itself, prompted by eighteenth-century gardening and evident as well in immensely popular nature poems like Thomson's *The Seasons* (1999:74). Recent scholarship on the picturesque has emphasized its dispersal through many different practices, its distinct periodisations, and the conflict between its popular manifestations and its diverse and often contradictory theorization. The editors of a 1994 collection of essays on the picturesque conclude that "The question that has underlain much recent work, whether voiced or not, has been whether it makes sense in any circumstances to speak of 'the Picturesque' as a single coherent category, or whether the multifarious versions of the Picturesque ... are not so disparate and in some respects so incompatible as to resist homogenization on any terms" (Copley & Garside, 1994: 2-3). Since Pringle's use of the term is so generalized and imprecise, it is impossible to associate him directly with any particular tendency within the picturesque, although broader affiliations are fairly obvious. Copley and Garside, for example, in attempting to isolate the "dominant focus" and "characteristic emphases" of contemporary understandings of the picturesque comment that "The most striking of these ... is the apparent rejection by Picturesque theorists of self-conscious design and system and their recommendation instead of irregularity, variation, decay and wildness in 'natural' appearances as sources of aesthetic pleasure"(3). If one takes "decay" out of this formulation – the picturesque fondness for ruins – the characteristics that remain are very evident in the landscape descriptions we have

examined. One can see, furthermore, how convenient an aesthetic the picturesque must have been in a colonial setting since it permitted the ‘natural’ to acquire the aura of art just as it permitted the colonial gaze both to find and to impose structure and differentiation on its new environment.

Perhaps the most forceful of recent critical understandings of the picturesque are those which have emphasized its function as socially performative *practice*, in particular its supervisory role in producing and maintaining senses of class and citizenship. Alan Liu, for example, has argued that the picturesque was so pervasively determined by its social context as to be, “in every sense a form of social control ... the frames of vision it created should be seen to participate in the basic institutions of control ... that supervised the British state” (1989:90). I cannot hope to do justice to the full density of Liu’s argument here, but by way of demonstration of his claim let me turn briefly to just one aspect of its complex substantiation: the picturesque and enclosure. One of the visible signs of acts of enclosure was the division of the land by fencing – often hedgerows – in order to create open but protected land for arable and pastoral farming. Such practices of agricultural ‘improvement’ had massively deleterious consequences for agricultural communities, especially the labouring poor. Practitioners of the picturesque, notes Liu, “were oddly willing to accommodate the signature of enclosure – hedges” (93) despite their obviously functional nature. Wordsworth in his *Guide to the Lake Districts*, for example, commends hedges for the way in which they “enriched the valleys with a sylvan appearance” (quoted p.94) – and there are also those notoriously naturalised “hedgerows ... /Of sportive wood run wild” in “Tintern Abbey”. “Essentially”, writes Liu, “the picturesque could recognise the artistic richness of enclosure because it was itself *visual* enclosure. Where enclosure acts hedged the land, acts of picturesque vision framed it in an endlessly repeatable picture of pure picturicity” (94). Liu’s argument then elaborates the ramifying functions of the picturesque, detailing its implication or “imaginary ground” (95) in practices of social control ranging from the supervision of rural affairs by a nascent urban bureaucracy to its fashioning of a “garden” of liberalism that served as a model for Whig political sensibility. “The picturesque,

in sum,” contends Liu, “was the late- eighteenth and early-nineteenth century idea of bureaucracy as ‘natural’” (100). Liu is, of course, not the only critic who has discerned in the picturesque an unusual affiliation to social practice. Thomas Pfau, for example, argues for a “systematic relationship between the emergence of the picturesque ... and the gradual emergence of “class” as the conscious reflection of a social identity that has been *produced* rather than *inherited*” (1997:21). For Pfau, an emergent middle class, lacking coherent political representation despite its rapidly ascending status, sought first to constitute itself as an identifiable community by establishing a distinctive repertoire of formal-aesthetic practices – what we now refer to as cultural capital – which enabled a sense of social mutuality or shared subjectivity. The picturesque’s role in the production of middle class ‘sensibility’ is notable for its attenuation of social reference: it operates not so much as a descriptive elaboration on landscape, an apparently irrefutable material or organic object, but “typically subordinates ... material and topical specifics ... to the aesthetic rewards of its composition” (11) and is thus marked by “an aggressive aestheticization of political consciousness” (31). Both Liu and Pfau offer us –albeit in this severely abbreviated form – a ‘historicist’ rereading of the picturesque as a socially generative formalism that seeks to cover its tracks by persistently dissimulating its investment in class interests as the ‘natural’ endowment of all persons, arising from the incontestable ground of nature itself.

If such readings insist on the indissolubility of the social and the aesthetic, then we must immediately ask if such doubling of inscription is possible in a colonial context like the Eastern Cape frontier where, among other considerations, there was no social aggregate of sufficient density to constitute a class, middle or otherwise. In seeking to understand how metropolitan forms might acquire an altogether different application when deployed in contexts remote from their site of origin, the work of Paul Carter on the Australian colonial picturesque needs brief consideration. For Carter, the colonial picturesque is an entirely mutated form which has “nothing to do” with “canons of taste formulated in Regency England” (1987:259). In *The Road to Botany Bay* Carter charts the history of Australian settlement through traveller and settler writings which record the makeshift and the

improvised nature of the first tentative stages of settlement: “the *intentional* world of historical individuals, the world of active, spatial choices”(1987:xvi). He opposes the performative spatial history hesitatingly enacted in these texts to those retrospective histories which read into the random experience of settlement a teleological design. “This imperial responsibility to organise the scattered experience of phenomena into logically related cause-and-effect facts was”, Carter argues, “completely at odds with the explorer’s habitual experience” (58). This frustratingly non-linear “habitual experience” is for Carter first brought into coherence by language itself, which performs a kind of ur-act of possession long before the material consolidation of settlement: “Possession of the country”, he writes, “depended on demonstrating the efficacy of the English language there. It depended, to some extent, on civilising the landscape, bringing it into orderly being. More fundamentally still, the landscape had to be taught to speak” (58-59). One of the principle languages in which this landscape was “taught to speak” was that of the picturesque and, like their South African counterparts, Australian settlers drew extensively on the vocabulary of the picturesque in their attempts to bring the landscape into familiar focus. Carter draws our attention to a widespread tendency among Australian settlers to describe as picturesque a variety of locations, often quite different in character, which elicited “a feeling of being at home in the world” (243). Though he recognises that the empirical or referential sense of the word is emptied by its contradictory applications, and that it often depended on “contrast ... with the preceding country rather than its own intrinsic qualities” (234), this does not invalidate the affectivity of its usage: picturesqueness is the offspring of the viewer’s orientation”, part of “the figure of intention that brought the country into focus in the first place” (349). It must be stressed that Carter does not regard this familiarising and often hopeful use of the picturesque as coercive or imperial in intent – it is improvised and contingent, as much an index of the viewer’s desire as anything it might name. In the context of settlement, the picturesque is a fragile sketch of an imagined future, “the promise of the invisible” (244), rather than something already complete in itself.

If we briefly return to those usages of the picturesque we have already examined in the *Narrative*, then it is clear that Pringle's use of the picturesque in describing a South African landscape has many points of resemblance with the Australian version described by Carter: its contradictory character, its antonymic rather than intrinsic referentiality, and so forth. Equally apparent is that Pringle uses the picturesque projectively: landscapes designated as picturesque are either 'compositionally' varied (see p.84) and thus promise what Carter calls "the impression of visual cultivation, of an aesthetic history with a visual future" (237), or they are landscapes susceptible to settlement and cultivation (see *Narrative* p.104-5) and therefore, as Carter puts it, "looked forward to a cultivated society" (245). Where Pringle does differ from the Australian settlers – at least those quoted by Carter – is in his alarmed apprehension of an indigenous sublime: can the picturesque, even imaginatively, invest in a future in the manner that Carter suggests it does, when it must contend with a paired category of such unremitting negativity? Could we not say that from its inception the settler imagination in South Africa is distressed with intimations of its own incompleteness, its inability to subdue the autochthonous to its own will, and that in this sense the sublime is fully as much a politico-historical phenomenon as it is an aesthetic one?

* * * * *

We might venture into further elaborations on these questions by finally turning to that poem of Pringle's which offers the most sustained engagement with local landscape. "Evening Rambles" was published in 1828 in *Ephemerides*, the first London edition of Pringle's poetry. Its date of composition is given as 1822 but there are reasons to believe that two of its six stanzas are the result of a later interpolation. The very title of the poem – the allusion to Wordsworth's *An Evening's Walk* (1793) is surely not accidental – indicates its allegiance to a locodescriptive/picturesque genre of some lineage and it would seem that the poem was intended as a colonial variation on familiar themes. Be that as it may, in my

reading the poem strays a significant distance from the generic conventions which might first have motivated it. In fact “Evening Rambles” begins with what we might construe as an oblique denial of these conventions: in the first stanza the relieving of “sultry” African heat by the “low and languid” breezes of the early evening releases the scent of mimosas, a “fragrance faint” immediately transposed (“it seems to tell”) onto soothing memories of a “Scottish dell” where “primrose-tufts ... peep ... forth in tender spring/When the blithe lark begins to sing”.

The second stanza decisively interrupts this reverie:

But soon, amidst our Lybian vale,
Such soothing recollections fail;
Soon we raise the eye to range
O'er prospects wild, grotesque and strange;
Sterile mountains, rough and steep,
That bound abrupt the valley deep,
Heaving to the clear blue sky
Their ribs of granite, bare and dry
And ridges, by the torrents worn,
Thinly streaked with scraggy thorn,
Which fringes nature's savage dress,
But scarce relieves her nakedness. (ll. 11-22)

The repetition of “soon” emphasizes how the Eastern Cape landscape (“Lybian” is here used as an accepted shorthand for “African”) very rapidly overwhelms any attempt to fit it into those descriptive formats which accommodate the “tender spring” and “the blithe lark”. One could be forgiven for imagining that Pringle would either end the poem after this stanza or look beyond metropolitan protocols to write another sort of poem altogether. That he does neither but elects instead to find ways of contriving a frontier picturesque might be understood as an evasion: the more telling point, perhaps, is that the poem signals an awareness of the contradictions it must deal with. The “prospects wild, grotesque and strange” which enclose the valley of the settlement emphatically refuse the desiderata of the picturesque - their “sterile mountains” are pointedly “bare and dry”, the “savage dress” of Nature unrelieved by detail or variety. There are glimmers here - as there will be elsewhere

- of the Zureberg experience, but these are toned-down allusions, not the full-blown sublime in its chaos of incomprehension. Interestingly, Pringle is in fact fairly faithful here to the topography of the settlement. This is his description at the moment of arrival:

[W]e beheld, extending to the northward, a beautiful vale, about six or seven miles in length, and varying from one to two in breadth. It appeared like a verdant basin or *cul de sac*, surrounded on all sides by an amphitheatre of steep and sterile mountains, rising in the background into sharp cuneiform ridges of very considerable elevation ... The lower declivities were sprinkled over, though somewhat scantily, with grass and bushes. But the bottom of the valley, through which the infant river meandered, presented a warm, pleasant, and secluded aspect; spreading itself into verdant meadows, sheltered and embellished, without being encumbered, with groves of mimosas and trees ... (1966:33)

As with so many of the landscapes Pringle encounters, from the shipboard view of the coast onwards, the site of settlement is topographically “blended”, with different types of landscape merging in the same space. Pringle explicitly acknowledges that such a landscape cannot be absorbed into the “soothing recollections” of a Scottish prototype and is therefore resistant to those paradigms of the picturesque to which he is accustomed. He then sets out to work this unpromising material into recognizable poetic form by elevating his angle of vision so as to screen out the “amphitheatre of steep and sterile mountains”: “But where the Vale winds deep below”, begins the third stanza, “The landscape hath a warmer glow”. With these lines what had earlier been a “Lybian vale”, defined primarily through the stark and unrevealing differentials of rock and sky and lacking any intimate compositional detail, now receives a dab of painterly colour: a “warmer glow”. If the stage is now set for Pringle to rehearse familiar locodescriptive techniques, we are at least in a position to register the detours he has had to take to arrive at this point.

In direct contrast to “prospects wild, grotesque and strange” or the muted memories of Scottish dells, a natural environment vivid with plant and animal life animates the next two stanzas. Local flora – the spekboom, the aloe, the bean tree – provide an exotic profusion of colour in the third stanza, with the light from the descending sun “blending” this potentially unruly display into the softer and more familiarly European matrix of “the deep green

verdure". In the fourth stanza Pringle manoeuvres himself to ground level – "Let me through the mazes rove"- where he encounters, or is immersed in, an animal world of untroubled sociability signalled through the sounds of mating birds and humming bees. Here human presence is barely felt as an intrusion: even the nervous duiker only skitters away from the poet at the sound of his approaching footfall. These two stanzas reclaim or reterritorialise colonial space by transforming it into a poetic habitat where the designs of artifice coincide with the life of nature itself. This colonial Arcadia, in which flora perform a veritable dance of display ("spreads ... rears ... shakes") for the observing eye and fauna all but invite the poet into their domestic intimacy, is invested with an incriminating degree of fantasy. It is as though Pringle feels the need to reverse the impact of the "sterile mountains" which had so precipitately cancelled "soothing reflections" with the counterweight of this natural idyll. Paradoxically, however, the abruptness of this inversion unsettles our reading, since it foregrounds the irreconcilability of these very divergent landscapes.

The fifth stanza, the poem's centrepiece, may be read as an attempt to mediate these extremes, or at least to bring them within a single frame. The stanza begins with Pringle installing himself in the panoptic center of a fully selfconscious "prospect" poem:

My wonted seat receives me now –
 This cliff with myrtle-tufted brow,
 Towering high o'er grove and stream,
 As if to greet the parting gleam.
 With shattered rocks besprinkled o'er,
 Behind ascends the mountain hoar,
 Whose crest o'erhangs the Bushman's Cave,
 (His fortress once and now his grave,)
 Where the grim satyr-faced baboon
 Sits gibbering to the rising moon,
 Or chides with hoarse and angry cry
 The herdsman as he wanders by. (ll 49-60)

It is immediately apparent that Pringle is unable to sustain the idyllicism of the earlier stanzas. Though he begins conventionally enough with an unimpeded vision over the generic "grove and stream" Pringle has still to negotiate – or feels the need to negotiate – what he *cannot* see from his prospective vantage: a Bushman's cave above him, now

occupied by a menacing baboon. David Bunn has argued that in this stanza Pringle is attempting to write the (in fact coeval and competitive) Bushman out of the landscape by displacing him to an earlier era and that “the poet performs another act of containment by placing the Bushman outside symbolic systems through his contiguous association with the “grim satyr-faced baboon” that now occupies the site” (1995: 157). This may be so – Pringle does something similar with the Bushman in “The Emigrant’s Cabin” – but the treatment of the Bushman’s cave in “Evening Rambles” is, I think, far more hesitant than Bunn is willing to allow. It is complicated, for one, by the contiguity of Pringle himself and his “wonted seat” to the cave and its cluster of associations. I would argue that this contiguity does in fact disturb the sovereignty of Pringle’s gaze by deflecting his focus upwards and away from the scene “spread out below”, which has to wait for the next stanza. The site of the cave introduces an unsettling interruption into the conventional unfolding of a prospect poem with its reminder that the commanding height of vision is not untroubled by adjacent presences. Furthermore, the lines “Whose crest o’erhangs the Bushman’s Cave/ (His fortress once and now his grave)” call up an intertext in *The Autumnal Excursion*. This is the full context of the relevant lines:

How lovely seems the simple vale
 Where lives our sires heroic tale!
 Where the wild pass and the mountain flood,
 Hallow’d by dying patriots blood,-
 The rocky cavern, once his tent,
 And now his deathless monument,-
 Rehearse to memory’s kindling thought,
 What Faith inspired and Valour wrought”!-
 (1819:13)

These lines celebrate the memory of the resistance of Scottish Covenanters to English persecution in the seventeenth century. In this poem Pringle is able to recall the impress of history on the landscape in ways that corroborate the present by lending texture to “memory’s kindling thought” – something he cannot do in a colonial context which demands, not necessarily successfully, that precolonial history submit to its own erasure. The relevant intertext with “Evening Rambles” is obviously the couplet “The rocky cavern, once his tent,/ And now his deathless monument” and, on the face of it, would seem to suggest

some analogy between slaughtered Bushmen and heroic Scottish resistance to English rule. I would not pursue the analogy this far (if only because the full range of Pringle's writing would not support such a claim) but what this intertext does suggest, at the very least, is that the Bushman's abandoned cave has disquieting resonances that Pringle cannot quite banish.

Having completed yet another detour, Pringle is finally in a position to invoke the full compositional detail of the extended view. In taking up this prospect over the colonial landscape, Pringle is repeating a gesture endemic to locodescriptive poetry since the seventeenth century: "the troping of a moral vantage point by means of an elaborate description of "literal" spatial elevation"(Pfau 1997:38). The implied linkage between visual command, with its descriptive plotting of the landscape into complex ordered forms and what Pfau later calls "a coalescence of authorial and readerly sensibilities in an all-encompassing subjectivity of sound moral and aesthetic judgement" (43) is a similarly recurrent feature of such poetry. We need to ask if "Evening Rambles" is able to exert such authority over the very different topographical details of the colonial landscape and bring these details into the orbit of its controlled vision. The answer, I would suggest, is certainly not a straightforward yes. Pringle begins conventionally enough: the vista of the valley is "Spread out below" and "full displayed" to his gaze, with the accustomed dispersion of light and shade. Once again invoking generic "nooks", "bowers", "meadows" that are adjectivally secured by the familiar "sheltered" and "sylvan", Pringle looks set to create a landscape on an accustomed pattern. From this point, however, rather than ranging through different planes and details of vision as prospect poetry normally does, with "the order of description ... from foreground to horizon" (Barrell 1972:44), the stanza instead focuses obsessively on the "tortuous bed" of the river course running through the valley. In describing this river as being "like a dragon spread" Pringle alludes faintly to the imagery of the Zureberg where the Sunday's River is described as being "like the path of some mythological dragon"(1966:28); but it is in his description of the "ravage" left by the flooding of this river that we may more fully detect, in displaced form, the aftershocks of the Zureberg experience.

Lo there the Chaldee-willow weeps
 Drooping o'er the headlong steeps,
 Where the torrent in his wrath
 Hath rifted him a rugged path,
 Like fissure cleft by earthquake's shock,
 Through mead and jungle, mound and rock.
 But the swoln water's wasteful sway,
 Like Tyrant's rage, hath passed away,
 And left the ravage of its course
 Memorial of its frantic force. (ll.69-76)

The description of the river's "tortuous bed", the very sinuosity of which suggests force and resistance, dominates this first section of the stanza, just as its aftermath dominates the second. It is worth pointing out here that in the *Narrative* Pringle expressed exasperation over the definitional attributes of the word "river" in the South African context – an example of how even the most simple designations could be confounded in the colonial context. "In speaking of *rivers*", says Pringle, "I may here remark, once and for all, that this appellation is applied by the African colonist to every brook that merely exhibits a rill of running water ... so that the term often appears, to a European apprehension, very unappropriately employed" (104). To this he adds:

The rivers of South Africa, with but few exceptions, are little else than periodical torrents, usually flowing with a diminutive streamlet, at the bottom of a huge chasm or glen, the banks of which rise on either side ... these tremendous yawning gulfs, when filled by the sudden and excessive rains to which this climate is occasionally, though not frequently subject, are swollen ... with a mighty and furious torrent, which defies all control and obstructs all passage. (104)

A river, then, is both a definitionally or semantically unstable term and a natural phenomenon subject to abrupt and destructive changes which "def[y] all control". From William Plomer's "The Scorpion" to Ruth Miller's "The Floating Island", riverine floods have functioned in South African poetry as a metaphor for an intrinsic natural violence, "Anarchy ... leapt beyond mischance", as Miller puts it. It is perhaps fitting that the first extended nature poem written in English in South Africa should have at its centre a landscape formed predominantly by the "frantic force" of a flooded river. And while such a poem might be

prospectively appropriate in its South African setting it is, perhaps for this reason, anomalous in its informing context of British landscape poetry which takes its cue from a very different set of material specifics (where rivers, for example, are notable for their calm and amplitude: “Broad rivers bold and bright” as Pringle puts it in *The Autumnal Excursion*).

If we return to that section of the stanza quoted above, we notice first the pattern of disrupted expectations which has already begun to characterize the poem, here evident in the sudden transition from the generic picturesque of nooks, bowers and meadows to the “headlong steeps” carved out of rock by the sheer force of the “torrent in his wrath”. Pringle’s gaze, far from being an excursus or unimpeded roaming through an extended prospect, is here fixated downward into the geological strata of the earth itself which he imagines as having been convulsed by elemental forces: “like fissure cleft by earthquake’s shock”. This is the same imagery of geological upheaval used in the Zureberg passage where “gigantic crags” and the “hills themselves” seemed to have been “tumultuously uptorn and heaved together”. The “headlong steeps” through which the floodwater has “rifted ... a rugged path” also operate as a horizontal recrudescence of the “rough and steep” mountains, suggesting that the division between these two features of the landscape is not as absolute as it at first appeared.

Although the poem might render the Zureberg sublime in a controlled and muted form, the fact of its “recollection” points to a sense of a landscape disturbed in its very formation and Pringle’s next move is an attempted cancellation of this disturbance by immobilizing the river bed as a “Memorial”, something secure in the safety of the past. The simile of geological rupture gives way to one of temporal succession: the inconceivable power of water blasting through the elements has “passed away”; it is a moment of abnormal excess, a “tyrant’s rage” now safely subdued. By associating the geological with a disturbed and tyrannical historical moment and dispatching it to the temporal distance of a “memorial”, Pringle is able to suggest that, like that other site of dereliction, the “Bushman’s grave”, the violent force of water and its aftermath may safely be consigned to a past whose convulsions

have been buried in the rocky strata of the earth itself.⁸ A space is also cleared for the stanza to return to the present tense:

- Now o'er its shrunk and slimy bed
Rank weeds and withered wrack are spread,
With the faint rill just oozing through,
And vanishing again from view;
Save where the guana's glassy pool,
Holds to some cliff its mirror cool ... (ll. 77- 82)

A more conventional picturesque allows Pringle to follow the receding “faint rill” of a water course until it gathers into the reflective surface of a “glassy pool”. Such mirroring effects, usually achieved by the calm surfaces of lakes, are a common picturesque motif and suggest a ‘natural’ aesthetic, free of any mediation. But we must also remark that much of the imagery used in this stanza, from “fissure cleft” to the engorged and swollen water and its aftermath in the “oozing” of a “shrunk and slimy bed”, is unmistakably if unconsciously sexualized. While it is something of a critical commonplace that the picturesque deploys erotic effects, these are generally ascribed to the nature of the picturesque gaze which looks intently but cannot possess and hence invests “heavily in the erotics of denied desire” (Modiano 1994:197) whose characteristic locus is in the seductive glimpse and concealment associated with “intricacy” – which Alan Liu calls “the great fetishistic zone of the picturesque” (1989:63). Pringle’s sexual figuration is a lot blunter than the mannered “*déshabille*” (to quote Liu again) of the metropolitan picturesque and brings back into circulation the sexualized sublime of the “deep sunk dells” and “impenetrable forests” of the Zureberg passage. Earlier characterized as a “memorial” the river bed is in fact a swamp of oozy fecundity whose origin is that “fissure cleft by earthquake’s shock” in the earlier line. The geological ur-act of the sublime is not so easily banished and this colonial picturesque cannot surmount its uncomfortable proximity to a primordial past.

Pringle’s gaze then moves upward to the enclosure of the “palmite’s leafy screen” and an adjacent rock-ash from which are suspended the nests of weaver birds. The stanza ends with the following lines:

In cradle-nests, with porch below,
 Secure from winged or creeping foe –
 Weasel or hawk or writhing snake;
 Light swinging, as the breezes wake,
 Like the ripe fruit we love to see
 Upon the rich pomegranate-tree. (ll. 86-92)

What interests me here is the way in which these protective nests function both as an image of a secure animal domesticity *and* a threatened one. Furthermore, the associative transfer of the pendant nests to the plenitude of “ripe fruit” implicitly carries that threat to the “rich” harvest of the pomegranate tree. David Bunn offers the intriguing hypothesis that the embowered nests, like the paired, conjugal animals in stanza three, prepare the way for colonial settlement by “anticipating the white settler household adapted to South African conditions” (145). While not wanting to dismiss this speculation, I would still argue that such anticipations are fraught: turtle doves and honey bees are not emblematically South African animals and, in the case of the weaver nests one encounters the paradox that an aesthetic effect – “these beautiful nests” as Pringle calls them in a note – is achieved in consequence of an evolutionary survival technique. In this new landscape, even the effects of “picturicity” are liable to reveal themselves as embedded in adaptive behaviours that respond to a dangerous natural environment.

One cannot be absolutely certain, but I would argue that the next two stanzas, which deal with colonial labour, are the product of an interpolation prior to the poem’s 1828 publication. There are a number of reasons to suspect this: in the period of Pringle’s residence on the frontier he employed neither slaves nor migrant Bechuana labour; as we saw earlier, there is no documented evidence that at this time he took any interest in abolition either: his major concern was the scarcity of labour and how to overcome this. These stanzas are pointedly homiletic in tone and do not use the presence of the labourers to any kind of picturesque affect; even on an expressive level, the verse is formulaic, and sacrifices the compositional detail of other sections of the poem to a tendentious denunciation of slavery. In all these respects, the two stanzas fall out of the customary range of locodescriptive or picturesque poetry altogether, and their placement here is anomalous.

The first of the stanzas begins with a (much belated) recognition of the furthest point of perspective (“But lo the sun’s descending car/Sinks o’er Mount Dunion’s peaks afar”) and immediately resorts to description by privation: the “brown herder” is not a shepherd from a “Scottish dell”, possesses a gun and not a crook, has no “flute”, “book”, “rustic song” and so forth. It seems odd, especially since these privative details are of little interest in themselves and approach mere enumeration, that Pringle should re-introduce a technique that he had earlier explicitly discarded as inappropriate to his setting. The intention of these lines might be to designate the herder as “the White Man’s thrall” and to bring his legal destitution to the attention of the British reading public, but the description nonetheless carries the implication that indigenous peoples are destitute of their own resources. The Hottentot’s rhetorical construction in terms of a lack accentuated even further by circumstance suggests that his privation is immanent, and that his future – as the negative comparisons imply – lies in the ‘improving’ model of a Scottish peasantry. The “poor Heathen Bechuan” fares only marginally better: though not “debased by slavery” he remains a “poor heathen” humming a “tuneless song”. Whether enslaved or not, indigenous labour is cast as a failed peasantry in desperate need, one assumes, of humanitarian intervention. It would seem that Pringle has taken the original version of the poem, added to it, perhaps revised some lines in the original, but in his additions has attempted to appropriate the original into the explicitly reformist agendas then preoccupying him.

When Pringle returns to landscape prospectus in stanza nine, the verse is drained of referential specificity: ten of sixteen lines have no distinctive locality and these lines typically employ a contrived figural generality (“Now, wizard – like, slow Twilight sails/ With soundless wing adown the vales”) that seems to act as a delaying or suspending device to postpone direct descriptive engagement. Even when a local “villain Lynx” and “thievish porcupine” make personified appearances, their presence is revealed by the “lamp” of an “enamoured fire-fly” – “Link-boy he of woodland green/ To light fair Avon’s Elfin-Queen” – straight out of the pastoral fantasia of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. What Pringle is delaying or blocking here is the threatening advent of night itself:

But lo! The night bird's boding scream
 Breaks abrupt my twilight dream;
 And warns me it is time to haste
 My homeward walk across the waste,
 Lest my rash tread provoke the wrath
 Of adder coiled upon the path,
 Or tempt the lion from the wood,
 That soon will prowl athirst for blood.
 - Thus, murmuring my thoughtful strain,
 I seek our wattled cot again. (ll. 139-148)

Though ending the poem the stanza also returns to its beginning: just as the recollections of a Scottish dell failed to screen the enclosing “nakedness” of its colonial counterpart, so here too is an admission that the pastoral reverie in the preceding lines was a “twilight dream” attempting to block out the actual scene by transposing onto it another set of associations. The shattering of this narcoleptic reverie by a night-bird’s ominously “boding scream” acts a chthonic warning to the poet immediately to abandon his “wonted seat” (and with it his fantasy of transposition) in order to escape the threat of impending nightfall and the dangers that it brings. In this context, lingering too long on landscape can be the death of you. The poem ends rather incongruously with a meditative “murmuring” of the poet’s “thoughtful strain” where the previous lines suggest that the “haste” of his “homeward walk across the waste” will not allow such tranquil recollection.

Pringle must have been aware that in prospect poems, as in locodescriptive poems generally, the approach of evening often marks a moment of repose, as the slow dimming of the light releases an array of soothing auditory stimuli and the visual scene fades into a contemplative repletion. Consider these lines, for example, from Wordsworth’s *An Evening Walk*:

Till pours the wakeful bird her solemn strains
 Heard by the night calm of the watery plains.
 - No purple prospects now the mind employ
 Glowing in golden sunset tints of joy,
 But o’er the soothed accordant heart we feel
 A sympathetic twilight slowly steal,
 And ever, as we fondly muse, we find
 The soft gloom deep’ning on the tranquil mind
 (1978: 1.376-384)

The distance between these lines and Pringle's hardly needs remarking and is an indication of just how far "Evening Rambles" has strayed from its informing models. In Wordsworth a "sympathetic" twilight symbiotically enters into an "accordant heart" and 'deepens' a "tranquil mind" as landscape and consciousness lose their distinctive boundaries. In Pringle, whose consciousness has contracted into protective reverie, the "wakeful bird" is a harbinger of danger: the landscape is closing in around him, threatening him; "murmuring my thoughtful strain" suggests the repetition of a protective spell rather than reposed contemplation and the improvised "wattled cot" – significantly the only mention of settler habitation – seems hardly able to offer the protection he seeks. Far from having achieved any reciprocation with landscape, the consciousness of the poet retreats into monadic isolation: what we have at the end of the poem is not closure, but flight.

Contemporary critical responses to "Evening Rambles" are united in their disparagement of its derivative intent: the poem is, such readings assert, a transparent attempt to work colonial landscape into imperial paradigms. The tone for this is set in J.M. Coetzee's groundbreaking essays on colonial landscape in *White Writing* (1989). While conceding in one essay that the poem's technical achievements (he is discussing the traverses that allow spatial excursus through the landscape) "are accomplished with a fair amount of art" (1989:47). Coetzee returns in another essay to declare the poem no more than an exercise in imperial domestication (the preceding quote is from stanza three): "[T]he familiar trot of iambic-tetrameter couplets reassuringly domesticates the foreign content. The underlying argument of the poem, from beginning to end is that, since the African wilderness clearly does not strain the capacities of the English language or even of English verse, it can be contained within the European category of the exotic" (164). Malvern van Wyk Smith is similarly unforgiving: in his view the poem is a "reworking" of the Zureberg experience into "relaxed domestic contemplation" (2000:28), in which a culpably "selective innocence" (29) enables Pringle to conduct a "controlled and magisterial survey ... confirming ... the operation of the imperial imagination" (29). David Bunn, while locating the poem in a larger argument about colonial landscape, reads in it similarly appropriative intents whose fundamental

motivation is “ideological containment” (1994:139). Although none of these critics works from within an explicit critical allegiance, their shared emphasis on the poem’s indefensible entanglement in colonial process may perhaps be traced to the influence of postcolonial criticism and its theoretical predecessor, colonial discourse analysis. Such approaches are rarely sympathetic to settler literature, and then only when this literature registers opposition to the colonial enterprise. The often undifferentiated association of colonial writing, especially that of the first phase of settlement, with what Aijaz Ahmed has called “aggressive identity formation” (1992:78), invariably assumes that acts of enunciation, aesthetic or otherwise, mirror the processes of material appropriation. These assumptions apply particularly, perhaps, to landscape poetry, where the very subject-matter is saturated with implication of the most obvious sort. Even within the metropolitan context, as we have already seen, late eighteenth-and nineteenth-century locodescriptive poetry has been subjected to vigorous critique for its occlusion of the labouring poor, its aestheticisation of political intent, its naturalization of class interest, and so forth. While I do not wish to deny the cogency of these approaches, they add further weight to appraisals of colonial landscape description as fully implicated in imperialism. This loading of the dice can very easily distract readers from the text itself, which then registers only as a secondary effect of a critical metalanguage unwilling to allow that colonial landscape description might be something other than a subset of the imperial will to dominate colonial space.

Whatever the case may be, my own reading of the poem has attempted to restore to it the unsettled precariousness of Pringle’s settler experience and how this finds expression in the generic and perceptual instability of the poem, as well its failure to sustain even those appropriations which it does attempt. Its very title, “Evening Rambles” is misleading in its suggestion of leisurely meandering: while Pringle may contrive some visual traverses, for most of the poem he is immobilized in a prospect position which he has eventually to abandon under some duress. I have argued that from its inception, where Pringle acknowledges, quite explicitly, that the settler landscape will not lend itself to an unproblematic emulation of European models, the poem is disconcerted by antitheses which

it cannot resolve. While there are times when Pringle proceeds as if this were not the case, such as the richly pastoral depictions in stanzas two and three, these moments of apparently normative evocation never lend themselves to ongoing development. What we have instead is something very much like a dialectical movement within the poem between landscapes which invite or prefigure human occupation and landscapes which refuse it. That the poem is unable to resolve these tensions or antitheses indicates, I think, an unspoken recognition that colonial experience requires another set of representations altogether. These are not supplied, of course, but the very failure of the poem to complete the generic and tropological mission implicit in its form, its stranded uncertainties, its spatial bewilderment in which memories of home and the landscape of the colony blur into an indeterminate space speak into a moment when the settler experience is laid open to the dangers of its own futurity, while at the same time losing its grip on the hand-holds of inherited convention. As such the poem seems to me to deserve a foundational place in “white writing” precisely because it is anti-foundational: it cannot escape its own contingency, and clears the space for a set of representations not axiomatically tied to inherited conventions.

One might, in anticipation, remark here that “Evening Rambles” (if we excerpt the interpolated sections) and “Afar in the Desert”, which I discuss below, attest to a very much more embattled and insecure coloniality than that which finds expression in the later poems. Nicholas Thomas, remarking on the tendency of colonial discourse to take its bearings from its context or point of delivery, has pointed out that while those discourses that emanate from the imperial centre are often characterized by the operational hubris of colonial power, those discourses which come from the colonial margins are often accentuated in very different ways. “[T]hese representations”, he writes – he has in mind official ‘reports’ of various orders –

Must be seen largely within the contexts of their circulation and reception, which were often within metropolitan societies rather than the colonized terrains that form their notional subject-matter. The supreme confidence often present in colonial discourse may indeed manifest epistemological megalomania, but also perhaps the geographical and social distance between scenes of writing and the realities of colonial success or

failure. Texts grounded more directly in the liminality of colonial confrontations frequently exhibit not authority but literary confusion and the awkward sense that the writer is marked more than superficially ... by his or her diasporic location. (1994: 168)

I quote Thomas at some length here because his observations seem especially pertinent to what I shall be arguing. Of particular interest in Pringle's case is that these discrepant discourses may be found in the same body of writing, an internal differentiation whose contradiction captures something of the differences that arise between the lived experience of colonization and its subsequent articulation as reformist political rhetoric: the first, as we have seen, is often anguished with the inexpressible and insecure in its authority; the second, as we shall see when examining Pringle's later work, very often employs a rhetoric of imperturbable utopian conviction in the manifest destiny of Christian imperialism or a poetics which confidently articulates indigenous voices. The split between these two discursive stances is perhaps the most distinctive structural feature of Pringle's writing on South Africa and it can be traced just as clearly in the poetry as it can in the development of the *Narrative*, whose closing chapters are weighted heavily towards polemical and evidential advocacy for the humanitarian cause rather than recording the awkward and sometimes threatening "liminality" of the settler experience.

* * * * *

"Afar in the Desert", first published in *The South African Journal* (hereafter *Journal*) in 1824, though considerably emended after that date, is without doubt the best known of Pringle's poems, and has been very widely anthologized and translated. In my view the poem, vulnerable to its incapacity to encompass colonial experience and distressed by contradictions it cannot resolve, occupies a place in Pringle's writing very similar to that of "Evening Rambles". There are compelling reasons, moreover, to read it as a kind of companion-piece to the earlier poem; aside from demonstrable thematic affinities between

the two poems, the date of publication of “Afar in the Desert” (in 1824 in the *South African Journal*, prior to its proscription) indicates that it must have been written before, and not after or during, the advent of Pringle’s bitter feud with Governor Somerset. Unfortunately, there are no references in Pringle’s private correspondence, or anywhere else, to the time of the poem’s composition. I would conjecture, though, that it was written during or shortly after Pringle’s journey from the frontier to Cape Town; he left the frontier on the 17th of August 1822, and arrived in Cape Town towards the end of November. The abundant references to the Karoo obviously confirm that the poem derives from this experience, but the poem is also layered with aspects of Pringle’s frontier experience as well as memories of his native Scotland. The poem’s well known refrain – “Afar in the desert I love to ride/With the silent bush-boy alone by my side” – recalls Pringle’s numerous excursions into the territory surrounding the frontier settlement where he would often use a “Hottentot lad” (51) as a guide, rather than his journey across the Karoo in a covered wagon, where he was accompanied by his wife and her sister, as well as another couple and their two daughters (1966:160). The poem is not then ‘about’ a specific experience – in the way that “Evening Rambles” was about the variations arising from a prospect view of landscape – but rather makes the occasion of a ride into the desert a metaphor which it extends in a number of directions and through a series of physical and imaginative sites. Its affinities with “Evening Rambles” are apparent from its inception: the very title of the poem takes us back to the alienating solitude in which the earlier poem ended and exacerbates it into a state of mind which, as A.E. Voss has acutely observed, is “manic” and “pathological” (1982:20) in its self-annulling and hallucinatory intensities.

The first of the poem’s six variable length stanzas performs a kind of poetic kenosis in which Pringle sees himself as divested of those attachments and identifications which had hitherto formed the basis of his identity. The refrain of the first two lines (“Afar in the Desert I love to ride/ With the silent Bush-boy alone by my side”), repeated at the beginning of every stanza except the final one, places Pringle in an isolated landscape which, as the poem progresses, recedes further and further from those indices of identification which render a

landscape readable. The second line of this refrain introduces the now notoriously anomalous “silent Bush-boy” whose unspeaking presence has been the occasion of numerous critiques of Pringle’s failure to endow him with human presence. From contemporary perspectives this might be a damaging omission of agency, but it is at least a candid admission that the poet can enter into no community of human exchange with his Bushman guide: if this represents a culpable failure on Pringle’s part, then it is a failure whose historical moment is only now drawing toward its end. More relevant to a consideration of the poem itself is the tricky placement of “alone”: does the emphasis fall on the poet’s loneliness, with “alone” acting as a synonym for “only” or “solely”? Or does “alone” refer to the guide himself, forced into an unwanted solitude by the task that has been chosen for him? I would suggest that “silent” does the work of enclosing the guide in a space inaccessible to Pringle and that “alone”, because it can suggest the two meanings above, carries intimations of both. Nor does the density of these two lines end in this equivocal interplay of silence and solitude: the opening line of this repeated refrain insists on the joy (“I love”) of the poet’s riding deep into a desert which becomes increasingly inhospitable to his presence, so that the sense of the refrain seems to work against the logic of the poem as a whole. In addition, the colon after “side” acts, in all the stanzas prefixed with these lines, as a syntactical starting point for what follows, drawn to a stop only by the period at the end of each of the stanzas. In this way the lines act as a template or base for the variations that follow them, variations that draw further and further away, in an increasingly contrapuntal movement, from the confident assertiveness of the opening refrain.

The first stanza opens, in a manner reminiscent of “Evening Rambles”, with “fond” instead of “soothing” recollection, and an attempt to block out the colonial moment by immersion in the past (“sick of the present, I cling to the past”). The stanza again records the evident failure of this move:

When the eye is suffused with regretful tears,
 From the fond recollections of former years;
 And shadows of things that have long since fled
 Flit over the brain like the ghosts of the dead:

Bright visions of glory – that vanished too soon;
 Day-dreams – that departed ere manhood's noon;
 Attachments – by fate or falsehood reft;
 Companions of earlier days – lost or left;
 And my native land – whose magical name
 Thrills to the heart like electric flame;
 The home of my childhood, the haunts of my prime;
 All the passions and scenes of that rapturous time
 When the feelings were young and the world was new,
 Like the fresh bowers of Eden unfolding to view;
 All – all now forsaken – forgotten – foregone!
 And I – a lone exile remembered of none –
 My high aims abandoned, - my good acts undone, -
 Aweary of all that is under the sun, -
 With that sadness of heart which no stranger might scan,
 I fly to the Desert afar from Man! (ll. 5-24)

The accumulation of verbs of loss and their culmination in the emphatic alliteration of “forsaken – forgotten – foregone” act to empty out Pringle’s past, as though his passage through childhood, youth and adulthood has now been erased and he is locked into an autistic present tense that knows no affiliation to anything other than itself. Of particular interest here are the lines beginning “And my native land ...” since they would seem to announce an explicit renunciation of *The Autumnal Excursion* with its belief in the ability of the imagination to recreate the “passions and scenes” of childhood and youth:

Ah, while amid the world's wild strife
 We may yet trace that sweeter life,
 Now fading like a lovely dream, -
 Why cannot fancy's power redeem
 The glowing thoughts, the hopes sublime,
 The feeling of our early prime. (34)

and the conviction that these “sacred scenes” remain indelibly printed on the mind:

- Oh, ne'er shall he, whose ardent prime
 Was foster'd in the freeman's clime,
 Though doom'd to seek a distant strand,
 Forget his glorious native land –
 Forget – 'mid far Columbia's groves
 Those sacred scenes of youthful loves (13-14).

Sentiments like these were integral to Pringle's sense of himself as a poet, and their renunciation in this first stanza is a startling – and one presumes self-conscious – act of divestment. What kind of poem can possibly be written out of a situation which lacks the essential materials, at least as far as Pringle is concerned, of poetry itself? The poeticisms (“bright visions”, “magical name”, etc) and melodrama of this stanza might make it less than convincing, but the intentions it declares are startling for a poet of Pringle's lineage. Although one might argue that, in general terms, the use of negation as a trope in colonial discourse “acts as a kind of provisional erasure, clearing a space for the expansion of the colonial imagination” (Spurr 1993:92-3), there is nothing in this poem to indicate that the imagination expands into anything other than emptiness.

The difficulties raised by the renunciations of the first stanza become apparent in the second stanza when, after the refrain, the poem seems to stall on numerous generalized variations – most of them entirely redundant - of “this wearisome life/With its scenes of oppression, corruption, and strife –”. It is as though Pringle is marking time, casting about for a direction, which, when it does come, returns again to the refrain:

Oh! then there is freedom, and joy, and pride,
Afar in the Desert alone to ride!
There is rapture to vault on the champing steed,
And to bound away with the eagle's speed,
With the death-fraught firelock in my hand –
The only law of the desert land! (ll. 35-40)

With these lines the stanza moves abruptly away from the introverted stasis of “dark melancholy” to an exhilarated sense of movement and power. For the first time, and the last, the refrain of “love to ride” is given weight by the “rapture” of a vaulting and bounding motion in which the poet enjoys a sense of elemental and unconstrained physical being, a corporeal rather than a visionary power: here is a landscape which it is possible to traverse without restraint, a kind of pure space in which movement knows no limits and in which the “sick” colonial soul may find the self-integration of “freedom, and joy, and pride”. This imagination of kinetic “rapture”, which restores the “rapturous time” of childhood in its unbounded plenitude does, however, come at a price: its will to dominate space requires the

violent enforcement of the “death - fraught firelock”. It is odd to think of Pringle as a gun-toting vigilante of the desert and a law unto himself, but how else are we to read these lines? It is as though, for a brief moment, he has mutated into a Kurtz-like figure whose crazed seclusion has led to the violent exercise of his unopposed will, or J.M. Coetzee’s *Jacobus Coetzee* whose journey into a “wilderness without polity” (1984:66) also culminates in violence and megalomania.

As though disquieted by the direction of his imagination at the end of the previous stanza, Pringle slows the third stanza into the visual contemplation of wild animals in a state of natural harmony. Although outward movement is emphasized after the refrain (“Away-away from the dwellings of men”) and with it a sense of an inexorable drawing away from human presence, this stanza is not set in a “desert” at all but in wooded and watered areas hospitable to the presence of a wide range of animals. In their natural habitat and “unhunted”, these animals variously play, browse, recline, gambol, wallow and drink, all verbs that indicate a leisurely ease in their environment. This scene, strongly reminiscent of the fourth stanza of “Evening Rambles”, resembles a pastoral game park and acts as an interlude of calm. But there is also a sense of Pringle marking time here, as though he is again not quite sure of where he wants to go. Certainly, with its rather lifeless catalogue of fauna and its sudden forgetting of the firelock and the rapture of unbounded motion, the stanza sits awkwardly in the context of the poem as a whole. There is also the fact that in their communal ease these animals suggest or prefigure a human society, and it is precisely such a society, the “dwellings of men”, which the stanza set out to distance itself from.

In the fourth stanza a “desert land” finally makes its appearance in the form of the “brown Karoo”. Once again, it is a landscape dramatised through the presence of animals, though in this case it is their isolated and slightly distressed auditory cues - “plaintive ...” and “shrill”- that at first reveal them. The suggestion here is of space empty of anything but sound and of animals tugged by nervousness as night approaches: a restive zebra is “scouring the desolate plain” with its hoof, while an ostrich hurries nervously to its nest “Far hid from the pitiless

plunderer's view/ In the pathless depths of the parched Karoo". As in "Evening Rambles" the advent of night – "twilight grey"- signals a time of danger and apprehension: the poem must now confront its arrival in the "pathless depths" which have all along been its destination, but which it has steadily deferred.

This termination is a "Wilderness vast" depopulated of all life save for reptiles and bats and deeply inimical to the human – "A region of emptiness, howling and drear,/ Which man hath abandoned from famine and fear".⁹ After itemizing the animal and plant life that is capable of surviving in this waste – even at this extreme Pringle cannot let go the relentlessly classificatory urge present in his South African poetry – he must move to register the effects of this landscape on his consciousness:

A region of drought, where no river glides,
Nor rippling brook with osiered sides;
Where sedgy pool, nor bubbling fount,
Nor tree, nor misty mount,
Appears, to refresh the aching eye:
But the barren earth, and the burning sky,
And the blank horizon, round and round,
Spread – void of living sight or sound. (ll. 81-88)

Surprisingly, this evocation of nothingness, or next to nothingness, is accomplished with considerable detail as well as a degree of compositional complexity rare in Pringle's poetry. That Pringle's description will be a privative one goes almost without saying, but the sense of this privation is accomplished in the first five lines by building up a series of subjects ("brook", "pool", "fount" and so on) which, even though ostensibly non-existent, nonetheless hold their syntactical place as they wait for the delayed verb ("appears") to complete them. A similar but less prolonged tactic is employed with "earth", "sky", and "horizon" that are "spread". Although in the latter case Pringle is describing the actually existent, the effect of the delayed verb, especially in the first construction, is to allow the compilation of clauses a density that belies their privative status – hence the hallucinatory quality of the lines, the mirages of an "aching eye" conjured out of nothingness: the picturesque of brooks, pools and fountains with their vertical attachment of trees, clouds and mountains is now more tortured

phantasm than “sacred scene”. It is tempting to read these lines as enacting something like the disappearance or draining out of the literary itself: what is fading before Pringle’s eyes are precisely those substantives of poeticized nature which had hitherto supplied his imagination with literary ballast. In *The Autumnal Excursion*, for example, in one of the many passages where he celebrates the sustaining power of the childhood encounter with nature, the following lines might be read in direct counterpoint to those from “Afar in the Desert” quoted above:

But youthful memory pictures still
 Each stone and bush that speck’d the hill;
 The braes with tangled copsewood green;
 The mossy cliffs that rose between;
 The fern that fringed each fairy nook;
 The mottled mead; the mazy brook,
 That underneath its ozier shade,
 Still to the wild its music made. (1819:23)

In these lines an array of natural features, demonstrably close to those described in the South African poem, inscribe a plenitude of natural being and the successive itemization of these features by the direct article anchors them in a substantiality that is syntactic as well as experiential. As I have suggested before, there are persuasive grounds to read “Afar in the Desert” as offering, in part, a repudiation or enforced abandonment of the convictions and poetic conventions which underlay the earlier poem. In the South African poem these become desubstantiated - hallucinatory remnants of a past which cannot be grafted onto the present. The concluding lines of the previous stanza might also be read as another explicit refusal of the sublime, where a Burkean “suspension in horror” is felt not to be an inspirational opening into an enlargement of being, but a Conradian “horror” at its obliteration. The poem might here be said to operate as a powerful – and deeply paranoid – intuition of the fate of the colonizing mission itself, doomed to lose its bearings in a wilderness of non-signifying blankness which will not submit to the imposition of European schemata.

In characteristic fashion, Pringle moves immediately to forestall this threat of disintegration by calling up a scene of suffering and revelation from the Old Testament:

And here while the night-winds round me sigh
 And the stars burn bright in the midnight sky,
 As I sit apart by the desert stone,
 Like Elijah at Horeb's cave alone,
 'A still small voice' comes through the wild
 (Like a father consoling his fretful child),
 Which banishes bitterness, wrath, and fear, -
 Saying – MAN IS DISTANT, BUT GOD IS NEAR! (ll. 89-96)

It is disappointing that this erratic but intensely driven poem should end in a sermon and capitalized pieties, but even this closure takes us back to the atavistic “rapturous time” of childhood which has in the poem acted as a counterweight to the acute distress of colonial experience. The voice of revelation that calls to the poet and comforts this distress is likened not only to the numinous power of the Old Testament God, but to the consoling tones of a father whose “still, small voice” addresses and calms a “fretful child” in an odd conjunction of biblical revelation and infantile regression. Absent from this final stanza or coda is the poem’s refrain: the mute bush-boy, it would seem, might act as the poet’s guide into – and out of – the wilderness, but he does not hear the voice of divine revelation.

There is a disquieting irony – and a difficult object lesson – in the fact that this poem was praised for so long on the grounds of its literary rendition of local landscape and that its volatile and disturbing content seems not to have been noticed at all. There might be a partial explanation for this in the fact that the often exuberant rhythmic structure of the poem, particularly in the repeated refrain, is strangely at odds with its disintegrating content. The metrical structure allows Pringle to imbue most of the poem, and especially the opening stanzas, with a sense of quickening motion punctuated by the a-a-b-b beat of the end rhyme. The poem might grind into stasis in its final sections, but the rhythmic momentum is sufficient to carry the reader through. A.E. Lewin-Robinson (1961:51-2) identifies the stylistic influence of Byron’s *Mazeppa*, “Away, away, my steed and I/Upon the pinions of the wind/ All human dwellings left behind”, published in 1819, and it is literary resonances like

these that might further have convinced readers that the spirit of the poem was reflected in its familiar rhythmical arrangements. Whatever the case may be, there is not the slightest hint that the poem might be about something other than “local colour”. Here is Sydney Low, for example, writing in the *Anglo-Saxon Review* in 1901:

The poem as a whole renders into literary English the South African impression, and this is a feat so rarely performed that it is worth noticing ... When I was a boy at school there was put into my hands a geographical text-book ... the author of which had very sensibly printed this piece of Pringle’s, in order to give his young students some notion of the scenery and zoology of the Cape regions. I read it and learnt it with delight; and for many years I could think only of South Africa as a land where you rode in the desert, with elephants browsing about you, and a bush-boy alone by your side. (1901:209-10)

If these remarks remind us of how easily, over a century ago, a British reader might see in the poem only an affecting domestication and taxonomy of the exotic, then we should also consider that these sentiments were equally prominent among South African readers. In the editorial introduction by John Wahl to his 1970 edition of *Poems Illustrative of South Africa*, for example, he writes: “What gives this brilliantly and deliberately hypnotic poem its enduring value is the sensitivity with which Pringle evokes the colours, the sounds and the immensity of his new country” (1970:xx). Observations like these were inevitably made in the context of Coleridge’s remark in a letter to Pringle that, with some omissions, the poem would rank as among the most perfect lyrics written in English. This is not a view that has gained wide currency: even in 1910 Low could dismiss it as an “exaggerated encomium” (209) while Wahl asserts that “few readers today would ... agree with Coleridge” (xx). Whether accepted or not, Coleridge’s praises might well have had the effect of foregrounding the poem’s formal qualities at the expense of its content, for it was not until 1982 that A.E. Voss’ reading of the poem brought to it a strong formal analysis coupled with an awareness of its determining context. The result was a startling inversion of over two centuries of readings which saw the poem as being above all literary in its achievement, especially in its depiction of South African landscape and natural life. “Here were images”, writes John Doyle in this critical tradition, “some of which became standard in South African poetry. Pringle’s sky burned on into the twentieth century” (1972:60) while G. M

Millar and Howard Sergeant similarly observe that “it is when [Pringle] is re-creating the never-to-be-forgotten experience of the ‘brown’ Karroo that he catches the spirit of Africa, its majestic brooding elements, its colour and movement, and its impact upon the spirit of man”(1957:22). As this compendium of quotations suggests, Pringle’s poem was simply not read as in any way a document of colonialism at all.

That it took so long for such a reading to be applied to Pringle might in part be explained by the fact that unlike, say, Olive Schreiner, his writing did not attract a significant body of critical commentary and in part by the fact that an *idée fixe* of Pringle as progressive progenitor of white liberalism (the father of South African poetry, pioneer of press freedom and so on) prevented or discouraged a reading of these early Pringle poems in their full range of implication. Voss’s 1982 reading of the poem marked a critical transformation of its accustomed interpretations, although the line of enquiry which he more fully opened up had in fact been briefly suggested by Guy Butler in the editorial introduction to his 1959 anthology of South African poetry when he observed that despite its “pious” conclusion, the poem’s absorption in the “rapture of speed, space and violence” (xxvi) remains unresolved. In responding directly to critics like Wahl (quoted above) Voss asserts that “the poem’s verisimilitude goes deeper than this picturesque, to the psychological rather than the kinetic; the poem’s insistent rhythm implies ... an exploitative colonial myth in which the solitary is self-sufficient in his new nature”(1982:18). In this reading the poem rests on a self-cancelling structure of paradox and opposition in which Pringle’s complicity with colonial domination is a prominent feature - evident, for example, in the negative polarity of the bush-boy and the fact that the firelock is the only law of a desert land which also hosts the “still, small voice” of God himself, thus making them equivalent. Here is Voss’ conclusion:

‘Afar in the Desert’ then is not only lyric, but manic; not only hypnotic, but pathological; not only evocative of Pringle’s ‘new country’, but destructive of Africa’s old. The coda adds the third element to the colonist’s armoury, the bible; and Pringle is like the archetypal white colonial: mounted, rifle in one hand, Bible in the other.

Where, by the end of the poem, is the ‘silent bush-boy’? He has served his purpose as intermediary with nature and disappeared ... The power

of Pringle's poem is not in its 'local colour', but in its presumably intuitive following of the frustrations of colonial experience to their potentially horrifying and alienated conclusions: solitary identification with God and nature can mean the elimination of society. (1982: 20)

While my own reading of the poem has points of affinity with Voss's, and is not in emphatic disagreement with any of its observations, I would argue for a significant difference in emphasis: is Voss correct in ascribing to Pringle a fully complicit agency in the colonial process? While a measure of this agency is inevitable – what colonizer can operate without it – is Pringle's alleged assumption of the role of "archetypal white colonial", gun in one hand, bible in the other, not a little overstated? Though Pringle might indeed assume these postures, he finds no completion or "self-sufficienc[y]" in them. As Voss himself somewhat contradictorily notes, Pringle's "presumably intuitive" following through of the "frustrations" of colonial experience is in fact self-defeating and hovers on the brink of complete social negation. Isn't the point here that while Pringle's flight from "man" implies some sort of refusal of the colonial order, this refusal then turns in on itself as colonial "solitude" implodes in a loss of self that requires the contrivance of divine intervention to bring it back to sociality by "banish[ing]" the negatives of "bitterness, wrath, and fear". The high rhetoric of the poem might accommodate the voice in the desert, but from any other point of view it is implausible: Pringle's colonialism – in this poem at least – is not that of the settler as usurper, confident that his agendas will eventually prevail. It is despairing, beset by contradictions which it cannot contain; a colonialism beside itself, which has nothing of the assured prospectus of a nascent colonial community and a future colonial state present, for example, in later poems like "The Emigrant's Cabin" (published in 1834). I will come back to Voss's reading of the poem in the context of its ambivalent critical reception, but for the moment there are aspects of "Afar in the Desert" that require further elaboration.

Between the first version of the poem published in the *South African Journal* in 1824 and the final one ten years later in *African Sketches*, Pringle made a number of revisions of the poem. Most of these revisions were concerned with expressive economy and involved

special interest in itself, but since it was placed immediately before the poem one can at least assume that Pringle was aware that it mentioned Wordsworth's "love of seclusion" (1824:111) and expressed sentiments such as the following:

T]his power of observing and reflecting back the very form and body of external nature, though essential in a true poet, is entirely subordinate to those faculties, which, operating upon the materials thus collected, communicate to them spirit and expression. The poet ... must be habitually disposed to project his humanity – his sensitive, passionate and intellectual being into whatever he contemplates ... (1824: 109).

"Afar in the Desert", like "Evening Rambles" before it, does indeed act upon the "form and body of external nature" and initially attempts to "project ... humanity" onto this externality; as we have seen, however, these attempts founder. Both poems begin with explicit evocations of prior recollection which fail to accomplish a transitional or bridging moment to facilitate the assimilation of colonial landscape into European consciousness, and they both end without that moment of consummated reverie conventionally associated with twilight. In the process both poems also dramatise for us a divided and agonistic consciousness for whom the colonial encounter is both cognitively and emotionally disturbing. Pringle is very often seen – and with some justification – as a poet who "assimilates his data under the categories provided for him by the dominant poetic models of his time and place" (Coetzee 2001:254). I would argue, however, that in these poems Pringle recognizes that his "data" are in fact resistant to metropolitan models, and that this resistance is evident not so much in style and structure, uneven and incongruous though these may sometimes be, but as a fracturing on the level of content where the "dominant poetic models" buckle under the stress of unfamiliar experiences.

These poems of Pringle's mark both the emergence of a shattered and deeply self-divided colonial consciousness and its termination. The bulk of Pringle's subsequent poetry turns its back on any attempts at lyric evocation of the interaction between poet and landscape, with the exploration of subjectivity this entails, and turns instead to more objective forms. In a strange reversal, it is as though Pringle stopped being a Romantic poet (of a sort) whose

primary datum, however directed, is the poet's own consciousness, and turned instead toward more traditional forms (mainly the ballad and the sonnet) in which he assumed the voice of public address. This 'turn' in Pringle is complex and requires a contextualisation of its own, but for the moment I wish to focus briefly on two commentaries which respond to Voss's reading of "Afar in the Desert" and provide a useful starting point for discussion. The first of these is in the introduction to the 1989 edition of Pringle's *African Poems* by Michael Chapman and Ernest Perreira, a commentary more or less duplicated in Chapman's *Southern African Literatures* published in 1994. The second is the article by Malvern Van Wyk Smith, to which I have already alluded. In the case of Chapman and Perreira, they accept the pertinence of Voss's criticism but deflect its implications by claiming that the poem's negative or politically suspect aspects – such as the stifling of the voice of the bush-boy – are recuperated in Pringle's later work where, as they put it, "the silent bush-boy ... return[s], recurrently, in Pringle's poetry as the enslaved Hottentot, the defiant Bushman, or the revolutionary warrior prophet". For them this recurrence is "imaginatively and morally right" (1989:xxv) and reflects Pringle's "intellectual and emotional quest ... for progressive conduct and action in a severely divided landscape"(xxvi). Van Wyk Smith gets to a similar point but concedes less to the Voss reading: while describing it as a "fine analysis" he nonetheless maintains that it results in a reduction of Pringle "not merely to stereotype but to caricature" (23). Like Chapman and Perreira, he too situates the poem within a sequence of progression wherein Pringle advances from a Eurocentrically inscribed subjectivism to an activist of African causes who "devote[d] himself to giving a voice to what he perceived to be the voiceless peoples of Southern Africa" (30) and in so doing entered into "a historical engagement with the colonial world" (31). I am not so sure that this narrativising of Pringle's 'progress' is quite as linear as these comments suggest; nor am I convinced that the ethics of social "engagement" or "progressive conduct" which allegedly characterize the later poems allow us to view poems like "Afar in the Desert" (to which I would add "Evening Rambles") as being hampered by an insufficiency of the historical or moral imagination. In the chapters that follow I shall attend, among other things, to the varied contexts in which Pringle produced these later poems, the audiences for which they were intended, and the

conventions of representation on which they drew. The first of these contexts, which produced a number of poems which Pringle might otherwise never have written, was Pringle's clash with the governor of the Cape, Sir Charles Somerset – an intra-colonial debacle that proved more ruinous to Pringle's ambitions than anything he ever encountered on the frontier.

¹ Pringle's description of the settler camps is very often quoted in general historical accounts of the settlers (see for example Edwards 1934:63) largely because his seems to be the most detailed description available. Alister Sparks' popular *The Mind of South Africa: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid* quotes and paraphrases the passage as though it were an incontrovertibly accurate account of events (1990:59). Literary critics have for the most part not commented on the class vituperation evident in these passages, or on the implications this has for our understanding of Pringle's work. Chapman and Perreira in their editorial introduction to *African Poems of Thomas Pringle*, for example, state that "Pringle's *Narrative* gives a lively description of the scene; at the same time he already notices how ill-suited some of the settlers were to the kind of life awaiting them" (1989:xv). Guy Butler on the other hand says of the passage I have quoted that Pringle's "comments on the moral qualities of the Settlers are perhaps too much coloured by their subsequent misadventures" (1974:100) and observes a little later that the "less attractive, poorer settlers" are "tartly dismissed by Pringle" (103). Butler, to the best of my knowledge, never developed this position into any kind of critique. His assessment of Pringle in the introduction to *A Book of South African Verse* is however sharp, and largely dismissive (1959: xxii-xxiv).

² The evidence for the invention, or at the very least the excessive embellishment of the predicament of the Xhosa woman, is compelling. For a start, as the editor of the 1966 edition of the *Narrative* points out in a footnote to this passage, there were at the time no laws enabling the Xhosa to be "given out in servitude" to the colonists. Then there is the journal of George Barker, the LMS missionary who received Pringle at Bethelsdorp. Barker's journal notes the visit of Pringle, but only in a passing reference ("Mr Pringle came from the Bay, found him a very intelligent man & very pleasant company" (SAL: George Barker, Journal, MSB 57,1(5).)) and no mention is made at all of the incident which Pringle describes at some length. We get some clue to the identity of the Xhosa woman in a slightly earlier entry in the Journal, where Barker records:

May 13. Rode to the Bay at request of Capt Evatt to fetch out the (illeg) people. Found 13 women 4 of whom had a large quantity of bread & flour. Rode around by the cattle place after I brought them to Bethelsdorp, called the people together in the church & untied the bundles of (illeg) women brought from the Bay & took out before them all 2 buckets of flour & 4 loaves of bread. Did this to shame ... (further entries erased on original).

The details are scanty, and it is difficult to fathom exactly why the thirteen women were apprehended – stealing supplies from Bethelsdorp to sell to the settlers? Barker's journal gives little sense of the experiential tenor of these events, making it difficult to gauge the impact or the implications of what he describes. In a later entry (the 15th of May) he tersely notes: "Rode out to Uitenhage to accuse the women whom I found in the Bay on Saturday. 3 were punished, one

sent out to service for a year and the others reprimanded". Is the "one sent out to service for a year" the original for Pringle's Xhosa woman? Whatever the actual circumstances were, it is clear that Pringle's version of events is very freely embroidered and there is every reason to believe that his account of the Xhosa woman is most notable not for its outrage but for its invention.

³ Pringle's views on race and class were shared by other humanitarians at the Cape. In 1833, for example, John Philip wrote a report for the American sister society of the London Missionary Society, in which he declared that "In point of abilities and good feelings, I consider the Caffres on the borders of the colony as decidedly superior to that portion of the refuse of English society that find their way to this country". This is followed a little later by the qualification that "Contemplated through the medium of their own superstitions, or that of their general condition, we might hastily pronounce them [i.e. the Xhosa] to be inferior to the white race; but on these points they lose nothing by a comparison with our European ancestors" (quoted in Ross, 1986:96). "Justus" (the pseudonym of the humanitarian Beverley Mackenzie) was more forthright about Xhosa superiority to the lower British orders in his tract *The Wrongs of the Caffre Nation*:

It appears to me that, setting aside the externals of clothing, and conveniences of civilised life, and viewing the savage mind in a moral and philosophical light, the lower order of the English nation are in many places far more *savage* than the Caffres – more savage in coarseness of mind and manners, more desperate, unrestrained, and uncivilised, and in one word, very far below the Amakosae in the scale of recovered humanity. (1837:60)

In a consideration of evangelical humanitarianism and class in the early nineteenth century, Susan Thorne has argued that the categories of race and class were "not yet the antithetical or even discreet axes of identity that they have since become" (1997:247-8). But she points out that this "circumventing of those social boundaries we know as 'race' and 'class'" came at the cost of severe exclusions of its own, since it was imposed in "such a way as to reinforce rather than subvert imperial as well as domestic social hierarchies. This was a profound and consistently negative equality ..." (248). For a general analysis of fundamental tensions in nineteenth-century liberal theory as played out in the domains of Empire, see Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought*. As Mehta observes, Liberalism's commitment to a hierarchy of values – such as that espoused by Pringle in this passage – necessarily diminishes the integrity of other forms of experience, and grants these forms of experience value only insofar as they exhibit the potential to approach Liberalism's own civilizational norms. "The judgement of other people's experiences as provisional – and the interventions in their lives that this permits – is the conceptual and normative core of the liberal justification of the empire" (1999:191).

⁴ In John Philip's *Researches in South Africa* (1828) an entire chapter is devoted to the mission station. Entitled "Testimonies in Favour of Bethelsdorp", the chapter consists of assessments of the station's progress by "individuals ... wholly unconnected" with the London Missionary Society and hence unlikely to "overcharge the picture" (225). Among the testimonialists is Pringle, whose account of Bethelsdorp hinges on the improvements he discerns in the station between his first visit in 1820 and his second in 1825 (the latter visit is never mentioned in the *Narrative*). The testimony Pringle supplies about the station during his first visit is brief, but it significantly contradicts what he writes in the *Narrative*. He asserts, for example, that "the want of personal and permanent interest in the soil, and, above all, the want of the feelings and habits which such circumstances promote, had prevented the inhabitants of Bethelsdorp from attaining that progress in the comforts and decorums of civilised life, which tend so much to improve their character, and to please and prepossess the passing traveller" (227). Pringle then goes on fulsomely to praise the "strikingly improved" (228) state of the mission. Clearly, the contradictions between this account

and the one published in 1834 was of no concern to Pringle. What we see here (and the account of the Xhosa woman is a variant of this) is how the need rhetorically to promote or propagandise the humanitarian cause could over-ride considerations of fact or even fear of contradiction.

⁵ Elizabeth Elbourne, for example, comments that the humanitarian group, led by John Philip and the LMS “successfully manipulated the symbolism of “civilisation” to wring real political concessions ... from the British parliament” (2002:234) and that the representation of indigenous people “required some manipulation of the truth” (235). This is a view from which few historians dissent; where dissent does arise it is over what these humanitarian interventions accomplished, especially in the long run.

⁶ A very similar sense of an unsettling contrariety in the landscape may be found in a passage in George Thompson’s *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa* (1827). The book was edited by Pringle with a very free hand and sections of it seem to be his work alone. The landscape description below, set somewhere between George and Knysna, is an example of this:

The scenery around this spot is certainly picturesque and imposing in a high degree. The lofty, rugged mountains on the left, crested with clouds, and clothed along their skirts with majestic forests, - those woods irregular, dark, hoary with moss, and ancient looking almost as the rocks which frown above them, or the eternal ocean itself which murmurs at their feet, - form altogether a scene of grandeur which fills the imagination with magnificent and romantic images; accompanied however with ideas of wildness, vastness, and solitary seclusion, almost oppressive to the heart. (4)

Contemplation of the landscape again yields a contradictory mix of visual impression and emotional response. Hence the scenery is “certainly picturesque” but with touches of the sublime (“rugged”, “majestic”, “a scene of grandeur” etc). Similarly, though the “scene” inspires the “imagination”, the accompanying association of “ideas” works against this. This disassociation is very similar to that in the passage describing the coastal view. In both cases aspects of landscape familiar to European conventions are intermixed in unusual ways and do not carry their usual significations

⁷ J.M. Coetzee’s assertion that in Pringle’s “extremely loose usage, we ... have the *wild/sublime* set against the *tame/picturesque*” (1988:49) seems to me mistaken. While the passage of landscape description he chooses from the *Narrative* to illustrate Pringle’s use of the word picturesque contains no “wild” elements, other passages, such as the one I have quoted, do. Coetzee’s *tame/picturesque* pairing takes its first term from an explicit reference to *English* scenery (“the rich tameness of ordinary English scenery” (84) which Pringle sets up in pointed antithesis to a Scottish “stirring recollection” of their homeland called up by the “rugged peaks and shaggy declivities” of the Eastern Cape Coast. As we have seen, in *The Autumnal Excursion* Pringle associates the English picturesque with the orderly and the cultivated; it is unlikely that he would extend this association to the barely settled frontier region. I would suggest that a more suitable schema for Pringle’s landscape representations would be a tripartite *waste/sterile, wild/picturesque, savage/sublime*. Such schematisations are unavoidably imprecise: there are occasions when the wild leans toward the sublime, as in “wild grandeur” (117). Compare also the passage quoted in footnote six.

⁸ I am indebted here to a similar reading of this section of the poem by David Bunn, though my understanding of its contextual implication is differently weighted. Bunn writes, for example, that the effect of lines 73-76 is “to suggest a nature reduced to quiescence. The only explanation for this change is that the setting is being prepared to accommodate the settler family, conceived of as a center of gentle patriarchal control far removed from the violence associated with the actual colonial process. Because the transitional landscape being built up in the poem is ahistorical, any

form of temporal reference – even geologic time, the time of erosion and sedimentation – is potentially threatening because it may remind of prior historical violence that prepared the way for this foreign invasion” (1994:143). Comments like these beg the question of why the poem allows the existence of threat or potential threat, and their figuration as “grave” or “memorial”, to be inscribed in the landscape in the first place. They also ignore the complications of other forms of “temporal reference” (such as “soothing recollections”) whose screening or occluding influences are admitted to be illusory. Pringle might, it is true, move to diminish such threats, but the more important point is surely that he brings them into play, that he allows their disturbance even if he does move to curtail their implications. The poem does not, it seems to me, exercise the degree of “ideological control” which Bunn ascribes to it. Far from “producing a landscape apparently willing to admit the colonial presence” (145) it produces – I argue – a landscape that is bewildering and even inimical to this presence. Despite its incisiveness, as a reading of the poem Bunn’s essay is very often selective: he tends to ransack the poem for points that corroborate a larger argument about colonial landscape rather than to read it on its own terms.

⁹ One must recognise that Pringle’s use of the “desert land” as a trope for material and spiritual depletion is entirely conventional. Even in the *The Autumnal Excursion* one of Pringle’s incidental poems contains the lines “sandy deserts scorched and dun,/ Stretched boundless neath a fiery sun” (1819:59) For nineteenth-century colonial writers (and beyond this as well) the Karoo fitted the tropological bill for what Johnson called “an unknown and untravelled wilderness” (he was observing a landscape in the Scottish Highlands). “The phantoms which haunt a desert”, wrote Johnson, “are want, and misery, and danger; the evils of dereliction rush upon the thoughts; man is made unwillingly acquainted with his own weakness, and meditation shews him only how little he can sustain, and how little he can perform” (1984:61). Educated nineteenth-century colonials were habitually disposed to read empty landscape such as the Karoo as the site of a displacement of consciousness itself. In 1842, for example, the missionary Robert Moffat wrote of the “Karoo country” that “[n]owhere appear any signs of life, nor a point on which the eye can dwell with pleasure. The compass of human sight is too small to take in the circumference of the whole – the soul must rest on the horrors of the wide spread desert” (quoted in Comaroff & Comaroff 1989:175). The long critical reluctance to read “Afar in the Desert” in a historically particular manner might in part be explained by the very generality of its central metaphor.

CHAPTER THREE

CAPE TOWN AND BEYOND: 1822-1825.

It was Pringle's great misfortune – as it was of many others – to cross the path of Lord Charles Somerset, the plenipotentiary figure of British authority at the Cape. Somerset, who had been governor since 1814, was a British aristocrat with a military and court background. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary Bathurst in 1815 he declared his intention to run the colony as an “outwork to India” and to “sacrifice local considerations to the needs of that great Empire” (quoted in Edwards 1934:19). Such imperial anachronism dominated Somerset's career at the Cape and became increasingly untenable as both global and local developments necessitated changes he was incapable of responding to. C.A. Bayly has described British colonial governorships of this period as “proconsular regimes” dominated by an adherence to “loyalism, royalism and aristocratic virtue” (1989:194) and Somerset's style of government reflected this ethos: it was entirely autocratic, with all effective power invested either in himself or those appointed by him; even judicially, Somerset's role as Judge of the Court of Appeal meant that he had the final say in any matters that involved infringements of the law. His aristocratic intransigence in the face of demands for judicial and other reforms, precipitated largely by the arrival of the British emigrants, eventually proved his downfall and in 1827, under pressure both from the Whig lobby in parliament and disaffected settlers in the Cape, he resigned. Ironically, Pringle had at first benefited from Somerset's patronage: he approved generous grants of land to the Pringle party on the frontier, and when Pringle made his way to the Cape toward the end of 1822 it was to take up a government post set up for him by Somerset. Pringle's subsequent falling out with the governor was swift and brutal and came at a time when Somerset's affronted megalomania was at its worst.

Pringle had never envisaged his stay on the frontier as being permanent; even before the Scottish party arrived at their settlement, he had used his letters of introduction to petition colonial officials for employment in Cape Town. Once he was in a position to relinquish his frontier obligations he did so; nor did he ever return there on any serious basis. There is every reason to believe that he did not find living on the frontier a congenial experience. For a person of Pringle's background - university educated, a poet of genteel and antiquarian tendencies, the first member of his family to rise above their agricultural inheritance - settlement on a "remote and exposed part of the frontier" (1966:77) must have presented itself as absolute death to all his ambitions. It is little wonder that, in a letter to Scott, he archly described his location as "this forlorn fag end of the universe" (QBSAL, June 1952: 112). Pringle was also aware that he was placed in a situation where all the 'advancement' and 'improvement' of his native land was now quite literally being wound backwards. In another letter written to Scott within a few months of arrival on the settlement he showed a level awareness of this: "we shall never be (at least for some generations) entirely removed from the state of borderers" (SAL, Eric Pringle Ms:7). It is not hard to see that Cape Town must have seemed an attractive prospect to Pringle; here, at least, was a chance to exercise those abilities education and experience had fitted him for. A letter to Fairbairn shortly after his arrival in Cape Town is droll about life on the frontier and full of anticipation for the future:

You must understand my good friend that having tired of herding nowt (?) & hunting lions and Bushmen I accepted of an appointment offered me lately by the Governor - & I came down hither about two weeks ago to take charge of a public library lately instituted in the Town by the Government. The situation is quite to my wish - only the salary is rather small - & therefore to make out a more comfortable livelihood I have been induced to receive pupils which have been actually pressed upon me from the most respected families in the colony ... a good seminary here would be certain when once established to attract pupils from India - on very liberal terms & altogether there is scope for both you and me to make our fortunes if we can seize the "time and tide" ... I am happy to find myself in considerable repute here, & really see or think I have a fairer prospect of making an independence than I have ever before had before me. (FB: 1:2)

In another part of the letter Pringle also raises the possibility of “a magazine to enlighten South Africa”. All these plans of Pringle’s might well have gained him the security of employment he sought had they not fallen foul of a governor reluctant to cede even the smallest amount of control over the colony. Pringle’s colonial endeavours were perfectly respectable ones; there is no trace of any ‘radical’ intent in his desire to introduce into the Cape Colony rudimentary forms of civil society such as a press and a school. As we shall see, these ambitions for civic improvement were located very much within the mainstream of Whig reformist politics, just as they were consonant, as Kirsten McKenzie has argued, with “a wider shift in the mechanisms of power and the conceptions of politics in the colonial world”(1998/9: 91). We might think of colonialism and modernity as synonymous or at least coterminous terms, but the clashes between Somerset and his colonial critics instantiate the internal differentiations within colonialism itself – for these were fundamentally clashes over whether the colony should remain fixed in a pre-Enlightenment, absolutist mode of governance, or whether it should embrace the civil forms and institutions of an emergent modernity.

The professional activities Pringle engaged in after his arrival in Cape Town very quickly expanded from his duties as a librarian, which were in any case not very onerous, to include the setting up of a school, the establishment of a journal, and the founding of the colony’s first independent newspaper. In these endeavours Pringle was joined by his friend and fellow Scot, John Fairbairn, who, lured by Pringle’s epistolary praises of the prospects offered by the Cape, arrived in October 1823. The journalistic writing produced by Pringle and Fairbairn during this period is of historical interest insofar as it initiates the emergence of a rudimentary public sphere in the colony; for our purposes, however, this writing offers valuable, and critically neglected, insight into the initial stages of Pringle’s understanding of the colonial process. The evolution of this understanding, as we shall discover, was characterized by change and even contradiction and not the continuity of humanitarian intent so often ascribed to Pringle.

Pringle and Fairbairn's thoughts about colonization at the Cape were set out in editorial and article form in two publications: the *South African Commercial Advertiser*, which began publication in January 1824, and *The South African Journal*, which appeared twice (in March and May 1824) before being proscribed. It was never revived. The *Advertiser*, a bi-weekly, ran for 17 issues before suffering a similar fate. Two years later Fairbairn recommenced publishing and he would act as the editor of the *Advertiser* until his retirement in December 1859. In what follows I concentrate on the two issues of the *Journal* and the original editions of the *Advertiser*: these two publications contain extensive commentary on the state of the Colony, and recommendations for its future development. Both Pringle and Fairbairn were enthusiastic advocates of British imperial expansion, and it is within this overarching context that their prescriptions for colonial advancement at the Cape are articulated. In the "General Introduction" to the first number of the *South African Journal*, for example, Fairbairn locates developments at the Cape within the world-historical trajectory of a progressive, enlightened modernity sweeping away the "rubbish of tyrannical systems" and, enabling "all the tribes of the earth [to rise] into superior modes of existence ... in the grand concourse of improvement"(1824:7). In this vision of imperial expansion, Scottish 'improvement' joins hands with empire and the colonies are scripted as undergoing acceleration into the final stages of a stadial narrative of global proportions. The motors driving this vision of universal progress are "the enterprising Spirit of modern Christianity" (5) and "the active spirit of commerce, with all the arts in its train" (6). The enthusiasm for the improving mission of imperialism is matched by an effusive patriotism; the penultimate paragraph extols British achievements and institutions and concludes with an unashamed endorsement of national greatness: "[W]ith a noble spirit of love for the whole human family diffused through the mass of her population; - in calm wisdom and conscious strength, Britain stands at the head of the history, - of the reality, - almost of the hopes of Man" (7). This insistence on British superiority was typical, Linda Colley argues, of an aggressively affirmative British patriotism which understood imperial expansion as elective destiny: "God had entrusted Britons with empire ... so as to further the worldwide spread of the gospel and as a testimony to their status as the Protestant Israel"(1992: 368-9). In the "Prospectus" to the

Journal, the imperial appeal to the extension of British standards works in conjunction with an agenda of local as well as global ‘improvement’: “In Cape Town, and throughout the thriving and better settled portions of the colony, a surprising improvement in the conversation, manners, and general aspect of society”, they write, “is obvious to every capable and candid observer” (1824: np). They announce their intention to assist this “cause of human improvement” by bringing to the colony a “ready and respectable medium” for the dissemination of information modeled on European magazines and reviews. The “Prospectus” makes it plain that its eventual intention is to create an enlightened body of opinion that, along with cognate developments, will create an incipient civil society or public sphere, “the root and flower of a People’s strength”.¹ For all its optimism, this is a strongly exogamous politics that does not seek, or even envisage, any rapprochement with indigenous custom or lore.

The one article in the two issues of the *Journal* that elaborates on actually existing colonial conditions, however, suggests that the progress of an enlightened modernity is not as inexorable as the “Prospectus” and the “General Introduction” suggest. “On the Present State and Prospects of the English Emigrants in South Africa” was written by Pringle and recapitulates many of the issues we are familiar with from a previous chapter: the decline in fortune of the “landed” settlers and the relative prosperity of the artisanal class, the mismanagement of settler affairs by the Cape government, inadequate protection against frontier incursions, and so on. But the article goes beyond criticism of settler policy to outline views on trade and slavery that are derived from Adam Smith and which reveal Pringle just as much an economic modernizer as he was a sociocultural one. Of particular importance here is Pringle’s Smithian conviction that the capstones of a prosperous state are an unimpeded flow of capital and minimal government interference in private enterprise: “Capital and free government are essential to the success of colonization” (159). For Pringle Cape society is disfigured by the persistence of monopolistic practices that derived from its original status as a way-station to India: “The very peculiar state of society existing at the Cape, has been produced by the unnatural and injurious restrictions of the monopolizing

system of the Dutch East India Company” (158). Pringle cites as an example of such restraints on trade the government’s monopolization of the supply of forage and vegetables to troops based in Grahamstown and the frontier posts (155). He also complains that prohibitive legislation, such as “the emigrants being bound like serfs to their locations by absurd regulations” (159) is stifling the “natural progress of accumulation”. His views on slavery are also framed within an argument for greater economic flexibility and profit: “[I]t is an unquestionable fact”, he writes, “that the colonists are suffering more or less in proportion as they are possessed of slaves or, in other words, are receiving a smaller return from their capital , than if it was otherwise invested” (156).

Such ‘economism’ from Pringle is by no means inconsistent with his humanitarian ideals: it is of a piece with them, just as it frames his understanding of ‘rude’ societies such as the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. The general matrix of these ideas lies, as we have already seen, in the moral philosophers and political economists of the Scottish Enlightenment. Pringle’s prescriptions for the ‘improvement’ of the Cape derive from these sources; they also served as the principal ideological buttress for John Philip, who would very soon become Pringle’s humanitarian mentor (see Ross 1986: 24-26)). We tend to think of colonial reformers like Pringle, Fairbairn and Philip in terms that do not always take into account, to quote Womack again, “the seamless unity of religious, political, economic and cultural themes”(1989:5) Philip was an ardent propagator of the civilisational benefits of unrestrained trade, particularly its ability to entrain indigenous peoples in its wake: “Wherever the missionary places his standard among a savage tribe, their prejudice against the colonial government gives way, their dependence on the colony is increased by artificial wants; confidence is restored; intercourse with the colony is established; industry, trade, and agriculture spring up” (1828:x). Similarly, writing in his editorial capacity in the *South African Commercial Advertiser* (the very name of this paper proclaims the links between a free press and free trade), Fairbairn too stated the case for the colonial benefits of *laissez-faire* capitalism: “To stimulate Industry, to encourage Civilisation, and to convert the natives into friendly Customers, is ... a more profitable speculation than to exterminate or reduce

them to Slavery” (quoted in Keegan 1996:98). Such views would have been entirely shared by Pringle, and it is necessary not to lose sight of these interlinked attitudes towards different aspects of colonial life. It is misleading simply to abstract one set of attitudes, let us say moral objections to slavery, from another set of attitudes which sees slavery as a counter-productive economic practice. Any omission of implication across different contexts runs the risk of curtailing our understanding of colonial writings of this period; this is especially true of Pringle’s poetry, particularly the later poetry of ‘protest’, which is very often read with an immediacy that ignores its shifting affiliations with larger structural issues.²

The editorials written by Pringle and Fairbairn for the *Advertiser* are, as I have indicated and as we might expect, informed by a similar set of preoccupations. One notable difference is a concern in the *Advertiser* that the colony might be considered inferior to other imperial settlements. In an editorial on 4 February 1824, for example, comparison is made between “the colony we inhabit” and “other countries in a like state of immaturity and probation”. Though the editorial concedes that the colony has “been too long mismanaged”, it again insists that ‘improvement’ is now the order of the day: “We have much improved our manners ... and in the points wherein we are still most defective, if we are below some of our elders, we may venture to maintain that we are at least equal or superior to several of our compeers”. The relative colonial status of the Cape is a recurrent topic in these early editorials and signals an incipient nationalism and a regional imperial patriotism as well as an anxiety that the Cape not be seen as losing colonial rank. As an allied concern, the editorials also stress the need for “the cordial and complete amalgamation of the Dutch and English Colonists” (5 May 1824: 145), and repeatedly repudiate the “contemptuous and revolting account” of the Dutch colonists expressed in John Barrow’s *Travels in South Africa*. This “amalgamation” is, however, to be accomplished only on British terms. We are not accustomed to thinking of Pringle as a colonial loyalist, but there is no sign in these editorials that either he or Fairbairn could be considered in any way critical of the fundamental tenets of the imperial mission. Their first and primary ambition was to promote the establishment of a social order that reproduced the lineaments of British civil society

while developing a distinctive identity of its own. In summary, we might say of these early editorials that, for the most part, they are social commentary in the subjunctive mode, envisaging a society that, as it happened, never really came to pass. The fullest statement of this projected community may be found in the editorial for the 17 March:

Whatever we are, whether born in the Northern or Southern hemisphere, in England, in Holland, or in Africa, if we have made Africa our home, and feel a common interest in the prosperity of the Colony, we are all Africans.

If we do as we ought – we will love, respect, and promote the welfare first of our families, friends and connections – secondly, that of the Colony we inhabit – next of the Empire of which it forms a part – and lastly of the whole human race.

This vision of expanding social concentricity which has at its centre an African identity excludes any but Europeans from its membership; it is as though indigenous people are still awaiting the processes that might carry them to full citizenship. The paper's motto was taken from Dr. Johnson, "The mass of every People must be barbarous where there is no PRINTING", and the express purpose of the *Advertiser* was to create, to use Benedict Anderson's word, a "modular" form of Scottish civil society, in which a 'free' press acts as the catalyst for the formation of a colonial bourgeoisie. In seeking to create a Cape identity of this sort, the *Advertiser* editorials also recognized the importance of allied institutions such as public schools, which were approved as "nurseries of vigorous intellect and pure morals" (25 April 1824) Like the *South African Journal*, the *Advertiser* sought to place itself in the forefront of an evolving and improving colonial society and in pursuing this objective, and in appealing for their readers' support, Pringle and Fairbairn explicitly invoked the notion of "the people" as the final arbiters of social justice:

A knowledge of the real character of man, then, is not to be obtained from history ... seeing it is chiefly occupied with the paltry intrigues of Courts, the rage, the falsehood, and treachery of party men, or the ravages of military violence. From this body of Actors ... compared with the mass of mankind, and the calm retired observers, Orators, Moralists and Divines have been accustomed to draw all their opinions and their commonplace topics of abuse respecting the depravity of our nature ... Matters are now completely changed. The people are now united and combined together by ten thousand ties which no created arm can break asunder, and can, if so disposed – and, owing to their great intelligence, no cause but a good and great cause can so dispose them – in a few hours

can put in motion a degree of strength which no created wisdom can evade or defeat. (25 February, 1824).

Although somewhat melodramatic and prolix in expression, this editorial (written by Fairbairn) unambiguously rejects the authority of absolutist or aristocratic forms of government (“the paltry intrigues of courts”) and makes a claim for the authority of public opinion in determining the legitimacy of forms of governance. The invocation of “the people” in this context is deeply problematic; even in a metropolitan context the emergent middle class’s representation of its own interests as universal ones was belied by the social hierarchies on which it rested. In the colonial context, such claims risk being mere rhetorical devices, and Kirsten Mackenzie has demonstrated how, long after Somerset had gone, “the clamouring of discordant voices resounds throughout the *Advertiser*, disrupting attempts to construct a stable middle class colonial identity” (1993:199). By 1831, Fairbairn was more forthright on the subject of “the people”:

In a constitutional monarchy there is one voice which the chief ruler and his ministers are bound to obey – the voice of the public – that public being understood as the majority of the wealthy and intellectual inhabitants of the country. This is an acknowledged principle. Demands for changes in the institutions of the state, which are made by a minority, respectable for its character in society, are entitled to the attention and respect of those in power ... but all demands from the turbulent, the disloyal, or the irreligious, are to be firmly resisted. (26 October 1831)

I emphasise the exclusionary aspects of the kind of social formation Fairbairn (and with him Pringle, who never gave any indication of thinking differently on these matters) envisaged for the colony, in order to curtail the confusion that arises when it is assumed that the humanitarian reformers were democrats, anxious to recognize the political rights of all. We have already seen how contemptuous Pringle was of those members of the British lower orders who had lost the habit of class deference. This inflexible sense of proper place is also at work in Fairbairn’s triad of absolutely unacceptable persons, “the turbulent, the disloyal, or the irreligious” (and he is referring here to European colonists). In an editorial written later in the same year, Fairbairn too lamented the lack of a clearly defined class structure: “[t]here exists not in this town that perfect chain of intermediate links between him [the

white labouring class] and them [the “respectable” colonists], through which they can sympathize without impairing the just distinctions of rank” (10 August, 1831). As McKenzie observes, the public sphere envisaged by the *Advertiser* was, even in intra-European terms, characterized by an “absolute” separation “between that group which might legitimately act within the public sphere ... and all other groups” (1993:202).

What is most surprising about these early editorials is the relative lack of weight given to what would become Pringle’s central concern: colonial policy and indigenous people. The bulk of the reportage or editorial comment dealing with these matters is directed towards some Bechuana chiefs then visiting Cape Town, and I shall discuss this in more detail elsewhere. References to the frontier Xhosa, however, are routinely disparaging in tone. The first column of the editorial on 21 January (attributed to Fairbairn) reads as follows:

There have been no new arrivals from ----- since our last; and few occurrences of general interest at home, except that the Caffres still seem disposed to renew(?) their depredations on the frontier. It is the opinion of many that fear is the only sentiment which can perfectly influence the mind of a savage. Even this feeling in the present case appears to be very transitory and ineffective. When they become a civilized people their partiality to colonial beef and buttons may be turned to good account. At present, it must be confessed, they are, in every sense of the word, *ugly customers*.

A week later on 28 January, the editorial (attributed to Pringle) praises the “zeal, courage, and perseverance of the Missionaries in their Apostolic labours among the wild tribes bordering on this Colony”, and then goes on to add that:

[T]hey approach, and, in spite of the most contumelious treatment, take up their abode in the midst of savage hordes to whom violence, robbery, murder, and every abomination are familiar; and proceed, by persuasion and good example alone, to rekindle in the breasts of these wretched beings, the principles of justice, benevolence, and the love of GOD.

These crude derogations of the Xhosa would not have been out of place in the pages of the often viciously racist *Grahamstown Journal* a decade later. I do not think it is possible to

explain such commentary on the Xhosa as an aberration; it reminds us, rather, that Pringle's subsequent humanitarianism developed out of a specific conjuncture of events; it was not the product of a 'natural' ethical endowment.

There is a single editorial of a 'literary' tendency, written by Pringle himself, which begins by attacking what he calls "infidelity", i.e. atheism or being "chained ... beneath the Upas tree of Unbelief". The occasion is an article written by the poet Southey in the *Quarterly Review* in which he offers his views of "the malignant nature of the evil". Pringle praises Southey's piety, but believes that he has exaggerated the "extent and progress" of atheism, which Pringle seems to understand in a very inclusive way; at one point he conflates it with "writings at once seditious, immoral, impious, and in every respect disgraceful even to their degraded authors" thereby establishing an equivalence between atheism, political radicalism and deviant or non-conforming social behavior. About the authors of these writings Pringle is coyly evasive, though he does mention "a few men of extraordinary genius". One cannot be certain, but I would guess that Byron and Shelley might well be the culprits here, and possibly radical figures of some public notoriety like William Hone and William Godwin. At any rate, Pringle is dissociating himself, with some vehemence, from literary and political radicalism. His argument against the deleterious influences of radical writing is a wishful one: though he concedes that they "enjoy a certain sort of popularity", he remains convinced that "many purchase these bundles of poison solely for the purpose of ascertaining their specific qualities, in order to devise a method of protecting the minds of those whom they love against their effects". The improbable idea that people were buying this literature in order to inoculate their loved ones against its moral toxicity is then offset by praise of the "amazing purity" to be found in the "real and permanent favourites of the public", and the "more consilatory [sic] view of the spirit of the present age" they offer:

It is small praise to say of such men as Scott, Campbell, Rogers, and Wordsworth that they are faultless in this respect. We must acknowledge their positive merit. Throughout their poetical works, they keep up a constant reference to the pure and purifying principles of the Christian Faith, and exalt, even to a chivalrous degree, our ideals of personal honour, conjugal fidelity, loyalty, and heroism. The same tone pervades

the leading periodical productions of the day, which from their nature and destination indicate with great certainty the prevailing taste. Now where such productions are sought after and perused with an avidity and to an extent unexampled in the literary history of any other period, it is impossible to admit the notion of a comparatively great or growing spirit of Infidelity. But though this argument, considered in all its bearings, appears to us decisive of the point, we can refer for further confirmation of our opinion to those astonishing associations in behalf of truth and human happiness, the Bible and Missionary Societies, and to the innumerable Religious works constantly issuing from the English Press. (28 January 1824)

The editorial in general, and this passage in particular, is the closest Pringle ever comes to something like a literary manifesto and has, to the best of my knowledge, received no critical attention whatsoever. This is probably just as well: the claims Pringle makes here for “positive merit” in poetry are caricaturally narrow and do not even encompass his own poetic practice, let alone that of a poet like Wordsworth. One can only assume that Pringle assumed these postures of unbending piety as a tactical means of indemnifying himself against Somerset’s propensity to label any criticism of his administration as the work of radicals and dissenters.

* * * * *

The events that precipitated a sudden change in Pringle’s fortunes had their source in the falling out with Somerset over the publication of the *South African Journal* and the *Advertiser*. A protracted and sometimes bizarre feud between the two men ensued, and the result was an abrupt and damaging reversal of Pringle’s colonial fortunes. Somerset had first voiced suspicions about the character of Pringle’s political beliefs shortly after his arrival in the colony (and these suspicions might well have been prompted by Pringle’s role in the Society for Distressed Settlers). In a letter to Scott, written in October 1822 (the letter to Fairbairn above was written in November 1822), Pringle relates that he had applied for a job as Superintendent of the Government Press, but had been informed that Somerset declined

his appointment on the grounds that he was rumoured to be “a violent Whig & formerly a supporter of the *democratic press*” (QBSAL 1952:114). Pringle immediately “addressed a letter to the Colonial Secretary avowing myself a whig indeed – but disclaiming (as I may do with great truth) any connection with opposition press or with Political party of any description”. So desperate was Pringle to clear himself of these imputations of radicalism he even wrote to a well-connected Edinburgh acquaintance, Sir George Mackenzie, requesting that he approach two Scottish lords of the Admiralty to vouch for his political respectability, but nothing came of this (QBSAL December 1952: 80). The Colonial Secretary (Colonel William Bird, who had had his own difficulties with Somerset) advised Pringle not to pursue the matter and “to trust to time & the influence of my friends” (QBSAL June 1952:114) - which turned out to be extraordinarily bad advice. In a letter to the Under-Secretary for the Colonies soliciting advice on how to proceed with a request by Pringle and his associates to publish a periodical journal, Somerset wrote of Pringle that he was “a person who I understand has hitherto been employed to scribble for a magazine published at Edinbro’ under the auspices of the Edinbro’ Reviewers, whose political and religious opinions he of course adopts. He is an arrant *Dissenter*...” (quoted in Lewin-Robinson 1962:18). How Somerset managed to convince himself of the truth of these claims, we cannot say, but he persisted in them, much to Pringle’s detriment.

The rest of the story is well known: Somerset objected to what he held to be critical animadversions on his administration in the second issue of the *South African Journal* and publication ceased when Pringle refused to accept the constraining terms under which further publication would be allowed; the *South African Commercial Advertiser*, which Pringle and Fairbairn covertly edited, was threatened with censorship over possible reports on embarrassing libel trials and suspended publication; Pringle’s school was denounced by Somerset as disseminating the “most disgusting principles of Republicanism” (quoted in Lewin-Robinson 1962: 74) and he was forced to close it down after enrolments slumped; an attempt to found a quite harmless Literary and Scientific Society was quashed because of Pringle’s association with it; finally, and most mortifyingly, Pringle was implicated in a

notorious local scandal. This last incident might appear trivial, but it tells us much about Pringle's sense of propriety and the sheer oddity of the events he was involved in. It also tells us about another protagonist in the scurrilous "affair of the placard", as it was called, whose story, now seemingly forgotten, deserves some magnification. At stake in this colonial drama is what we might call the politics of respectability, which, as Robert Ross notes, involve the "outward manifestation of a specific class ideology" (1999:5) rather than transient matters of public reputation. The scandal began when an army officer saw a placard on Cape Town's Heerengracht suggesting that Somerset and his physician, Dr James Barry (who was in fact a woman, although this was not known) were engaging in 'unnatural' practices. By the time the officer had gone into his house to change and come out again, the offending placard had disappeared. He nonetheless reported his sighting to the authorities and Somerset authorized search warrants to find evidence against those who might be suspected of involvement. Pringle then heard, by a circuitous route (his informer had overheard someone talking about it), that his name was among the suspects. Shocked at this offence to his reputation, he immediately protested to the Commission of Inquiry then sitting in Cape Town³. The commissioners took the complaint to the Fiscal who denied it, but then queried the source of Pringle's information – which he was not prepared to disclose. The affair then dragged on, with accusation and counter-accusation, but Pringle's charge that Somerset had deliberately attempted to damage his reputation by putting his name on the list of suspects was never substantiated. The Commission of Inquiry, while admitting that the charge against Somerset was the most serious Pringle had made, eventually ruled that there was insufficient evidence to support it. Pringle was correct to claim that, in general, Somerset was intent on placing him "under a sort of civil proscription" (1966:198), but in his efforts to seek redress for the material and social deprivations he suffered as a result of Somerset's behaviour Pringle was not above some strategic sidelining of a similarly placed individual – the independent settler, Bishop Burnett, whose own efforts to seek redress from Somerset resulted in significant reform of the colony's legal system.

“The name which is most associated, nowadays, with the accounts of those early struggles for liberty is that of Thomas Pringle”, wrote G.E Cory in 1930, “... but, at the time, the name most trumpeted, was that of Mr. Bishop Burnett”. (1930, II:245). Isobel Edwards similarly observes that “Of all the complaints lodged against the colonial government, however, the petition of Bishop Burnett caused the Colonial Office the greatest anxiety; largely on account of the widespread publicity it received in the Press and in Parliament” (1934:111).

Inexplicably, Burnett seems to have gone out of historical print: recent works on this period (Crais, 1992; Keegan 1996; even Mostert’s monumental *Frontiers* (1992) fail to mention him at all, while Lester (2001) mentions Burnett in passing in a context other than his petition. Burnett, a settler who had paid his own passage, arrived in Grahamstown in 1820 and had set up a trade in forage for colonial troops with the government farm in Somerset. He became embroiled in litigation with Henry Somerset, the Governor’s son, and the manager of Somerset Farm, Robert Hart (a friend of Pringle’s). In the course of this litigation, Burnett was charged with libelling the colony’s legal system and successfully appealed a prison sentence but not banishment. He was then implicated in the placard scandal, which was alleged to be his work, but after eluding the Cape authorities he returned to London in 1825 where he continued, unsuccessfully, to petition the British Parliament.

My interest in Burnett - and my reason for this detour - is not in the details of his legal disputes or the probity of his character (he was not regarded as a ‘respectable’ settler by his peers) but the relative weight of his politics and those of Pringle, particularly as these pertained to language and gentility. While Burnett was no humanitarian reformer, and fixated entirely on private grievances, as a critic of the colonial government he was fearless and eloquent; nor was he afraid of publicly directing his scorn at the British government, a limit that other critics of Somerset’s administration would not overstep. In a book published in 1826, following the refusal of the parliamentary appointed Commission of Inquiry to find substance in his complaints, he described such commissions and their instigation as follows: “When the cries of the oppressed and persecuted have at length reached parliament, and redress is demanded with a voice too earnest to be slighted with impunity, the Colonial

Secretary instantly lulls the storm with this effectual damper on research: Ministers are about sending out a commission of inquiry”(iii); and on the notorious dilatoriness of these commissions he comments: “Time is no object with the commissioners; on the contrary they amass fortunes by protraction” (iv). Comments like these did not endear him to authority, not least because they were couched in an idiom considered inappropriate for official address. In general, Burnett’s petitionary style is emotive and rhetorically volatile; in sentiment, the petitions (and there were many of them) show some affinity with early nineteenth-century popular radicalism in their scorn of constituted authority. The Commissioners of Inquiry complained of his “violent and contumelious language” (SAL 968.7:47) and he was similarly reproved by Bathurst, the Colonial Secretary, “for want of temperance in [his] language” (1826: 24). In a letter to colonial officials in London, Burnett defended himself against such charges:

That his lordship (he is referring to Bathurst) “cannot conceive it to be possible that any individual could have been singled out for persecution or as incessantly harassed as I represent myself to have been” I can very well imagine, but this is no confutation of the fact; and I can see no reason why his Lordship should assume conclusions at variance with the premises before him, or charge the just expressions of my feelings, so long and remorselessly outraged, with intemperance and indiscrimination.
(SAL 968:6)

Olivia Smith has examined how within the British state itself there was a longstanding tendency to conflate the language of petition with the worthiness of its intent, and how “writing in a ‘decent and respectable’ language” (1984:30) was a condition for a petition being considered, let alone accepted. In this “politics of language” there was an assumption that any impropriety in language reflected on the morality and sensibility of the user; such discriminations were also used to map, and to enforce, class distinctions. No doubt these recriminations about his language worked against Burnett, but he had a compelling case and, more than any other single petitioner, was instrumental in the measures which led to Somerset’s recall and his eventual resignation. Isobel Edwards argues that the various omissions and delays attending the parliamentary presentation of Burnett’s case against the colonial government “affords an excellent illustration of the lengths to which the Colonial

Office was prepared to go to protect Lord Charles Somerset” (135). The debate on Somerset eventually petered out in the dying days of Lord Liverpool’s Tory administration. Somerset resigned in 1827, having been absent anyway from the Cape since 1826, and the reformed government declined to raise the matter again. Burnett’s petition was by no means without consequence, however: the Commission of Inquiry was asked to report on the administration of justice in the colony and the result was the Charter of Justice in 1827 which allowed for a much more independent judiciary. “Judicial reform”, writes Timothy Keegan, “was the most important measure to flow from the labours of the crown commissioners” (1996: 101)

Pringle’s name became indirectly associated with that of Burnett during the affair of the placards; it was particularly galling to Pringle that, apart from the impropriety of the charge itself, he was placed, or allegedly placed, in the same company as men like Burnett and William Edwards. The latter, a solicitor who had brought a successful case against the Collector of Customs for corruption, was then in prison for libel (among his accusations was that Sir Charles kept a slave concubine). In his memorial to Bathurst listing his grievances, Pringle described the circumstances in the following way:

Soon after my interview with his Excellency ... an infamous placard was reported to have been posted up, grossly reflecting on the honour of his excellency: and an immense reward was offered for the discovery of the author and warrants were issued by his excellency to search the papers of suspected individuals . On this occasion I accidentally discovered to my inexpressible horror and annoyance, that the fiscal had been authorized to insert my name among others of a very disreputable description in such warrant signed by the Governor thereby tending to convey an indirect but disgraceful and disgusting slur on my reputation. (SAL: A.FOL. 968.7033 PRI: 149)

Pringle’s concern with his reputation was paramount: a little later in the same memorial he asserted that “My reputation is my best, almost my only possession” and this reputation consisted in the fact that he was “a good and quiet citizen ... a man of loyal principles and irreproachable conduct” (151). The affair of the placards was understood by Pringle to be nothing more than an attempt to “slur” this reputation by placing him in disreputable company. Especially disagreeable to Pringle was Bishop Burnett himself: in his letters to

Fairbairn in the months that followed this incident, he was more explicit about Burnett who was, claimed Pringle, “a sort of Gentleman Swindler, & without any principle of truth or honesty” (FP: 1: 100B). Although in the same letter Pringle conceded that Burnett had been “ill-used” by the colonial government who, at Somerset’s behest, “broke through all the rules of law to smash Burnett” and that Burnett was “also right” in his allegations that the commissariat at Somerset Farm was swindling the settlers, these facts seemed to matter little to Pringle when set beside Burnett’s character. Pringle also disapproved of the use of language in Burnett’s petitions, which he unhesitatingly linked to Burnett’s personal qualities: “It is too rude & violent, that style – I don’t like it. That fellow Burnet will do mischief I doubt. He won’t bear inspection himself & will consequently be easily crushed” (FB: 1: 92). As the Burnett case grew more topical and looked set to become the subject of a formal parliamentary inquiry, Pringle took it upon himself to try to shut the process down by communicating doubts on Burnett’s character to those Whigs in London who were prominent in attempting to make the Cape Governor the subject of a parliamentary investigation. He wrote to Fairbairn:

You will observe that the inclosed letters to Hume and Brougham are duplicates. I wish them sent off not by the first vessel but the 2^d if you can manage it. My reason for this you can easily guess. If you think of any remarks on what I have written you can send them inclosed with mine. Perhaps you’ll think I have been too severe on Burnet – but it is necessary. He is an unprincipled vagabond & his exposure will reflect disgrace on the public cause if Brougham is not warned. (FB:1:114).⁴

This was an act of extraordinary arrogation on Pringle’s part. He nowhere indicates exactly what Burnett had done to merit the abuse he heaps on him and admits in another letter that he had only ever spoken to him in passing. Then there is the simple fact that, as Pringle well knew, Burnett had legitimate grievances and had been reduced to an insolvent fugitive before being banished. It is difficult to understand why Pringle was so set on preventing Burnett’s petition from being debated: his assertion that the “public cause” would be damaged by the failure of Burnett’s petition seems an odd hypothesis, given the sheer range of opponents lined up against Somerset and the extensive clamour against his administration at the Cape⁵. As it happened, Burnett’s petition, which was first debated in the House of

Commons on the 16th of June 1825 (that is, before Pringle began his campaign to warn sympathetic Whigs of the defects of his character) was, notwithstanding Pringle's efforts, brought up again in May 1826. The debate on the petition was delayed again, but in the meantime the opposition demanded a full copy of the parliamentary papers regarding Burnett's case. These were then put before parliament on the 7th of December, but by then momentum against Somerset had gathered on several fronts and an attempt to adjudicate the Somerset affair solely by reference to Burnett's petition was refused by Whig MPs on the grounds that a whole array of evidence against Somerset needed examining (Edwards 1934:137-8). It is hard to say what, if any, influence Pringle's interventions had, but it seems unlikely that they made any great difference to anything - even if they did encourage certain Whigs to doubt Burnett's character. By this stage, Somerset's reputation was in such tatters that his governorship was effectively over when he left the colony in March 1826 and the various parliamentary delays were simply playing for time. Nor does Pringle refer to these parliamentary events in his letters to Fairbairn from London. The only such reference, dated 30 September 1826, is to the report of the Commissioners of Inquiry in which he states that a whitewash for Somerset seems likely and that "They have done up Burnett" (FB 1: 134). No mention is made at all of the campaign that so preoccupied Pringle or what became of it.

Pringle might well have been sincere in his belief that Burnett's character would not bear scrutiny in the House of Commons and that other petitions would suffer by association, but this does not fully account for the vindictiveness with which he pursued this matter. What the Burnett affair does demonstrate, however, is that Pringle's involvement in colonial reform could be opportunistically or strategically motivated; it was not always a matter of humanitarian conviction. Like so many other colonial incidents at this time, the agitation over Somerset was riddled with personal agendas, shady motives, dubious behaviour and intra-colonial backstabbing, in which Pringle also played his part.⁶ In a study of colonial scandal in Cape Town and Sydney in the first half of the nineteenth century, Kirsten Mckenzie observes how in this period, before urban class divisions had fully configured, scandal operated not as an unedifying diversion from the norm, but as a socially

differentiating mechanism sifting the authentically respectable from parvenus and pretenders threatening to erode “the tenuously genteel society of the imperial bourgeoisie” (2004:32). The need to monitor the borderlines of propriety in these nascent colonial societies is also, Mckenzie argues, the product of a “sensitivity to metropolitan disdain” (12), particularly since metropolitan perceptions of colonial behaviour influenced the legislative options of the Colonial Office. Ironically, Pringle’s vendetta against Burnett, the bottom line of which was the impugning of Burnett’s respectability, involved the very same tactics, albeit in a less offensive form, that he so affrontedly accused Somerset of using against himself. In both cases the intent was to attack an individual’s social standing by “construct[ing] a reputation” (10) damaging to public perceptions of his respectability. Pringle’s implication in colonial scandal, both as a victim of unsavoury inferences and as the perpetrator of slurs on the respectability of others, underlines the often debilitating limits of colonial society and the tendency of factional dispute to descend into vindictive squabbling.⁷

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The period from May 1824 until April 1826 when Pringle finally left South Africa was a difficult one for him: he had no means of maintaining himself in Cape Town, and drifted around the colony before returning for a temporary stay with his family on the frontier. Our knowledge of this period, apart from Pringle’s own account of it in the *Narrative*, owes much to the letters he wrote to Fairbairn during this time. Most of these concern the ongoing dispute with Somerset and his submissions to the Commissioners and Bathurst, but they also give us a fairly detailed record of the poems he wrote. He also gave details of new submissions to the Commissioners concerning his own case, and on other matters, such as the commando system. Pringle was more or less marooned in the frontier districts and had to rely on Fairbairn to keep him informed about developments at the Cape, to forward and check some of his own depositions to the Commissioners and to pass on articles and poems

he wanted published. What is most notable about this correspondence, however, is its angry, aggrieved and conspiratorial tone. As we might expect, Pringle obsessed over the details of the inquiry, over rumours and rebuttals, and over the possible judgement of his own case. His mood appears to have been volatile, and the letters veer between paranoid suspicion and grandiose expectation. He writes of the Commissioners, for example, that “I have never doubted (nor can I permit myself to doubt) so far as regards their being men of high honour & principle” (FP:1:62:J). Then he adds in a contradictory disclaimer: “But there appears to be some power of darkness behind them which is prepared, I suspect, to throw glamour into the eyes of the public”. Such exaggerated suspicions frequently emerge in the letters, and they are at times accompanied by an equally inflated sense of the magnitude of his own role: “I shall meet them intrepidly”, he wrote of his apparently multiplying enemies, “& do not despair of routing the whole pack” (FB:1:60).⁸ Patricia Morris describes Pringle’s conduct of his case as “embarrassingly egocentric and short-sighted” (1982:312), especially in regard to the closing down of the *South African Journal*, and there can be little doubt that Pringle was not possessed of a steady judgement in pursuing these causes (of which the Burnett affair was another example). Nonetheless, it was during this fraught period that Pringle’s writing took on the character with which it is now primarily associated: an often polemical rhetoric of colonial reform in his prose writings and in his poetry a move toward the depiction of indigenous people, often in situations or roles which emphasized their sufferings at the hands of the colonizers.

Throughout the period after he had left Cape Town and before his departure to London in April 1826, Pringle wrote, or began to write, at least eleven poems, of which three, “The Bechuana Boy”, “Makanna’s Gathering” and “The Song of the Wild Bushman” employ indigenous speakers. The others “A Noon-day Dream”, “Franschoek”, “Genadendal”, “To Scotland”, “The Nameless Stream”, “Sonnet to Oppression” and “A Common Character” are, for the most part, generically stylized poems which reflect the poet’s situation. Occasionally Pringle’s indignation bursts through the formal frame to denounce a generalized “tyranny”

and “oppression”. The representative example here is “To Oppression”, in which Pringle affirms a commitment to opposing colonial injustice:

I swear, while life-blood warms my throbbing veins,
Still to oppose and thwart with heart and hand
Thy brutalizing sway – till Afric’s chains
Are burst, and Freedom rules the rescued land, -
Trampling Oppression and his iron rod,
- Such is the vow I take – So help me God! (ll. 9-14)

This is poetry of a formulaic cast, with a strong resemblance to the public poetry written to protest the slave trade, in which the wrongs of Africa and the guilt of Europe are repeatedly protested. These lines from Southey’s “The Genius of Africa” (1795) are typical:

By every drop of blood bespilt,
By Afric’s wrongs and Europe’s guilt,
Awake! Arise! Avenge!

Though “To Oppression” certainly had Somerset in its sights, its apostrophizing and denunciatory rhetoric has an obvious precedent in eighteenth century anti-slavery poetry. The full extent of this influence on the South African poetry Pringle wrote in England will be examined in the next chapter.

The only two of these poems to be published in South Africa at this time were “Franschoek” and “Genadendal”. Neither, I think, is of great interest either in itself or in terms of the development of Pringle’s poetry. Both are Petrarchan sonnets which praise the achievements of two of the colony’s oldest mission settlements: the French Huguenots in Franschoek and the German Moravians in Genadendal. Though competently executed, the sonnets have the feel of verse exercises, done for the occasion. Such technical facility is notably absent from what is certainly the most interesting – one is almost inclined to say the most deformed – of these poems: “A Noon-day Dream”. Like “Evening Rambles” and “Afar in the Desert”, the poem dramatizes the failed transposition of memory and desire into the colonial present, but on this occasion there is an anomalous retreat from colonial experience, which functions only as a minimal frame to the poem rather than its overtly informing context. As the title

suggests, noonday dreaming is an anomalous activity that inverts the normal temporality of the oneiric and works to block out the external world when the dispersion of daylight is at its peak. A short introductory stanza sets the scene:

'Twas noontide; and breathless beneath the hot ray
 The far-winding vales of the wilderness lay:
 By the Koonap's lone brink, with the cool shadow o'er me,
 I slept – and a dream spread its visions before me. (ll. 1-4)

In a shift from this depopulated “wilderness”, Pringle proceeds to imagine himself – in what has become by now a somewhat fixated regression – “to be back among scenes which I loved when a boy/ ... walking again with fresh feelings of joy”. This regression to “young rapture” is sufficient, for the moment, to “melt ... away” the featureless desolation of Pringle’s actual location and summon up in its stead a “sweet glen” populous with children, butterflies, braes, birds, huntsmen, shepherds, milk-maidens, and so on. For a full twenty nine lines (ll.15-44), the poem loses itself in a pastoral evocation, as though the most emollient aspects of Pringle’s childhood have found imaginative recuperation in the colonial wilderness. As we have come to expect, this transpositional interlude does not last. What follows on, however, is not an abrasive re-entry into the colonial present, but a further displacement, this time into a clumsily allegorical urban landscape. Here a dignified procession of “poets and sages ... /And statesmen and heroes” is scattered by a “boisterous crowd of maskers and rhapsodists” whose “lewd love of mischief” and “scurrilous song” threatens to invert the moral order: “to scoff at the Right and applaud the Wrong”. (We might note in passing here a repetition of Pringle’s habit of using sexualized reference –“lewd”, “scurrilous” – when describing anything that threatens the established order.) The final stanza registers yet another shift (“The Visionary Pageant again seemed to change”), this time to an indeterminate space of “aspect strange”, where the dream modulates into an improbable procession of silent crowds in “abject fear” of “a grim spectre enthroned on high/And his name was written – TYRANNY!”. This lurid spectre commands vast crowds of all “the tribes of the earth”, including “proud England’s children” and only a fortuitous thunderbolt at the

end of the poem “shivers the rock” on which tyranny is enthroned and awakens Pringle from his gaudy nightmare. The poem ends, as it began, with the poet in his solitary location:

Awaking, I hear but the wild river sounding;
I gazed, but saw only the klip-springer bounding,
And the eagle of the Winterberg, high o'er the woods,
Sailing supreme 'mid his solitudes. (ll.106-9)

That “A Noon-day Dream” has slipped entirely under the net of critical attention is understandable: it is a forced, awkward poem that moves from make-believe to portentous melodrama while never at any stage managing seriously to engross the reader’s attention. However, I would argue that despite obvious failures of conception and execution, the poem is open to a symptomatic reading of some interest. “A Noon-day Dream” certainly perplexed Fairbairn, who was its first reader. In a letter written to Pringle, he complained of the poem that it was a “nightmare”. Replying to this criticism, Pringle wrote back “Your examination of my “Dream” has diverted me ... - The fact is I wrote it without any plan at all. One thing rose out of another. I am therefore sensible that it must be very incongruous and crude.”(FB:1:122). Such misgivings did not prevent Pringle from eventually publishing the poem, to which he made minor revisions, in his 1828 annual *Friendship’s Offering* and again in *Ephemerides* (1828) and *African Sketches* (1834). We can only guess at Pringle’s motives for publishing material he appeared to hold in some doubt, but it remains of interest that he admits to having written the poem without any clear sense of what he was doing. It is, I would argue, precisely this lack of conscious control which allows us to read this “incongruous and crude” poem as indexing a lot more than its ostensible subject matter. We might begin by observing that that the poem is disablingly disjunctive: it traverses real and imagined spaces that bear little relation to one another, and even less to the physical location on the Eastern Frontier which Pringle was nonetheless careful to note. In this sense “A Noon-day Dream” might be understood as displaying, or enacting, a fairly extreme form of disorientation: despite its ostensible anchoring on the Frontier, the poem moves from space to inconclusive space without any but the most forced resolution; it is a poem that does not know where it is, let alone where it is going. When one considers the thematics of the poem – such as they are – similar disproportions are evident. The poem cuts from a mute and

“breathless” wilderness to Scottish scenes infused with a plethora of natural detail and visions of a childhood idyll “Unaltered by years, and unclouded by care”. From this juncture, seemingly a secure one, the poem abruptly switches to an allegorical nightmare which dramatizes an incipient breakdown in the social order – a breakdown fully confirmed in the next long stanza, where visions of a universal abasement are cut short only by fortuitous natural intervention. One might observe of these two last stanzas that however unconvincing one might find them on the level of poetic invention, they present a remarkably paranoid apprehension of historical process. It is as though Pringle’s own imperiled situation (where for the forces of “tyranny” one may readily substitute Somerset’s autocracy) is now translated into a much wider context. Is this an unconscious intimation that the civilising mission is without moral foundation and threatens to undermine rather than to extend the Protestant mandate to extend its benefits across the face of the earth? Despite at first making the familiar move of setting Pringle’s Scottish experience as a baseline from which to negotiate colonial consciousness, the poem then drifts into stilted allegory which figures a collapse of ethical values within a generalized, rather than a local, frame. The brief stanzas that open and close the poem might describe a formulaic colonial landscape in which no human figures are present; however, the final image of an eagle “Sailing supreme” in the emptiness of the sky suggests an indifference to human endeavour, even an escape from it. Paradoxically, this version of empty colonial space offers the poet a reprieve from the abjection of his own vision.

Whatever one may say about “A Noon-day Dream” – and my own comments on the poem are (unavoidably?) rather speculative – its inchoate pessimism suggests that Pringle was experiencing increasing difficulty writing poetry in the vein of “Afar in the Desert” and “Evening Rambles” (of which this poem offers us a weak generic variant). It is as though, as I have remarked before, a poetics of the self is no longer possible in a world that refuses the self any corroboration. It is not altogether surprising that Pringle should abandon this mode, and that his final attempt at writing such poetry fails on a number of levels. We should note, however, that a dissociation between self and world has continued to inform, or disable,

poetry written by South Africans of European origin. Thus Stephen Watson writes of Sydney Clouts that his poetry “provides only another example of a body of work in which there often seems to be a near fatal lack of form, both inner and outer, an inability to absorb and order contradictory influences, and a corresponding imbalance between the “I” and the world external to it” (1990:67). Although the comparison is by no means a direct one, the condition described here by Watson may be taken to apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to these early Pringle poems which are notable for their foundational failure to achieve any form of Romantic ‘organicism’.

If we turn now to those poems written during this period which assume the voice of indigenous peoples, we find a very different dynamic at work: one which articulates an indigenous consciousness in terms that are, at least ostensibly, oppositional to colonialism. Pringle’s first attempt to write verse that was at least evocative of indigenous life was “Caffer Song” (the title was later changed to “The Brown Hunter’s Song”) published in the first edition of the *Journal* in 1824. The poem is a pastoral exercise with conjugal and domestic themes. Though the speaker is, one assumes, a Xhosa man, there is nothing in “Caffer Song” to suggest anything other than a purely substitutive manoeuvre, with occasional Xhosa names doing duty among lines such as “And fast by the brook stands a yellow-wood tree/ Which shelters the spot that is dearest to me”. “The Song of the Wild Bushman”, on the other hand, is an altogether different type of poem in that it attempts to represent, in the immediacy of present circumstances and with the direct voice of the “Wild Bushman” the experience of being on the receiving end of colonialism. On the face of it, this would seem a radical gesture and it was one that would be repeated by Pringle for the rest of his writing career. How then, before we commence any analysis of this and other poems, do we understand their underlying gesture: writing in the name of the other? This question is complicated by the fact that, as far as the “Song of the Wild Bushman” is concerned, the conditions in which Pringle actually encountered Bushmen were at that time even more exacerbated by hostility and violence than they had been in 1820 and 1821.

* * * * *

Before moving on to Pringle's poetic rendering of indigenous experience, I wish to digress into two instances which bring a strong visibility to the often intractable difficulties that arise when colonizers attempt to translate indigenous experience into European terms. The first of these instances attends to translations across economic systems: the exchange of goods on the colonial frontier in the early 1820s, where beads, buttons, brass wire and other commodities of negligible value were exchanged by the colonists in return for such items as ox-hides, horns, gum and, most prized of all, elephant's tusks. The following is an entry from the journal of John Ayliff, an 1820 settler and Methodist missionary:

Today being the stated time for the fair held at this place – in which the Caffres have an opportunity of bringing in their produce (consisting in rawhide, ivory, horns, honey, baskets, mats, rush rope, Caffre & Indian corn) & exchanging it with those persons who have licence to traffic with them – about 10 a.m. the signal was hoisted (i.e.a Union Jack on one of the bastions of the barrack square) for the Caffres to bring into the market what they had to dispose of and it was not long before the market place was crowded. I should think there were 500 persons with various articles of produce. As soon as all the Caffers had come in a sergeant, who was appointed, arranged all the produce in two lines, having a space of about a 100 yards between. And about noon the signal was given, by the sounding of a bugle, that the market should begin and to buy up all the small things such [as] horns etc. and then, when it was thought that the time had expired, another signal was made for the traders to come out – which was done. And then, after they had sufficient time to arrange for the hide market, they went in again, at the sound of another bugle, and bought up all the hides – which was all done in about two hours. And then the flag was pulled down, which was the signal for the fair to be closed. --- The traders had got large quantities of hides & horns – and the Caffres had gone home with *beads* and *buttons*, well satisfied, *poor things*, with these useless ornaments. (1963:81)

Whatever strikes us in this passage - the regimentation of trade, as though it were a setpiece battle, the writer's ignorance of what economies of value the Xhosa might invest in objects he considers useless - one thing remains clear: goods of negligible value to the colonists are being exchanged at a rate of return that is in dizzying excess of their monetary value. In one

system of value an elephant's tusk is regarded as possessing little functional or symbolic importance; in another entirely abstract system, ivory is a decorative material with considerable exchange or monetary value. What is striking here is the utter discrepancy between the two systems, a discrepancy which had its uses for the colonizers: formal and informal trade with the Xhosa was massively consequential for the economy of the Eastern Cape. Clifton Crais, for example, writes that

[D]uring the first three decades of the century frontier trade supplanted agrarian production as the basis of the colonial economy ... [this] ... had important implications for the subsequent history of the region. The frontier trade became the single most important avenue by which settlers accumulated the capital upon which commercial agriculture would develop, the so-called 'merchant road' to capitalism in South Africa. Traders were linked to a complex web of credit relations that stretched from Grahamstown, to Port Elizabeth to Cape Town and London, in which Cape Town merchants retained much of their earlier control, setting up stores in Grahamstown which sold the commodities the travelers bartered to the Xhosa. (1992:106).

In forming their lines and in lining up their objects of barter in places like Fort Willshire, the Xhosa could not have been aware that they were also being inserted into the invisible symbolic world of capital itself, then in the process of reordering the world into the ambit of its systems of exchange. I have chosen to comment on the settler trade with indigenous peoples into order to underscore the fundamental asymmetry that emerges when one symbolic system is imposed on another, and in particular the entirely discrepant currencies of representation that result from such encounters – where for the settlers beads and buttons mutate into something other than cheap and disposable commodities and for the Xhosa the discarded or negligible becomes magically invested with value. “[H]undreds of swarthy groups of eager barbarians”, writes the settler Henry Dugmore in the 1820s, would gather below the fort , “wondering at the newly acquired value of articles they had formerly deemed worthless” (1990:23). I would suggest that the exchange of goods described here may be understood as broadly paradigmatic of what happens when two entirely different systems of representation meet: a fundamental misrecognition prevails; even language itself breaks down, loses its usual significations. “Strange Kaffer was spoken on these occasions,” writes Henry Dugmore, “and strange Dutch and English too.”(24).

I use the example of the trading fair at Fort Willshire in the 1820s to introduce the central problematic of this chapter: in what ways might we understand the representations of indigenous people that dominate the second and more prolific phase of Pringle's South African poetry? The transactions at Fort Willshire remind us that there was no easily commutable exchange between Xhosa and settler, that the goods they bargained passed over a gulf of incomprehension the moment they changed hands. Pringle's poetic representations of indigenous people, in many cases his direct assumption of their voices are, I argue, a form of exchange or translation from one currency to another in which indigenous peoples are 'traded' in the literary market place as a means of securing recognition for their right to be governed in a certain way or their capacity to be assimilated into a Europeanised society is made demonstrable by the fact that they are granted the virtual or potential ability to 'speak' within the conventions of British literary genres. In order to effect such a transfer, however, writers like Pringle must remove indigenous people from their own systems of signification – systems which he understood imperfectly, and often condemned – and place them in another system where, we may be reasonably certain, they would not be immediately recognizable to themselves.

My next instance of representation is one that bears more directly on verbal transcription and is taken from a passage in the *Narrative* which contains the only extended description of an actual encounter with indigenous people that Pringle ever wrote (I exclude here the fictional or embellished earlier account of the Xhosa woman). While he was en route from the frontier to take up a government appointment at the state library in Cape Town, Pringle stopped at the town of Beaufort on the northern fringes of the Karoo. During this stay he visited, "more than once" (167), the local jail or *tronk*, a squalid, cramped cell ("about twenty feet long by twelve or fourteen broad") confining "about thirty human beings, of both sexes, of all ages, and of almost every hue – except white". The atmosphere in this carceral hovel is so fetid with human waste ('the effluvia ... was too horrible to be encountered') that Pringle has frequently to take "renovating draughts of wholesome air". The prisoners had been

detained, according to Pringle, for a variety of offences ranging from murder to merely being complainants and comprised a cross-section of the colony's indigenous inhabitants: slaves, "wild" Bushmen, Hottentots and Xhosa. Pringle's assessment of colonial justice is blunt and polemical and might well be the result of a later revision:

Some of these were complainants at the drostdy against the fraud or oppression of the colonists to who (agreeable to colonial *law*) they were bound in servitude; and they were immured (agreeable to colonial *practice*) in this vile tronk, until their masters found it convenient to answer their accusations, and probably to get them well flogged for daring to complain: such, at least, was the usual result. (168).

But there is more to this than denunciation of colonial injustice. Pringle's subsequent description of the prisoners moves toward what we might call an ethnographic aesthetics or a specular colonialism, in which indigenous bodies supply an occasion for the unrestricted ability of the colonial eye to read their meaning and derive pleasure – or disgust – from their appearance. In three paragraphs dense with descriptive detail, Pringle moves through a gallery of racial types that are quite literally posed for his inspection: "The prisoners being desired to *arrange* themselves around the walls," he writes with an evasive erasure of his own agency, "*exhibited* a strange array of wild and swarthy visages ..." (168) (emphasis mine). First up in this exhibitionary arrangement are runaway slaves who offer nothing to dwell on but "shackled limbs and lowering looks", followed by the Hottentots in culturally miscegenated attire: "half native, half European – the sheep-skin caross of their fathers and the leathern trowsers of the boor". In other passages, particularly the description of the visit to Bethelsdorp, the Hottentots are the great, semi-assimilated hope of the mission endeavour; here, they offer no visual allure beyond their crudely mismatched clothing. By contrast, the next visual 'panel', the "wild Bushmen" offer a more engaging spectacle: "with aspect, dress, and demeanour yet more barbarous and bizarre than the rudest of the colonial Hottentots". We then get details, with gender differentiation, of clothing, hair and facial ornamentation. Appended to these descriptions of visual appearance are brief subsidiary catalogues of misdemeanour and likely punishment (such as the one quoted above). In effect we have two types of discourse mixed together: alongside Pringle's condemnations of

colonial injustice is an aestheticised survey in which the prisoners become the objects of a discriminatory gaze.

In Pringle's previous descriptions both Hottentots and slaves were, visually speaking, faceless, represented only by shackles, lowered heads, clothes. The Bushmen, while described in slightly more detail, flicker briefly into more than merely generic life with their "narrow, black and piercing eyes" – eyes like those of animals, revealing no interiority, offering nothing to read. The Xhosa, by contrast, to whom Pringle devotes an extended description, are more than bodies and their adornment (or lack of it): their faces become a site of decipherment as they make their way into a recognizable frame of reference.

There was yet another group, more interesting, perhaps, than any of the others. It was a family of Caffers, consisting of two men, a woman, and child, and a youth of about sixteen. The men were seated, naked, on the clay floor, heavily ironed, and having their ankles fixed to a huge iron ring, which confined them like stocks in a recumbent posture. One of them displayed a frame of Herculean size and strength; but his countenance, though free from ferocity, was unanimated by intelligence. The calm and thoughtful features of his comrade, a man of middle age, expressed nothing of mere animal or savage passion, but were marked by a certain air of mental dignity and reflection. The female was said to be the wife of the latter; and she had an infant encircled in the warm folds of her mantle. Her dress consisted of an ordinary caross of ox or antelope hide, dressed with the hair upon it, together with a short petticoat of similar materials, and a kerchief of finer leather ... drawn, like a veil, over her bosom – indicating, altogether, feelings of womanly modesty and decorum, pleasing to meet with amidst so much wretchedness and barbarism, and forming a favourable contrast to the disgusting nudity of most of the other females around her. Her deportment was quiet and subdued; and her features, if not handsome to European eyes, were yet expressive of gentleness and simplicity of character. But the Caffer youth who stood beside this female, and who looked like her younger brother, was truly a model of juvenile beauty. His figure, which was almost entirely naked, displayed graceful ease and great symmetry of proportion. His high broad forehead and handsome nose and mouth approached the European standard; and the mild, yet manly expression of his full black eyes and ingenuous open brow, bespoke confidence and good will at the first sight. (170-171)

Pringle arranges these Xhosa prisoners in a series of visual tableaux – two men, a woman and child, a youth. The two men, "naked", are chained to the floor by their ankles, and the first man to be described "display[s] a frame of Herculean size and strength", the verb again

alerting us to the exhibitionary status of these prisoners. What he next offers to Pringle's gaze is a lack, a facial lacuna he can read as self-evident: "his countenance, though free from ferocity, was unanimated by intelligence". He is a body without a mind – perhaps, we might say, all body and no face. With the other Xhosa man this position is reversed: he is all face, a face in which there is "nothing of mere animal or savage passion" - a description which marks the man as exceptional while at the same time implying a demeaning racial norm. The face of this man is one of "calm and thoughtful features marked by a certain air of mental dignity and reflection". Pringle's later reference to "European eyes" and "European standards" makes it quite clear what normative standards are being used; it is by this yardstick that he is able to discern the indices of an inner life rather than an inert, "unanimated" exteriority.⁹

The next panel of Pringle's *tableau vivant* depicts the Xhosa woman; unlike the men, she is differentially placed within her context and this difference has to do with the "modesty" of her dress. Unlike the other women present, her breasts are covered ("a kerchief of fine leather ... drawn, like a veil, over her bosom".) In an outburst of strangely enraged prurience, Pringle declares that such "womanly modesty and decorum" is "pleasing to meet with amidst so much wretchedness and barbarism, and forming a favourable contrast to the disgusting nudity of most of the females around her". A dissonance is apparent here: whereas earlier Pringle had complained that the prison conditions were "a disgrace to humanity" he seems now to imply that "wretchedness and barbarism" inhere in the prisoners themselves rather than in their condition. The comment on "disgusting nudity" is especially surprising, given that Pringle must surely have encountered such nakedness before in 'normal' conditions (though he nowhere ever mentions this); then there is the fact that similarly naked men are not reproved for their nudity. Why, considering the privations which Pringle himself condemns so strongly, should this female lack of clothing be construed as an obscene affront to propriety? One can only speculate, but I would suggest that the implication of a depraved sexuality this accusation carries should be read alongside the oblique but unmistakably homoerotic cast of the next, and final description: that of the Xhosa youth.

This “almost entirely naked” youth elicits from Pringle an erotic admiration filtered through a statuary aesthetics of proportionate parts and striking features. He describes the youth as “truly a model of juvenile beauty”, an adolescent epicene whose figure displays a feminised “graceful ease” as well as “great symmetry of proportion”. His facial features, the “high broad forehead and handsome nose and mouth” seem to epitomize European ideals, but Pringle judiciously draws back from such an ascription by conceding only that these features “approached the European standard”. The description then concludes with an attribution of agency to the youth that belongs, in fact, to Pringle himself. These facial features are endowed with a persuasive articulacy (“bespoke”), so self-evident is their communication of character. That such ‘speaking’ should convey “confidence” and “goodwill” is an astonishing claim: it is as though the beauty of the youth is conjoined with goodwill toward none other than Pringle himself, since it is Pringle who registers this goodwill and brings it into being. At no stage is there any indication that these prisoners speak; indeed there is not even any indication that they move.

If this passage is remarkable for its discursive transformation of suffering bodies into exhibitionary or ethnographic bodies, and finally into an erotic body, it is also remarkable for its excess, for what exceeds the observing or attributing eye of the narrator and intimates, however tenuously, his own desire. The apparently immiscible levels of denunciation, exhibition and desire in these descriptions also evidence an inability on Pringle’s part even to get close to any sense of the prisoner’s subjectivity: they remain constructions, projections, animated only by a visual grammar which assumes the universality of its rules. It is in this context, the “contact zone” of colonial encounter, that we are able to read something of the incompleteness and thinness of Pringle’s response to indigenous people whom he can ‘know’ only under conditions of enforced surveillance. Pringle might use this occasion to speak in the abstract language of justice and right, but it is a language entirely tangential to the subjects in whose name it speaks: for these are subjects who do not themselves speak; nor is Pringle able to speak to them let alone for them, however laudable his intentions might be. If at the Wiltshire trading fair the economies of material and

monetary exchange were discrepant to an extreme degree, with an overwhelming advantage accruing to the settlers, might we not say of this description of the prisoners that they are converted in a currency of representation that surely bears little relation to their own conception of the situation in which they found themselves - a situation which included their involuntary display before a stranger?

We might also understand this passage in the light of Pringle's subsequent career as a metropolitan humanitarian. I have already indicated that the note of social protest sounded earlier on in these passages seems like a later interpolation, but the very fact that the description of the prisoners is so detailed, and so studied, also points to a deliberate elaboration of an actual event. Though I have found no archival evidence to confirm this, it still seems to me very likely that these passages are a strategic reworking or embellishment, circa 1833 or 1834, of events in 1821, rather than their faithful transcription. In an analysis of humanitarian narratives, Mario Klarer has drawn attention to their frequent use of the classical rhetorical figure of *energeia*, which he glosses as "the power of language to bring images before one's eyes as if they were real" (2005:561). Such techniques of strong visualization are very obviously present in what Pringle has written here and they also afford an example of what Thomas Lacquer has identified as the central tendency of such narratives, a "propensity to use detailed description of the body as a common locus of understanding and sensibility" (1989:201). These retrospective interventions in the *Narrative* serve as structural reminders of how this text is differentially layered and unstable or at least uneven in its informing intentions. In this particular case a recognizably humanitarian mode of writing is anomalously inserted into a section of Pringle's *Narrative* otherwise written in the genre of the traveller/observer (the passages are preceded by observations about ostriches and followed by observations on various "aspect[s] of the desert" (170). Despite the employment of central techniques of humanitarian narrative, Pringle's description of the prisoners in the Beaufort *tronk* also deviates from these insofar as its emphasis shifts away from what Lacquer calls "the reality of human suffering and ... its claim for sympathy" (181) toward an oddly homoerotic absorption in the male physique. This is an unusual moment in

Pringle's writing and I do not wish to risk reading too much into it. What should be noted, however, is that in its abolitionist phase the humanitarian narrative very frequently, as Mary A. Favret puts it, "reproduce[d] slavery as an erotic spectacle" (1998:23), particularly in its evocation of such sexually charged practices as the flogging of naked female slaves. Given that Pringle was so involved in the anti-slavery cause in the early 1830s, such a transference of erotics might perhaps have filtered through into his writing of this scene. Whatever the case may be, the underlying point to be made here is surely that in this representation of the imprisoned indigenes there is an expenditure of imaginative and even libidinal energy that significantly exceeds the ostensible subjects of the writing.

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In the "Song of the Wild Bushmen", as in subsequent ethnographic poems by Pringle, these problematics of representation will, inevitably, attend our understanding of how Pringle renders his indigenous subjects. It is worth briefly remarking, however, that to identify degrees of distortion or displacement in these representations is not, *ipso facto*, to condemn them as projections of the colonizer. I would rather seek to restore to these poems their complex and often differential particularity; additionally, their very 'failure' in terms of referential veracity by no mean always erases their value as intimations, however faint, of alternative colonial futures. "The Song of the Wild Bushman" is a good poem with which to start, precisely because although it is obviously a factitious or contrived portrait of the Bushman, it is not for this reason merely of diagnostic interest. The "Song" begins with the direct and assertive voice of the protagonist:

Let the proud White Man boast his flocks
 And fields of foodful grain;
 My home is 'mid the mountain rocks,
 The Desert my Domain.
 I plant no herbs nor pleasant fruits,
 I toil not for my cheer;

The Desert yields me juicy roots,
And herds of bounding deer. (ll. 1-9)

The Bushman might be the ostensibly 'full' subject of this poem, but his self-descriptions are nonetheless configured around a European norm. Here we again have something like description by negative analogy: the Bushman might not possess the same forms of land, labour and subsistence as the white man, or the bounty that this brings, but despite this his "domain" has the resources to meet his needs. Paradoxically, it is the desert, earlier the tropological place of despair and spiritual attrition, which acts as a fecund sustainer of life as it "yields ... juicy roots/And herds of bounding deer". In the second stanza, Pringle again analogizes Bushman activity with European practices by likening those implements the Bushman uses to capture or kill animals to the rein, yoke and curb used to control horses. The opening lines also wishfully suggest that the Bushman is not simply a hunter-gatherer, but also an elementary pastoralist: "The countless springboks are my flock, /Spread o'er the unbounded plain;" The third stanza initially breaks from analogy but still suggests, with some awkwardness, Bushman ability to control the natural environment:

The crested adder honoureth me,
And yields at my command
His poison bag, like the honey-bee,
When I seize him on the sand. (ll.17-20)

The odd ascription of honorific behaviour to the "crested adder", which passively "yields" but has also to be "seize[d]", indicates the strain of artifice informing the poem. Not only does the Bushman command snakes – creatures particularly fearful to the European imagination – but he is indifferent also to the threat posed by locusts (another creature with a fearful Western lineage), which he eats. Pringle's phrasing here, "make of them my bread", again transforms Bushman habits by casting them in familiar terms. The fourth and final stanza of the poem is the poem's most pointed, and clearly the other stanzas have all been directed towards this end:

Thus I am lord of the Desert Land
And I will not leave my bounds,

To crouch beneath the Christian's hand,
 And kennel with his hounds:
 To be a hound and watch the flocks
 For the cruel white man's gain –
 No! the brown serpent of the rocks
 His den doth yet retain
 And none who there his sting provokes
 Shall find its poison vain! (ll. 25-34)

Although there is an odd metaphorisation of the Bushman as serpent, and with this an implicit (if unconscious) denigration of Bushman worth, the stanza is extraordinary in its polemic. For the first time, Pringle imagines what the colonial process might look like from the other side; while we might have every reason – as I have indicated – to regard the assumption of this perspective as deeply problematic, the fact that it is being assumed at all is significant in itself. There is no telling, however, how the colonial readers who encountered the poem in the pages of the *Advertiser* might have reacted to it. Although the poem might appear to contemporary readers to attack something fundamental in the colonial process, we must be careful not to assume that this was how early nineteenth-century readers understood the poem or even that it was written with this intention. We gain some sense of what Pringle himself intended in the poem when it was published for the second time in Thompson's *Travels*. It was prefaced with the following line (almost certainly written by Pringle himself): "The following verses are designed to express the sentiments with which these persecuted tribes may be supposed to regard the colonists" (1827:54). A lot rests on this "may be supposed", however, since Pringle has very little, if any, access to a Bushman point of view, and in constructing it he must necessarily impose his own perspectives. Both A.E. Voss and Dirk Klopper have offered perceptive and complementary readings of "The Song of the Wild Bushman" in which they draw attention to the contradictions and ironies that beset Pringle's choice of a Bushman persona. Klopper, for example, sees "basic contradiction" in the assumption of such a persona because "Pringle cannot simply relinquish his colonial identity and preconceptions" (1990:43). The central consequence of this is that "Pringle ... merely replaces the perspective and speech of the San with his own, a gesture that corresponds with the actual physical displacement and extinction of the San population" (44). This might be so, but all the same one should be careful not to equate too

closely Pringle's merely gestural poem with "actual physical" acts, as Klopper is in danger of doing here. The point remains, however, that Pringle's assumption of a Bushman point of view is unavoidably appropriative. In Voss's critique, the Bushman is made to make clearly unsustainable claims: "The 'brag' of the poem as a whole is undercut by some perhaps unconscious irony. "I will leave my bounds" suggests, as well as defiance, both spatial and temporal limitation. To be "lord of the Desert Land ... for all its suggestion of 'natural' power, is socially an empty boast" (1982: 21-22). I do not think that one can argue with the substance of these critiques: there can be no doubt that Pringle's Bushman is figural and projective, forced into the service of a set of ideas, rather than an attempt to inwardly imagine other ways of being in the world. What we need more closely to understand is what informs this set of ideas.

We gain a more detailed sense of why Pringle chose to write poetry with anti-colonial indigenous speakers if we go back again to the context of their composition. Before we do so it is worth noting that in those colonial poems such as "Afar in the Desert" "Evening Rambles" and "A Noon-day Dream" in which the speaker is demonstrably Pringle himself, white consciousness is agonized, and at the limits of its articulation. When an indigenous speaker is employed, this dilemma vanishes: the speaker's way of life might be threatened by colonial incursion, but his sense of self is intact and often assertive. Furthermore, the formal frame of the poetry is more assured and generically stable than in the poetry which represents Pringle's most thoroughgoing explorations of the consciousness of the colonizer.¹⁰ The ironies of this reversal should come as more than just a surprise: they point us, perhaps, to an instability inherent in the structural formations of a place like the Cape Colony, which embodies, at one and the same time, an incipient 'democratic' modernity, a petrified *ancien regime* form of local governance, a remote and utterly tenuous 'frontier' in which thinly scattered British settlers encounter tribal and indigenous peoples as well as an appreciable population of Dutch boers whose way of life resembles (to them) that of a vanishing European peasantry. If you add to this a vast and largely unexplored hinterland from out of which were beginning to trickle refugees escaping from various forms of turmoil, then the

utter disaggregation of the whole becomes further apparent. This was a ‘society’ set for conflict and disturbance well into any kind of foreseeable future. In such disturbed social formations, when (for someone like Pringle, at least) there are barely any aggregates of class or regional identity to fall back on, there must be a disabling fragmentation of the social base necessary to any self-fashioning, and we have already seen the kind of meltdown that occurred when Pringle tried to fit his colonial experience into the generic templates available to him. The assumption of an indigenous persona, with its clearly defined enmities, might provide a locus of articulation for the alienated colonizer, but it comes at the cost of displacing even further the very people it purports to represent. The historical torsions twisting through this apparently simple four stanza poem become even more evident when we consider the more immediate contexts in which it was written.

When Pringle returned to the Baviaans River district in late September 1825, “depredations” by the Bushmen had significantly increased. At the time of writing “The Wild Bushman’s Song” at the beginning of September 1825 (it was published in the *Advertiser*, which had resumed publication in August, on the 21st of September), he was well aware of this situation. On the 29th of June 1825 he wrote to Fairbairn, in a passage to which I have already alluded, that “I have declared war against them & have this day written to the Landdrost for a commando to attack them in their bloody dens. You see how back settlers grow all savage & bloody by coming into continual collision with savages” (FB:1:52:B). On August the 5th, he wrote in reply to Fairbairn, who had in the interim evidently chastised Pringle for his hypocrisy: “Your denunciations against my Bushman commando do not alarm me. There is no “damn’d spot” on my hands. But I am no Quaker to turn my cheek to the smiter - & if attacked will resist even to slaying him then approve who he may” (FB:1:56:D). Less than a month later, Pringle would write “The Song of the Wild Bushman”. What are we to make of this? Let us turn first to the letter which describes the outcome of the intended raid, written on September the 22nd:

I have written on the next leaf a thing for Greig. You can adopt or expunge what part of it you may think fit. I am not sure how far the short statement I have given of our Bushman may be proper for the public of

our colony. The Boors in general regard & treat these poor creatures like wolves & they consequently become like wolves in reality. This river had become dangerous to live in of late & is still in some degree on acct of them. One cannot go a thousand yards from home without a gun. Peter Rennie's death was indirectly owing them [Rennie had been killed when his gun exploded]. He was going out at this time in pursuit of horses they had stolen. However, our party had no hand in attacking them. That was done by Captain Massey & the Field Cornets. I wanted them taken alive but it is said they refused & defended themselves desperately. 5 men were killed. Some of the Hottentot Dragoons & horses were wounded severely by their poisoned arrows.

Those wars occurred during my visit to Graaf Reinet.--- Why has the Govt not established missions among the Bushmen? or taken some other means to reclaim them from savage & predatory habits? At present they have scarcely any choice but of predatory warfare & precarious existence or of servitude to the Boors. The only country they have is the desert & the best parts even of it are taken from them. Is the vindictive temper they exhibit in such circumstances to be wondered at? They often carry off more cattle or sheep than they can use or conceal & in such cases they invariably kill the animals. There are spots in the wood entirely covered with the bones of hundreds of sheep & oxen they have slaughtered & left to the vultures.

(FB: 1: 88A; FB: 1 : 88B).

The sentiments about Bushmen expressed in this and other letters exist at a very considerable distance from the stance adopted in "The Song of the Wild Bushman". Though Pringle is sympathetic to the plight of the Bushmen and wants less drastic measures to be taken against them, he sees absolutely no intrinsic value in their way of life and can suggest only that they be "reclaim[ed]", preferably by conversion to Christianity (which the poem renders as "To crouch beneath the Christian's hand,/And kennel with his hounds"). Furthermore, his strictures against the "Boors" do not sit well with his own punitive actions. Then there is the curious fact that the Bushmen refused to surrender and preferred to face death rather than be captured by the British troops. It would seem that, in contradiction to what Pringle implies about Boer savagery, the Bushmen regarded both colonisers with equal hostility. The tone of the earlier letters does not suggest any remorse on Pringle's part for his complicity in these actions; his reply to Fairbairn's accusation, in particular, indicates an aggressive indifference to the charge that he is not acting in good faith, or in any kind of consistency with his own principles (which, one presumes, is more or less what Fairbairn must have objected to). We might observe, though, that the very sharp break between

Pringle's poeticisation of a defiant Bushman and his actions towards, and opinions about, historically existent Bushmen, recapitulates exactly the break we saw between the gypsy as the subject of "poetic and picturesque description" (1817:43) and the gypsy as recalcitrant member of the social order. In the final publication of the poem in *African Sketches* in 1834 this differentiation between the poetic and the actual is evident within the textual apparatus of the poem itself. Pringle chose to quote extensively from his own writing in the *Narrative* to provide ethnological data about the Bushman in his notes. This account describes the Bushmen, quite inaccurately, as pastoralists who have been forced off their land by tribal wars and the encroachments of colonists. "Having descended from the pastoral to the hunter state", writes Pringle, "the Bushmen have, with the increased perils and privations of that mode of life, necessarily acquired a more ferocious and resolute character. From a mild, confiding, and unenterprising race of shepherds, they have been gradually transformed into wandering hordes of fierce, vindictive, and suspicious savages" (1989:86).¹¹ The Bushmen of the notes bear little relation to the defiant and heroised figure in the poem, and we can only conclude that this very obvious contradiction did not bother Pringle at all because he took for granted a dissociation between figural representations of marginal or tribal peoples and their actual social status. Whatever socially critical charge is imputed to poems like "The Song of the Wild Bushmen", we must recognize the fact that it is grounded in an aesthetics of representation in which a literalism of reference plays very little part.

Pringle's somewhat disparaging remarks about the Bushmen, as well as his misunderstanding that their mode of subsistence is a regressive one, shows up some of the limitations of the stadial theory he implicitly works with. Unlike sympathetic observers of the Bushmen like William Burchell (whose *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* (1822) Pringle often refers to for its taxonomic or descriptive details), Pringle is quite unable to ascribe to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle any inherent value; it is simply a throwback, "savage". Stadial theory might have been egalitarian insofar as it opened the doors of improvement to anybody, but it is nonetheless distinctly hierarchical in ranking modes of subsistence. This might be the reason why Pringle can only explain the Bushman lifestyle in terms of

regression and why it baffles him to imagine that such a way of life might be freely chosen. The notes again: “Whether any considerable hordes of these people existed in their present state previous to the occupation of the country by Europeans, seems to be doubtful” (1989:86). Pringle evidently cared little for the Bushman beyond the utter injustice of their parlous state. And yet in Burchell there are a number of passages that reflect sympathetically, and even with admiration, on the Bushmen people he encounters. Here is one example:

[A] party of eleven *Bushmen*, with three women, paid us a visit this morning. They were, in stature, all below five feet; and the women still shorter; their skin was of a sallow brown colour, much darkened by dirt and grease. Their clothing appeared, in my eyes, wretched in the extreme; but, doubtless, not so to them, as they all seemed contented enough ... Among them were some young men, whom, with all the remains of ancient prejudices, I could not help viewing as interesting. Though small, and delicately made, they appeared firm and hardy; and my attention was forcibly struck by the proportional smallness, and neatness of their hands and feet ... Through an interpreter, they asked me my name, and expressed, in artless terms, how much pleasure I had given them by so bountiful a present of tobacco. Desirous of transfusing into the minds of others those powerful feelings of interest which I myself experienced on beholding and conversing with this little family of Bushmen, heightened by the consideration that I now stood amongst them on their own soil, I never, more than at this moment, longed to possess that command of language, and that talent of descriptive representation, which might enable me to impart all those peculiar sensations with which my first interview with this singular nation, inspired me. ((1822)1953: 205-6)

What interests me here is that Burchell recognizes the alterity of other ways of life and their distance from European society but declines to judge either way of being in the world, even going so far as to admit to an incapacity fully to understand or appreciate the “singular nation” of the Bushmen. He is notably less bound to the kind of summary judgement that Pringle often exercised, especially in the final chapters of the *Narrative*, on indigenous ways of life. We have also to consider that Pringle must have been aware of Burchell’s observations on the Bushmen, but chose never to mention them or to invoke them as a precedent. Pringle’s engagement with the cause of colonial reform, and his role in raising public awareness of the shocking injustice endured by indigenous people, remain beyond doubt. There is little evidence, however, that he possessed the empathetic feeling for other

racism that a writer like Burchell so often displays. With Pringle, concern for indigenous people is always inseparable from certain colonial agendas: his poetry might 'protest' the predicament of the Bushman, but its underlying intention is not to explore another consciousness but to persuade a reading public that the Bushman must be colonized in another way (or as he bluntly put it in a letter to Fairbairn "[I]t is better to convert than extirpate them" (FB: 1: 56D)).

In August 1825, some weeks before he wrote "The Song of the Wild Bushman", Pringle had an extended meeting with Andries Stockenstrom, the Deputy-Landdrost of the district, John Philip, and other members of the London Missionary Society. As Noel Mostert describes it, this week-long gathering amounted to a lengthy inquisition of Stockenstrom's position on slavery, race relations, and frontier policy and resulted in the strengthening of ties between Philip and Stockenstrom, who would later prove a useful ally to the humanitarian cause (1992:584-5). For Pringle, the meeting was decisive and marked the beginning of his association with this group. In seeking to understand Pringle's humanitarianism, we must consider that prior to this meeting he might have been sympathetic to missionary causes generally, but his connection with Philip himself was limited. Though I am not suggesting that Pringle's newfound enthusiasm for Philip and his cause was merely expedient, it was surely not unrelated to his fallout with Somerset. At that time, and for some years to come, John Philip was an important figure in colonial affairs and represented something like an alternative power base to the British administration at the Cape. He had direct access to the Colonial Office and powerful metropolitan lobbying groups and was also in charge of a network of mission stations which served as important sources of information about events in the colony. In a letter written to Fairbairn shortly after this meeting, Pringle declares that his sense of the importance of the humanitarian causes represented by Philip is such that "I feel almost criminal in giving up any portion of my heart or time to poetry. I am sensible of the vast importance of the task I have undertaken - & I will not flinch from it I am come over here with Dr Philip & am awakened from my lethargy" (FB: 1: 56). This Damascene moment was short-lived as far as writing poetry was concerned, but it does seem

that the meeting shifted his anti-Somerset campaign into a broader set of allegiances. Though Pringle would continue to pursue this campaign, his friendship with Philip, whom he greatly admired, was indispensable to his later metropolitan role as abolitionist and campaigner for colonial reform. Despite his disavowal of poetry as a selfish or “criminal” indulgence in less than a month he had written “The Song of the Wild Bushmen” and this was soon to be followed by the two poems which are perhaps the best known examples of Pringle’s ethnographic poetry: “Makanna’s Gathering” and “The Bechuana Boy”. There can be little doubt that poems such as these were in some ways informed by the meeting with Philip. Neither of the two latter poems was ever published in South Africa, and the original versions were polished and revised for publication in London, but they are still very much poems of this period. Only minor alterations were made to the original manuscript of “Makanna’s Gathering” and because there is no original for “The Bechuana Boy” it is not possible to estimate what degree of emendation produced the first published version. For this reason I will discuss the poem in the context of its British publication in the next chapter.

The poems appear to have been written at more or less the same time, as both were enclosed in a letter to Fairbairn in October 1825. “The War Song of Lynx” (the poem’s original title), wrote Pringle, “is not a bad subject; but what I have made of it does not much please me ... You may either keep it by you, or print it first & criticize it afterwards, as you see fit. You may show it to Wright & see if he can find any flaws in regard to history or custom. I am not quite sure whether the attack on Grahams Town was in 1818 or 1819. Inquire & correct” (FB 1:98). Pringle’s comments indicate that he set no great store by the poem and that he was not entirely certain of its historical details; additionally, he did not envisage it as being in any way contentious, or else he would surely have mentioned it. This raises again the difficult question of how such poems were regarded by their intended audiences. “Makanna’s Gathering” is, on the face of it, a polemical endorsement of Xhosa retaliation against colonial injustice. Pringle had tinkered with the idea of such a poem for some time. In a previous letter, he had talked of attaching various “notes” (it is not clear in what these consisted) to the articles he was writing on the Cape and intending to send to the *New Monthly Magazine*

in London. One such note was intended to be “a speech of one Lynx’s heemraden demanding back his chief after he was taken & detailing the whole history of European injustice toward[s] his natives. It is a noble piece of savage eloquence” (FB:1:78). This speech - we shall look at it shortly – might have provided the inspiration for the poem. Before doing so it might be useful to trace the sequence of representations of black (that is to say Xhosa and Bechuana) people that lead up to “Makanna’s Gathering”. This will at least allow us to establish a sense of precedent for how Pringle articulates a black voice.

Pringle’s first attempt at such an articulation was in the pages of the *Advertiser*, where a poem entitled “Speech of his Majesty King Mateebe”, published in the issue of 21 January was purportedly a transcription of a speech by a Bechuana chief rousing his people to resist invasion by wandering and warlike tribes (referred to as “Mantatees”) displaced by, among other factors, the rise of the Zulu state in the 1820s. An introduction to the speech describes it as “done into English” from the (presumably) Dutch translation of a Hottentot called Hatta, described as “Prince Peclu’s sworn interpreter at the Cape”. At this time a delegation of Bechuana chiefs were visiting Cape Town under the patronage of Robert Moffat of the London Missionary Society. The *Advertiser* took some interest in their visit, and gave it coverage in editorials and articles, including a transcription/translation of the speech by King Mateebe. One assumes that Pringle’s poem is based on this, although the relation between the two versions is tenuous indeed. Here is a representative excerpt from the recorded speech:

Be silent ye women, (addressing them)” who ill use your husbands by stealing their property and giving it to another; be silent that your husbands and children be not hindered by your evil words; be silent ye kidney eaters, (turning toward the old men) who are of no other use but to hang about for kidneys when an ox is killed; if the oxen is taken where shall you get your kidneys?” – Then addressing the warriors, “there are *those* of you who do not deserve to eat out of a bowl but only out of a broken pot; you stupid and disobedient, think on what has been said and obey without murmuring; – I command ye! Ye chiefs of the Matclapees, Matclaroos, Myrees, Baralongs and Baracoutas, that you acquaint all your tribes of the proceedings of this day, and let none be ignorant; I say again, ye warriors prepare for the day of battle; let your shields be strong, your

quivers full of arrows and your battle axes as sharp as sharp as hunger.
(SACA, Jan 14 1824)

Pringle's "speech", though it occasionally lifts incidental details from its original, is completely different in tone. It has elements of the ballad, the drinking song and the rousing oration; there is, however, a strong infusion of parody, which makes it difficult to judge Pringle's intentions. While the "Speech" may be of negligible merit, and Pringle advisedly never published it anywhere else, it is useful in enabling us to understand how Pringle conceived using an African persona early in 1824. The third stanza is a representative sample:

Bechuana! – Matclapees! –
Dare ye face the Mantatees?
Shall we muster to the battle?
Will ye fight or lose your cattle?
Lose your cattle – kraals – and wives –
To cannibals with crooked knives!
But hark, ye women – hold your shrieking –
At least till we are done with speaking –
I say, abate your senseless squalling,
Or I will give your hides a galling!
Provoking pests of womankind!
With fear or fury always blind –
The secrets of our COURT revealing, -
Ever scolding – often stealing –
In some mischief, aye, delighting,
And hindering the men from fighting; -
Such milky – liver'd sneaking things,
Are men who make their wives their kings!
A husband who can't use the *sambok*,
Has less discretion than a ram, bok,
Baboon or jack-ass! – take for sample,
My recreant brothers' late example –
Which, if *you younger ones* shall follow,
And I be left *solus cum sola* –
I say no more – but wish that evil
May catch you, - which the whites call *Devil!*

What are we to make of this? It would seem that at this point – the poem was published on January 21 – Pringle is not fully serious about an African voice. The poem/ speech bears very little resemblance to the prose version of the speech, which it has simply manipulated for comic effect. Here the black voice is nothing more than a kind of colonial minstrelsy, got

up for a laugh; this is a rather empty levity we do not normally associate with Pringle. At approximately the same time Pringle also published a prose account of an interview, or record of a conversation, with Teysho, “one of the principal counselors of Mateebe” (1824:78), his eldest son and heir apparent, Peclu, and an interpreter referred to only as Hatta. Also present was the missionary Moffat, who had accompanied the men on their journey to Cape Town. This was published in the first issue of the *South African Journal*. The two Bechuana men are recorded as being deferential to European superiority and a certain amount of fun is had with their incredulity on boarding some of the bigger ships in the bay, which they believe are produced by magic – “a thing come of itself” (78). The account ends with Pringle and Moffat enjoining on the men the advantages of emulating European practices:

If the Bechuana were to learn to plough and sow bread-corn, use wagons, and acquire our arms and knowledge, they would no longer be exposed to destruction from the nations around them. That *our* forefathers had once been a poor and ignorant people like themselves, without stone houses or great ships, and without any other clothing than softened hides, like their own mantles; - but that a wise nation had come over and taught us *knowledge*, in consequence of which we had since become great, wealthy, and powerful, as he perceived.

Teysho seemed struck with this fact, and promised to follow diligently, when he returned home, the instructions of “Moffat”, and learn to plow and sow, and eat bread and corn; and encourage his people to become industrious (sic), wise, and mighty, like the “Macoos”. (1824:79)

This account of a meeting with the Bechuana is never referred to by Pringle anywhere else, but it is extremely useful in allowing us a glimpse into how, at that time, he was disposed toward African people. The tone of this encounter, and the implicit alliance between Moffat and Pringle signaled by the use of “we”, suggests that Pringle shared the missionary position on agricultural and other forms of improvement, and in particular the benefits of fixed or sedentary tillage, believed at the time to be “both a cause and an effect of civility and advancement, the fountainhead of productive society and moral community” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997:123). There is nothing to suggest, either in this passage or anywhere else, that Pringle’s general attitude towards African people was at any variance with the general tenets of missionary belief, some important aspects of which are recited like a catechism in the

passage above. Here – albeit briefly – the African voice is fixed in the modes of credulity and deference and barely speaks for itself, but it is at least an improvement on the trite contrivance of the “Speech”. At this stage of his residence in South Africa, Pringle seems to regard the representation of indigenous people as, in the main, an occasion for comic diversion.

Pringle’s most achieved ‘rendition’ of an African voice is perhaps the “noble piece of savage eloquence” referred to earlier. It is another transcription of a speech, this time made by Andries Stockenstrom who was present when one of Makanna’s counsellors berated some British officers after the defeat and exile of his leader. It was first published in the new *Monthly Magazine* in 1827 where it formed part of an article “Letters from South Africa. No II – Caffer Campaigns – The Prophet Makanna”. The speech was later included in an article entitled “The Wrongs of Amakosa” which was published twice in 1833: in the annual *Friendships Offering* and in a magazine, *The Tourist*. It was also included in the final chapters of Pringle’s *Narrative*. Since the speech, as well as the section introducing it, are enclosed in quotation marks, we must assume that it is a faithful reproduction of Stockenstrom’s words, described by him as a “bald translation” from “hasty and imperfect notes” (1966:285); nowhere does Pringle give any indication that he altered it.¹² Whatever the relation of Stockenstrom’s notes to the original oration might be, the speech is compelling and persuasive, not least because it has the feel of being rendered, however imperfectly, on its own terms:

We lived in peace. Some bad people stole, perhaps: the nation was quiet – the chiefs were quiet. Gaika stole – his chiefs stole – his people stole. You sent him copper; you sent him beads; you sent him horses – on which he rode to steal more. To *us* you only sent commandos.

We quarreled with Gaika about grass – no business of yours. You sent a commando; you took our last cow; you only left a few calves – which died for want, along with our children. You gave half the spoils to Gaika; half you kept yourselves. Without milk, - our corn destroyed, - we saw our wives and children perish; we followed, therefore, on the track of our cattle into the colony. We plundered and we fought for our lives. We found you weak; we destroyed your soldiers. We saw that we were strong; we attacked your headquarters: - and if we had succeeded, our

right was good, for you began the war. We failed – and you are here.
(1966:286)

The telegraphic directness of the syntax, with its rapid accumulation of detail, gives the speech a compelling immediacy. One reads it with the sense of another voice speaking, of an English adapted to accommodate cadences and styles which are not native to it. This is by far the most successful attempt in Pringle to render an African voice, and one suspects that this is because Stockenström's translation somehow managed to stay close to the spirit of the original utterances. What is surprising is that despite having this model to hand, Pringle chose not to imitate it, preferring instead to allow his poeticized Makanna to speak in the commanding and exhortatory tones of a versified warrior certain of victory.

Pringle's fascination with the Makanna story is understandable: it is embroidered with dramatic and striking events and is historically 'safe' insofar as Makanna, or others like him, can no longer threaten the security of the colonial state. The main part of Pringle's account of Makanna is historically accurate, although his understanding of these events is inevitably restricted. Makanna's career is briefly traced: his early contact with settlers, his fascination with Christian doctrine, his development of an idiosyncratic blend of religious beliefs, his elevation to prophet status among his own people and the doomed attack on Grahamstown which led to his imprisonment and death by drowning. In the history of black South Africa, Makanna is an iconic figure, a forerunner of black resistance to white colonial rule. For Pringle he is a curiosity, as much to be pitied as admired: Makanna's syncretic beliefs are "an extravagant religious medley", his self-representation an "impious pretension" (280) and so on. Even his military ambitions are regarded with some disdain: "Ignorant of our vast resources," writes Pringle, "Makanna probably conceived that, ... once effected, the contest was over for ever with the usurping Europeans" (1966:281). But Pringle also admired Makanna without qualification when he gave himself up to the colonial troops as a means of ending the retaliatory violence after the battle of Grahamstown: "The course adopted by Makanna ... was remarkable", he concedes, "and gives us a higher idea of his character than any other part of his history which has become known to us" (284). Makanna's selfless act is

praised for “a magnanimity which would have done honour to a Greek or Roman patriot” (284) and is pointedly set against the action of the commandos which continued to harass and plunder the defeated tribes after Makanna had given himself up. This ambivalence towards Makanna might be explained by considering that when Pringle first published his account of these events part of his intent was to attack the colonial government under Somerset. It is therefore convenient for him to endorse Makanna’s behaviour and praise his personal qualities at a conjuncture which showed colonial policy at its most brutal.

Given the wide scope of this story, it is interesting that Pringle’s poem focuses on an event that shows Makanna at his most bellicose: an address to his troops before the attack on Grahamstown. In the *Narrative* this address is described as follows: “[B]efore they were lead on to the assault, [they] were addressed by Makanna in an animating speech, in which he is said to have assured them of supernatural aid in the conflict with the English, which would turn the hail-storm of their fire-arms into water”(282). In this version, the speech is notable only for its superstitious delusion, yet it was on this event that Pringle chose to concentrate his freely imagined poem:¹³

Wake! Amakosa, wake!
 And arm yourselves for war.
 As coming winds the forest shake,
 I hear a sound from far:
 It is not thunder in the sky,
 Nor lion’s roar upon the hill,
 But the voice of HIM who sits on high,
 And bids me speak his will!

He bids me call you forth
 Bold sons of Kahabee,
 To sweep the white men from the earth,
 And drive them to the sea:
 The sea which heaved them up at first,
 For Amakosa’s curse and bain,
 Howls for the progeny she nurst,
 To swallow them again. (ll. 1-16)

In these opening stanzas, especially the second, Pringle invokes what must have seemed to readers of the time a veritable demonology of Xhosa aggression with its revengeful engorging sea and the desire completely to annihilate the white settlers. This is part war song (as the original title indicates), part invented oratory; it even has elements of the kind of patriotic verse Pringle wrote in Scotland (“There injured Scotland’s patriot band/For Faith and Freedom made their stand”, etc (1819:16)). All these are imbued with the novelty of Xhosa names and a Xhosa mythology that traffics in images of a natural world infused with supernatural powers. Here Makanna is transformed into a belligerent exotic, calling forth the revenge of the elements themselves on the usurping colonists.

When he does try to give specificity to the situation, Pringle calls on notions of lineage, birthright and freedom that are distinctly British in character, although they are again cast within the framework of traditional Xhosa beliefs:

Hark! ‘tis UHLANGA’s voice
 From Debe’s mountain caves!
 He calls you now to make your choice –
 To conquer or be slaves:
 To meet proud Amanglezi’s guns,
 And fight like warriors nobly borne:
 Or, like Umlao’s feeble sons,
 Become the freeman’s scorn. (ll. 17-24)

“Umlao’s feeble sons” are a reference, as Pringle tells us in a footnote, to the “Colonial Hottentots” (1989:100), who act as the contrastive group to the Xhosa because they have (allegedly) surrendered their freedom to the colonizers. In this poetic hierarchy, the Xhosa occupy the first rank because they have not (yet) entirely surrendered their lands and way of life. Pringle is caught in the most obvious of contradictions here: not only is he a colonizer himself, participating in the processes which are, in various ways, disenfranchising the Xhosa and dispossessing them of their land; he is also a zealous proselytizer for the benefits that commerce and Christianity could bring to such a people. The poem continues with two fairly formulaic stanzas urging the troops into battle, before concluding with a stanza that moves away from the martial emphasis of “To conquer or be slaves” and evokes the grisly

possibility of fallen colonial soldiers being devoured by predators convoked for the occasion by “Uhlanga’s call”:

The wizard-wolves from Keisi’s brake
 The vultures from afar,
 Are gathering at UHLANGA’S call,
 And follow fast our westward way –
 For well they know, ere evening-fall,
 They shall have glorious prey! (ll. 41-48)

One must surely read these lines as an arraignment of barbarous superstitions, or at the very least a slightly macabre staging of Xhosa customs: it is impossible to imagine that Pringle would have approved such beliefs, let alone looked forward to their realization. Whatever the case may be, there is throughout the poem an aura of threat, which sits uneasily with the ideality of Xhosa warrior-nobility and suggests an unconscious intimation of settler fright, or even an implied admission that Xhosa otherness is irreclaimable. This instability of position, the inscribing into the Makanna persona of irreconcilable attributes might well be understood as an encoding of Pringle’s contradictory colonial stance: he condemns colonial policy, which invites the vindictiveness of an oppressed people, but at the same time believes that the imperial mission can be vindicated if undertaken in a certain way. Pringle’s investment in what we might call a colonial imaginary nonetheless debars him from any sense of authentic identity with the Xhosa, whom he must invent in terms that celebrate and demonise at the same time.

The footnotes to “Makanna’s Gathering”, which gloss Xhosa words and provide genealogical and religious details pertinent to them, introduce another level of discrepancy into the poem’s apparent intentions. These notes act like a miniature ethnography appended to the poem, a factual apparatus that brings Xhosa belief systems within the ambit of European knowledge and subjects them to evaluative scrutiny. An example of this is Pringle’s gloss on “Hark! Tis Uhlanga’s voices”:

The term *Uhlanga*, sometimes used by the frontier Caffers for the Supreme Being, is supposed by the missionaries to be derived from *hlanganisa*, to join together. But from Mr Kay's account of the Amakosa genealogy, it appears that *Uhlanga*, or *Thlanga*, is also the name of the oldest of their kings of whom there is any tradition, and by whose name they always swore in former days. It seems to me, therefore, doubtful whether the god Uhlanga be not merely a deified chief, or hero, like the Thor and Woden of our Teutonic ancestors. (1989:101)

The confidently constative tone of this assertion, with its implication that Pringle is familiar with Xhosa belief systems and is able to hierarchically evaluate them on a comparative European scale, is misleading. It seems that Pringle, or his missionary sources, were unaware that Makanna (more usually known as Nxele) had in fact evolved a cosmology in which there were two warring Gods, Mdalidephu, the God of the black man and Thixo, the god of the white. Nxele preached that this cosmological struggle was about to culminate in the defeat of Thixo and that various supernatural agencies stood ready to assist in the task (Peires 1989:1-2). Pringle seems not to have understood this millenarian aspect of Nxele's teachings, and to have regarded as dubious any syncretisation of Christianity by indigenous people into forms more consonant with their own beliefs. In the poem itself, the cosmology Pringle ascribes to Makanna makes no mention whatsoever of these rivalrous Gods; even in the apparently authoritative notes, it is clear that Pringle is assuming a knowledge which he does not have. As in all Pringle's South African poems, the often copious notes juxtapose the poem with another kind of text altogether: a taxonomy, an ethnography, a history, a local detail, a genealogy, as the occasion demands. These notes tether the poem to a discourse which is unashamedly imperial in its classificatory and normative intents. Nigel Leask, commenting on the "depth of ethnographic detail" found in the footnotes to the oriental poems written by contemporaries of Pringle such as Byron and Southey finds a similar "discrepancy ... between poetic text and annotation" which he reads as qualifying the text in a particularly constricting way: "[T]he absorptive pull of the exotic visual image ... is constantly checked and qualified by a globalising descriptive discourse which draws the viewer/reader away from dangerous proximity to the image, in order to inscribe him/her in a position of epistemological power: nothing other than the commanding vision of imperialist objectivity" (1998:168). These considerations obviously bear on Pringle's annotation as well,

with the qualification that their 'factual' construction of African life could on occasion be inaccurate.

Once we have turned the poem through the various prisms of its textual and contextual locations it begins to lose its incendiary status as an anti-colonial poem, and begins to look more like a colonial poem of a particular sort. The question remains, though: what sort of status do we accord the poem? How was it intended to be read? "Makanna's Gathering", like many of the poems Pringle wrote about South Africa, had as its destination a literary marketplace dominated by metropolitan readers. I doubt very much whether Pringle saw his miniscule local readership of 1824 and 1825/6 as constituting any kind of market at all; he must surely have imagined that his poems addressed a British readership, in the widest sense, metropolitan and colonial. There is also the simple fact that most of the poems, including "Makanna's Gathering" were published while Pringle was living in London. To address a wide British audience Pringle had, as he very well knew, to work within conventions of representation with which they were familiar. At that time the Xhosa, like other indigenous groupings, were a remote and barely known tribal people and Pringle must have been conscious of the need to render his novel African subject matter in a way that was still within reach of his readers. In the case of "Makanna's Gathering" I would suggest that one familiar framing genre implicit in the poem is what we might call the ethnographic picturesque, and that behind it lies the ever pervasive influence of Walter Scott. In an appraisal of Scott's use of the picturesque, Peter Garside has argued that Scott, who was well acquainted with the work of Price and Gilpin and drew on it in the planning of his Abbotsford estate, created a form of historical picturesque in which figure, and not ground, was the principal focus. Garside quotes Scott on "the distinction between a sense of the picturesque in action and the picturesque in scenery" (1994:148) and argues that Scott developed a historicized picturesque centered around vividly pictorial descriptions of character and incident. Garside develops his argument by examining the picturesque significance of Meg Merrilies (we remember that Pringle assisted Scott in his research on Jean Gordon, the prototype for the fictional figure in *Guy Mannering*). What interests me

here is the notion that striking or dramatic figures had picturesque appeal; allied to this is Scott's assertion that transitional historical moments, in which an older way of life is being superseded by the new, offers the best opportunities for such picturesque description: "the most picturesque period of history is that when the ancient rough and wild manners of a barbarous age are just becoming innovated upon" (quoted in Garside 1994: 169). It surely could have not escaped Pringle, who was steeped in Scott's work, that the Xhosa, whose way of life was being "innovated upon" by colonization, were candidates for picturesque description. Much of Scott's work was set, as the narrator of *Rob Roy* puts it, "among a people singularly primitive in their government and manners" (1963:5) and there can be little doubt that Scott influenced Pringle's poetic conception of the Xhosa. If one isolates the one stanza in "Makanna's Gathering" which has no Xhosa words and no specifically ethnographic characteristics, it could belong in any number of poems of the period describing a battle or intended battle of the middle or remote past:

Fling your broad shields away –
 Bootless against such foes;
 But hand to hand we'll fight today,
 And with their bayonets close.
 Grasp each man short his stabbing spear –
 And, when to the battle's edge we come,
 Rush on their ranks in full career,
 And to their hearts strike home. (ll. 33-40)

Though it does not help that this stanza is rather flatly written, we see at once how much the poem loses when the Xhosa context goes; the poem gains whatever vividness it possesses from its description of unusual or striking local detail, which gives texture to its conventional verse forms. For theorists like William Gilpin the picturesque figure, if it was not to be a mere appendage to the landscape, should have striking characteristics of its own. Typically, such figures are banditti and gypsies, who still retain the representational allure of exotic or foreign ways but are otherwise considered lawless. It remains open to considerable doubt that Pringle's depiction of Makanna and the Xhosa in this poem falls outside this pattern of representation, and that the poem was understood as a "wild" African picturesque, part of the spectacle of empire rather than an indictment of it.

Even if we accept – as I believe we must – that poems like “The Song of the Wild Bushman” and “Makanna’s Gathering” might not have been intended or generally understood as incendiary comments on the evils of colonialism, they still retain a signal importance in the canon of white writing. The very fact that Pringle has ventriloquised indigenous voices and attempted to occupy (even if this occupation might at the same time be an eviction) an indigenous position points toward a recognition that representation is doubled, that colonialism cannot speak in a single voice. This incipient transculturalism might, in the case of Pringle, be heavily weighted toward the controlling interest of the poet himself, and be everywhere inflected, as we have seen, by projections and imaginations in which indigenous people play an expedient role. Nonetheless, to recognise this should not be to block out the significance of making this move in the first place.

* * * * *

Readings of “Makanna’s Gathering” as an anti-colonial poem have a genealogy (of sorts).

Consider the following, written in 1835:

What!! A Briton! and one who is the conspicuous organ of all the real or apparent philanthropists of the day – the man (shall I call him a man) who pretends to shudder at the proper chastisement of a rebellious domestic ... and whose heart, one would suppose, would sicken at the very idea of blood – to sit down and pen such an oration as the one to which I allude – good God!
 What have we done to call down this dreadful, this ferocious treatment? What have we done to this Pringle to draw down the horrid vengeance of the unsparing assegai upon our defenceless and, till now, peaceful homes ... It [will be] remembered [that] Mr. Thomas Pringle once was [a British settler in Albany], and would have remained so, had he not found that to be outrageously philanthropic and charitable at other people’s expense, was a far more profitable and luxurious occupation. I hear that Mr. Pringle is now in Cape-Town, if so, why does he not hasten to take the lead of his beloved Kafirs, of the never-treacherous, never treaty-breaking Amakosa?

This little volcano of colonial indignation erupted in the correspondence pages of the *Grahamstown Journal* on the 2nd of January 1835. Its occasion was a shocked response to “Makanna’s Gathering”, an “oration” which the correspondent evidently regarded as a quite literal sanction of Xhosa aggression. It would not have helped that the Xhosa were then invading the colony in numbers not seen since 1819, and the correspondent seems to have confused these events with the earlier ones, but even so this unrestrained invective is somewhat wide of its mark. Critics often assume that Pringle’s poetry must have offended his colonial readers. John Wahl, for example, writes of “Makanna’s Gathering” that “It was bitterly resented by many of Pringle’s fellow settlers, who regarded it not as historical verse but as dangerous and inflammable propaganda”(1970: xxii). But aside from the hysterical outburst in the *Grahamstown Journal*, I can find no evidence that this or any other poem of Pringle’s was regarded as offensive by his “fellow settlers”. We have, unfortunately, no way of knowing what the colonial response to Pringle’s poetry was at the time of its publication. The only review of *African Sketches* was printed in the *Cape of Good Hope Literary Gazette* and it was taken verbatim from a London magazine, *The Spectator*. The anonymous reviewer did not mention the poetry at all, except to say that it was “pleasing and characteristic” but went on at some length, and in horrified tones, about the barbarous treatment of the frontier Xhosa reported in the *Narrative*. This review caused considerable offence, as we shall see, to the editor of the *Grahamstown Journal*. There are also grounds to suppose that the *Narrative* was provoking to others as well. In a short editorial excerpt, Alexander Jardine, the *Gazette’s* editor, commented that:

Pringle’s new work is causing a shaking among the dry bones of the colony. It has been aptly termed a *bunch of whip cord*; it must certainly prove lacerating to much of the proud flesh around us. (No.4. Vol.4. 1834:134)

I do not think Jardine’s remarks concern Pringle’s poetry at all; they almost certainly refer to the often contentious treatment of colonial issues in the *Narrative*, issues which were current and contentious at the time.¹⁴ (Ironically, it was Jardine, a fellow Scot, who took

over both Pringle's librarian post and the editorship of the *Chronicle*, the government approved paper which briefly succeeded the *Advertiser*. Pringle professed suspicion of Jardine, believing that he might have been a false informant against him in the affair of the placards). At any rate, when the *Gazette* did get round to offering an anonymous 'review' it was short and absolutely innocuous, informing its readers that:

Mr Pringle's work has been so well received by the public, and has been so pleasingly analyzed by the periodical press, particularly in Tait's Magazine, that there remains nothing for us but to register the gratification we have derived from its perusal, and to recommend it, right warmly, to the attention of those who may be pleased to value our judgement in these matters ... (No. 12. Vol 4. 1834:81).

The review then goes on fulsomely to praise "the excellent people of Glen Lynden" and the progress made by the Scottish settlement. This time Pringle's poetry is not mentioned at all, so one can only assume that there was nothing in it offensive to colonial sensibilities. In the review section in which Pringle's book was briefly mentioned, there were two other volumes under consideration. The first, *The Advantages of Emigration to Algoa Bay and Albany, South Africa* by the 1820 settler Thomas Phillips, was briefly praised as a "practical tract ... which has condensed into thirty pages of unambitious, but excellent matter, a clear and distinct outline of what is required to be known respecting the colony" (185). The rest of the review, however, more than four pages of tiny, closely packed type in three columns, energetically refutes a comparative survey of European colonies in which the Cape is disparagingly treated. It is abundantly clear the now forgotten *European Colonies in their various parts of the World, viewed in their social, moral and physical Conditions, &c*, written by John Howison and published in London in the same year as *African Sketches*, was considered very much more damaging to the colony's reputation than Pringle's book.

I raise the issue of Pringle's early reception in South Africa, and in particular the way in which "Makanna's Gathering" might have been read, because the assumption that Pringle's poems were seen as critical and confrontational by his colonial contemporaries can easily divert our understanding of them. Thus Chapman and Perreira assert that Pringle "initiated a 'tradition' of protest poetry which, in the case of "Makanna's Gathering", saw him adopting

another pseudo-persona in order to advocate retaliation by the Xhosa against the injustices of British incursions” (1989: xxiv). Though I do not think, for obvious reasons, that the poem can sustain such a reading, critical assessments like this might in part rest on the assumption that Pringle’s poetry was perceived in this way by his contemporaries. But the general reception of Pringle’s poetry in the decades following his death was, as far as this can be accurately gauged given the relative scarcity of published response, unfailingly approving. While there might have been a significant number of settlers, especially in the late 1820s and 30s, who vehemently disagreed with the views on colonial governance and conduct aired by Pringle and the cohort of humanitarians, this opprobrium did not extend to the poetry, which appears to have been received not only without fuss, but with overwhelming approval – even by his detractors. Thus Robert Godlonton, a leading settler voice and editor of the *Grahamstown Journal*, denounced both *African Sketches* and Pringle himself in the most vehement manner imaginable:

It appears then that Mr. THOMAS PRINGLE has not been content with painting Lord C. SOMERSET as a modern *Verres*, but that he has depicted the frontier farmers, and some of the English settlers to boot, as a set of ruthless ruffians who are abetted and encouraged in their atrocities by the Colonial authorities! At least, so say his reviewers, of which the following is a specimen extracted from the *Spectator*, of the 17th May: -
Grahamstown Journal, September 4th 1834, np)

Godlonton then goes on to quote from the offending review, which, it must be said, is rather darkly melodramatic, describing Pringle’s book (and it is obviously the *Narrative* that is referred to), as throwing light on “one of the darkest and bloodiest stains upon the page of history” and offering accounts of this “worse than slave trade”. After condemning the review as a “flagitious libel”, Godlonton returns to attack Pringle himself, accusing his family of illegal profiteering in the sale of government granted land. He continues:

His contempt of the government, may therefore, have *some* shadow of foundation; but why he should travel out of his way to lay such a foul catalogue of crimes at the door of our farmers, both English as well as Dutch, is only to be accounted for on the grounds that Mr. THOMAS PRINGLE is a poet, and that poets have a licence to deal in fiction. We need not enter upon a refutation, as we deem it hardly necessary that any of our readers should be assured that such charges are gross exaggerations

and distorted facts ... The *fancy* of the *poet* and the *zeal* of the *partisan*, are in this production alike conspicuous; in the former case his *Pegasus*, for want of the needful curb, has carried him far into the regions of romance; in the latter, the reckless spirit of pact has led him to commit errors which can neither be palliated on the ground of expediency, nor excused on the plea of ignorance.

Despite the sarcasm, Godlonton – obviously an educated man – reflexively associates Pringle’s poetry with “fiction” and “romance”. Unlike the envenomed letter writer, he seems to have accepted that Pringle’s poetry employs a degree of figural licence not accorded to the reportage and polemic of the *Narrative*. Further evidence that he understood Pringle’s poetry in this way is found in Godlonton’s 1844 memorial account of the settlers, which was prefaced by some “beautiful lines” from a Pringle poem along with the further observation that Pringle’s “name as a man of genius will add grace to the role of the early British immigrants” (1844:114). Throughout the nineteenth century, Pringle’s poetry was regarded with proprietorial pride whenever it was mentioned : “[I]t continues to live” wrote John Noble in the introduction to his 1881 edition of Pringle’s South African poems, “in the hearts and minds of Cape and Natal colonists” (vii). This was, clearly, not poetry that offended the mores, political or otherwise, of an acquisitive and often violent colonial society. To the contrary: the poetry seems to have constituted a very welcome stock of cultural capital (“grace”) to a colony where it was in short supply.

When Pringle left for London on the 16th of April 1826 Somerset had embarked for the same destination some two weeks earlier. Neither was ever to return. Pringle’s decision to seek a livelihood in London seems a curious one: he had few connections there, and nothing at all had been offered him in the way of employment. That he seemed not even to consider the possibility of going back to his native Scotland suggests that he saw even less advantage to himself in Edinburgh or even that he felt himself to be unwelcome there. He could have returned to Cape Town and resumed editorship of the *Advertiser* with Fairbairn but chose not to do this. He must also have been aware that Somerset was unlikely to return to the colony and that there were few, if any impediments, to the resumption of a colonial career. Patricia Morris has suggested that Pringle thought he might gain redress by presenting his

case in London, and then using these funds to return to the Cape (1982:320-322), but Pringle must have known that such an outcome was by no means a certain one. Whatever his motivations – which seem, at best, confused – Pringle’s residence in London, though it gained him no great financial advantage, was decisive in establishing his literary reputation as an editor and minor poet; it also brought him into contact with leading literary figures. In addition, his involvement with the Anti-Slavery movement, of which he became secretary, gained him a reputation as a colonial humanitarian which he put to good use in the final years of his life when he was prominent among a group of petitioners able to exert pressure on the Colonial Office. By the time Pringle left South Africa, the outlines of his ‘African’ poetry had already been established, as had the main thrust of his journalistic polemic against the colonial government. What we need now to examine is how Pringle, from a metropolitan base, fashioned his colonial experience into forms which found a ready readership among certain sections of the British reading public.

¹ I use the term “public sphere” in the sense usually accorded to it via Habermas, i.e. a “social space between the private sphere and the state, in which the middle class organised itself as a public over the course of the eighteenth century, through a rational-critical debate conducted in arenas like the coffee-house and the newspaper press” (Gilmartin 1996:3). As Gilmartin points out, however, Habermas’s notion has been criticised for failing to take into account the conflictual and exclusionary aspects of the public sphere, as well as the existence of counter and competing publics. As we shall see, these considerations also apply to efforts to construct a public sphere in the early nineteenth-century Cape Colony.

² The most sustained attempt to place the humanitarian reformers in a macrological socio-economic context is found in Timothy Keegan’s *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (1996). Keegan’s very detailed analysis traces a web of affiliations between mercantile and humanitarian interests which dovetailed throughout the 20s, and to a lesser extent in the 30s, before drifting apart in the 40s. “[H]umanitarian and mercantile concerns”, writes Keegan, “seemed perfectly compatible, as both were preoccupied with the dismantling of the old order, based on monopoly and patronage, coercion and unfreedom”(99). Particularly important in this alliance was the role of the *Advertiser*, which from its inception supported, and was supported by, the merchant interest chafing under the trade restrictions which Somerset had inherited and continued. Even at the time of the initial closing down of the *Advertiser*, prominent merchants were among those who signed the petition protesting this closure (98). Keegan argues that the humanitarian-mercantilist alliance held firm while the colonial economy was still developing “along lines more apposite to an imperial economy of free trade dependent on expanding markets” (127) but that once this had been achieved and settler capitalism developed its own dynamics, the alliance no longer served mutual interests and humanitarianism very rapidly became a spent force:

By the 1840s ... humanitarianism was on the retreat. The humanitarian movement thrived only so long as the settler economy was weak and

undeveloped. While philanthropic impulses served a purpose in the transition to a bourgeois colonial society, once settler capitalism had been launched as a vital force these impulses faded. The irony was that the capitalist economy which emerged from the transformations of the 1820s and 1830s was to be based on the ever more rigid assertion of failed hegemony. Because the colony's underclasses, rural and urban, failed to conform to the optimistic humanitarian ideals of a sober, subservient and tractable workforce, new forms of social control and subjugation had to be forged to replace the older, counterproductive coercions of unfree legal status. (127)

Keegan's judgement that "In the end, liberal humanitarianism turned out to be a shallow, tawdry, deceptive thing"(127) may perhaps be too harsh a judgement on the benign intentions of people who had no way of knowing what historical cards they were going to be dealt, but they act as a corrective against those views of humanitarianism which seek to freeze it in the postures of moral authority.

³ A Commission of Inquiry, or Crown Commissioners, had been appointed to investigate the affairs of the colony in 1823. This Commission was partly the result of complaints from the 1820 settlers, but also the result of efforts by humanitarian interests in the Colonial Office and Parliament "to collect evidence on slavery and colonial government"(Bayly 1989:205) in the Cape and other colonial territories.

⁴ Henry Brougham (1778-1868) was the Whig politician most prominent in the campaign against Somerset in the House of Commons. Pringle's association with him cannot be dated, but one would assume that it began when Brougham was the recipient of letters, petitions, etc, from Pringle during this period. Brougham was well known as a reformist Tory who promoted a number of legal and social causes. Pringle would later be associated with Brougham's "Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge", which Brougham and others founded in 1826 to counter the "diffusion" of radical politics among the working classes. The *Penny Magazine*, launched by the Society in 1832, was explicitly intended to wean the working class away from more politically incendiary material, and extracts from Pringle's *Narrative*, as well as several of his poems, appeared in this publication. While Brougham's politics might have been reformist in relation to the encrusted Tory hierarchy of Lord Liverpool's government, and even the more conservative Whigs, he was a determined opponent of oppositional politics outside the ambit of parliament.

⁵ The following editorial in *The Times* in August 1824 is an example of how the mainstream metropolitan press attacked Somerset, and puts in perspective the assumption that humanitarians like Pringle adopted a 'radical' stance against the governor:

What can this member of the House of Beaufort mean? Can he see an inch before him, that he thus audaciously grapples with the spirit of the whole British nation? Is it not evident to one whose pretensions are those of the most commonplace courtier that by his hostility to the press, he implies the weak or vicious character of an administration that will not bear disclosure? It is, we pronounce, an utter impossibility that Mr. Canning or Lord Liverpool can abet such proceedings; as well might they accede to a formal compact to that dark conspiracy called the Holy Alliance ... It is in the colonies that most abuses take their birth; - it is there that they must be stifled. By the time they travel hither they may be too strong for us". (quoted in Edwards 1934: 117)

⁶ Burnett seems to have been unaware of Pringle's campaign against him. In his book/pamphlet published in London in 1826, *A Reply to "Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry at the Cape of Good Hope" upon the Complaints addressed to the Colonial Government and to the Earl Bathurst by Mr. Bishop Burnett*, there is no direct comment on Pringle. There is, however, an enclosed letter from a "respectable merchant in Cape Town" which praises Pringle's character in the following terms:

About the same period as Mr Greig's paper commenced, a quarterly magazine called "The South African Journal" made its appearance. It was edited by Mr. Thomas Pringle, a worthy and respected gentleman, and was even printed at the Government press. He was led to make some reasonable but rather independent remarks in his magazine, and the fiscal was therefore appointed censor over it likewise, and the editor was sent for by his Excellency. Mr. Pringle's appearance ought to excite compassion, for he is a cripple, and unable to support himself without crutches, and his own mild manners ought to excite forbearance in others. But he was the only man in office who ventured to sign the memorial in favour of a free press, and the Governor charged him with this offence. Mr Pringle replied that he had been accustomed all his life to think for himself, and was not aware that because he held a Government appointment, he was, at so late a period to be deprived of that rational gratification. Immediately after this conversation he resigned his appointment of Librarian to the Public Library, and at the same time threw up the publication of his journal. (1826:263)

Quite aside from their interest in showing us the regard in which Pringle was held by his colonial contemporaries, these observations reveal that Burnett must have regarded Pringle as an ally in the struggle against Somerset. One cannot but wonder what his reaction might have been had he known about Pringle's campaign against him.

⁷ Astonishingly, despite Pringle's frequent and often heated denials that he was a "radical" of any stripe – "we disclaim the name and detest the principles of RADICALS, or LEVELLERS" declared a SACA editorial on the 31 March 1824 – the myth that he really was of this persuasion persists. The historian Stanley Trapido, for example, in an influential article ("From Paternalism to Liberalism: The Cape Colony, 1800-1834) makes the inexplicable, throwaway claim that Pringle "was a lifelong radical" (1990:87-8). Though this assertion in no way invalidates Trapido's analysis of the events of this period, it does indicate that such assumptions about Pringle are part of a generalised currency of thought. An article on Pringle by the 'radical' historian Dora Taylor and published in the magazine *Trek* in 1943 makes a number of competing but unresolved claims about Pringle. While Taylor concedes that Pringle had "no intention at any time of being immoderate in his actions" (1943:12) and was at times as "smugly bourgeois-liberal as one could wish to find"(13) she still insists that Pringle could on occasion speak in "the very voice of the bourgeois revolution, the voice of Milton and Cromwell thundering now at the base of Table Mountain"(13). While Pringle's courage and pertinacity in his standoff with Somerset are not in doubt, to cast him in any revolutionary role, even a retroactive or delayed one, is misleading. In her conclusion, for example, she argues that "Of Pringle it might be said ... that the revolutionary role was thrust upon him by objective conditions" (13). The "revolutionary role" was, however, "thrust upon" any number of people, including the so-called "Albany Radicals", the relatively wealthy heads of proprietary parties in the Eastern Cape who complained, as did Pringle, that the Governor's frontier policies favoured the artisanal class at their expense and threatened the structures of social hierarchy! It seems to me that Taylor takes insufficient account of the deformities and contradictions of the colonial situation at this time. Taylor's judgement of Pringle's radicalism is recycled in Perreira and Chapman's introduction to the 1989 edition of Pringle's poems. After making the sweeping claim (already quoted) that Pringle was "an enemy of oppression in any form, and a staunch advocate of

freedom and liberal values" (1989:xv) they go on to assert that "Pringle would by the standards of today be regarded as moderate rather than radical in his views"(xv) – thereby implying that in his own time he was regarded as radical . Then, citing Taylor's articles, they reiterate the claim that "At the Cape the radical role was thrust on him by objective conditions" (xv). Perhaps the last word on this matter should be given to Bishop Burnett. In official correspondence with the colonial office, Burnett complained as follows about Somerset's tactic of denouncing his critics as radicals: "[T]his species of attack is so common at the Cape as to become at length quite innocuous: if Lord Charles has a dispute on a race course, the party at variance is set down by his minions as a radical, so that the term applies to those persons personally obnoxious to his excellency rather than his government; but to show the unwarrantable uses to which this engine has been applied, his Lordship thought proper in a private and confidential letter to the Reverend Mr. Geary, the pastor of Graham's Town, to caution him as to what society he should keep, and to denounce to him Major Pigot, Captain Campbell, Mr. Phillips and myself, as disaffected radicals!!"(SAL 968.7:23)

⁸ It is difficult to judge the extent to which Pringle's recriminations of the Commissioners were of his own making. In A.M. Lewin-Robinson's historical account of early periodical literature at the Cape, he dismisses absolutely any suggestion that the Commissioners handled Pringle's case without impartiality. He describes their official report on Pringle's grievances (which refused to grant Pringle redress of any kind), as being "as clear and impartial as one could wish to find it" (1962: 76) and "eminently fair and accurate" (77). Interestingly, Pringle's tone in these letters is reminiscent of that adopted in his letters to Fairbairn about the fallout over *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. "The Enemy still go on with a great deal of birk and ability," he wrote to Fairbairn on June the 20th 1819, "but we expect to run them out at length"(FB 1:111).

⁹ Robert J.C Young 1995, pp.175-182, discusses the nineteenth-century colonial obsession with the taxonomy of physical types and argues that it used both a Hegelian paradigm of a distinct self/other split and a "norm/deviance model of diversity and inequality". He sees the latter as being exemplified in Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'faciality' and the identification of the white face with the Christ face: "If the face is in fact Christ, in other words your average, ordinary White Man, then the first deviances, the first divergence types, are racial ... Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face ..." (quoted p.180). Thus far Pringle's descriptions fit fairly neatly into this second model; we should note, however, as the rest of the passage under analysis will make clear, that deviance can be so fractional as barely to amount to difference.

¹⁰ A.E. Voss, for example, notes that "The Song of the Wild Bushman" is "a much more obviously crafted poem than 'Afar in the Desert'" (1982:21).

¹¹ Andrew Banks mentions that the nineteenth-century philologist and Bushman ethnographer Wilhelm Bleek "had little time for the theory of the former London Missionary Society head, John Philip, that Bushmen were 'Hottentots' rendered impoverished by 'European oppression'. Bleek dismissed this as a 'preposterous notion'" (2006:24). It is not surprising that Philip and Pringle should have held the same views, as both would have subscribed to the relentlessly developmental logic of stadial theory (see my remarks above).

¹² In his *Southern African Literatures*, Michael Chapman mistakenly attributes this speech to Makanna himself. He also claims that the speech was "rendered into English from Stockenstrom's eye-witness account" (1996: 115) and that "Pringle developed Stockenstrom's account of Makanna's speech to the British forces into a powerful statement of dignity in defeat"(106). There is, however, no evidence to support these assertions save what has already been cited. To confuse matters even further, Noel Mostert informs us that Stockenstrom did not speak Xhosa (1993:507).

¹³ In *Southern African Literature: An Introduction* Stephen Gray makes the claim that in “Makanna’s Gathering”, as in “The Brown Hunter’s Song”, Pringle was “rendering Xhosa songs into English” (1979: 165) and praises “the courage of the artistic statement” Pringle was making – i.e. that indigenous art was worthy of translation. To the best of my knowledge Pringle was not fluent in Xhosa, and the only direct translation in which he was ever involved was “Sicana’s Hymn”, first published as late as 1832. In this case he openly acknowledged “the assistance of my ingenious and learned friend, the Rev. Dr. Wright” (1989:107). I think we may take it that the direct translation was supplied by Wright and that Pringle worked from this. Gray cites no sources for his claim that “Makanna’s Gathering” is a “rendering” of a Xhosa song. All the evidence points to the imaginative embellishment of events about which Pringle had only second hand accounts and of whose details (by his own admission) he was unclear. Similarly, despite the use of a Xhosa epigraph, there is no evidence that “The Brown-Hunter’s Song” is a rendition in literary English of a Xhosa original. Certainly, Pringle never made any such claims for the poem. Assertions such as these work to create the impression (see also the note on Chapman above) that Pringle was thoroughly familiar with the expressive resources of Xhosa orality; this was not the case.

¹⁴ A.J. Jardine, who edited the *Cape of Good Hope Literary Gazette*, had been among those who had aroused Pringle’s ire during the fallout with Somerset. It was Jardine, a fellow Scot, who had taken over Pringle’s post as librarian and Jardine who acted as editor of the government approved *Chronicle* which stepped into the temporary gap left by the closure of the *Advertiser*. Pringle, probably unfairly, believed that Jardine might have falsely implicated him in the affair of the placards. The *Gazette*, which Jardine edited – and contributed to substantially – ran from June 1830 to the end of 1835. Though he was sympathetic to “philanthropic principles” and is quoted by Lewin-Robinson as saying that he could have greatly increased the *Gazette*’s circulation had he “succumbed to the one-eyed monster the mob” (1962:138) and refused to endorse Fairbairn’s editorial stance in the *Advertiser*, he drew the line at Philip’s *Researches in South Africa* (1828). A lengthy review published in two parts 1830 (which Lewin-Robinson attributes to Jardine himself (1962:154)), approves the book’s account of events relating to indigenous people and missionary activity up to the Caledon Code of 1809 but declares that thereafter “we cannot refrain from applying the strongest expressions of dissent and astonishment” (Vol 1, No 4, 1830: 42). The review goes on to upbraid Philip for his “credulity” in accepting as reliable report mere “hearsay” about “cruelty to Hottentots” (43). I draw attention to this review because its scepticism about Philip would seem to indicate that, in its general tenor, the *Gazette* was likely to be predisposed to a negative reception of certain aspects of *African Sketches*. That this did not happen strongly suggests that, despite Jardine’s “whip-cord” remarks, the book’s reception - in Cape Town at least - was not especially controversial.

CHAPTER FOUR

LONDON – 1826-1834

When Pringle arrived in London in 1826 he entered a social, political and cultural formation at an almost inconceivable remove from the sparse and abrasive world of the Cape Colony (though his formative years in Edinburgh, and his experience of Scottish journalism would, to some degree, have prepared him for his new environment). Pringle had now to negotiate a more complex, if less threatening, terrain and his means of negotiation was a professional engagement with print culture – as journalist, pamphleteer, poet, editor and secretary. In the mid 1820s print politics and print culture in Britain were characterised by significant divisions, the most salient of which was that between a ‘democratic’ political establishment which, however divided within its own ranks, regarded parliament and constitutional reform as constituting the only legitimate form of politics and dispersed but still articulate proponents of radical reform who wished, in various ways, entirely to transform existing political structures. Pringle had come from an anachronistic colonial situation in which print dissemination was limited and print control despotically vested in the hands of a single individual: in this context the right to print was granted to none but the most direct government functionaries and the battle fought by Pringle and Fairbairn had been to extend this right to an emergent colonial middle class. If such a move constituted, in condensed form – and with the obvious limitations of a racially divided colonial state - a replay of the classic eighteenth-century Enlightenment scenario of the opening of a public sphere in the waning absolutist state, then the situation in which Pringle found himself in London in 1826 was a very different one. As Kevin Gilmartin explains, disparate radical groupings were united in their conviction that the state and its civil institutions were irreparably corrupt and intransigently opposed to internal reform: “The radical belief that corruption had

thoroughly infiltrated meant that the press and opinion were no longer counterposed to the absolutist state, as in the classic bourgeois public sphere, but were instead divided between a corrupt state and the advocates of reform” (1996:23). This polarization reproduced itself in the broad configuration of the reading public as well, resulting, as Jon Klancher notes, in “not a single but two national reading publics, implacably opposed in their language and politics”(1987:98). Though there might have been complex differentiation within these opposed reading publics (cf. Klancher, pp. 4-5; Gilmartin pp. 1-10) and a profuse range of differing publications produced by both, the polarity of the opposition between them was never in doubt. In an ironic replication of Somerset’s rather more bluntly revanchist tactics in the Cape Colony, practitioners of party politics, whether Whig or Tory, “developed a set of shared reactionary commitments, and used a ‘cry about Jacobinism’... as Cobbett termed it, to brand a whole range of alternative positions foreign, illegitimate, and seditious” (Gilmartin 1996:13). Institutional attempts to stifle or limit dissent also resorted (as I have already briefly indicated) to legislative prohibition of libel and sedition, as well as a “sustained assault on [its] economic foundations” (48) by invidious taxation. Pringle’s name might be synonymous with press freedom in South Africa, but no evidence exists that, in the metropolitan context, he raised his voice against the political establishment for their transparent determination to limit press freedom in their own interest.

It needs to be made emphatically clear that in this metropolitan context, Pringle’s print production – and with it his representations of the Cape Colony – were neither allied to nor directed at any radical faction. The various confusions around Pringle as a “radical” which have resulted from a misreading of his role at the Cape can all too easily lead to the assumption that his writing (the bulk of which was published in London) served radical or radical reformist purposes. This is a misunderstanding easily compounded by perceptions of his role in the Anti-Slavery Society and as an active member of extra-parliamentary pressure groups lobbying for the reform of colonial legislation. All these activities took place under the purview of constituted authority and with its express sanction. Indeed, as we shall see, the primary market for Pringle’s writing, and especially for Pringle’s poetry, was a genteel

middle class audience, sometimes with strong evangelical leanings, which would have been unlikely to tolerate any marked deviation from existing norms.

In his first letter to Fairbairn after arriving in London, Pringle reported on the literary market place:

The Literary trade is exceedingly flat just now. Campbell's Mag^{ne}. & Blackwoods are the only ones that sell well. The Edinb. Review has become the property of Longman & Co. J.G. Lockhart is Editor of the Quarterly. There is little or no encouragement for new works. In short like other manufacturers business has been overdone. There is a glut in the market - some of the chief manufacturers are ruined & many of the operations are starving.
(FB1:132B)

This conception of literature as a “trade” comparable to “other manufacturers” underscores Pringle’s unillusioned understanding of the difficulties of making a living by means of writing alone, and how dependent such an endeavour was on the vagaries of the reading audience. It did not take Pringle long to realize that his market ‘niche’ lay in writing about his African experiences, and he very seldom turned his hand to any other subject, except slavery – a related field. Despite the inauspicious prospects Pringle faced on his arrival in London, he soon managed to establish himself in the journalistic and literary markets with a modest degree of success. This work dovetailed, to a degree, with his role as Secretary to the Anti-Slavery Society, which also saw Pringle extensively involved in the production of pamphlets, circulars and other publications. In general terms, two broad trajectories characterize Pringle’s metropolitan career: as a journalist, he begins by publishing polemical accounts of slavery at the Cape and the malefactions of the Somerset administration, but then supplements this with general interest articles about the Colony; as a poet, he appears almost exclusively in the same publications where his journalism appeared or where he had editorial discretion, but he also publishes a politely received book of verse, *Ephemerides; or occasional poems written in Scotland and South Africa*, in March 1828. Pringle’s local standing was greatly enhanced by his editorship of the annual *Friendship’s Offering* from 1829 to 1835, which gave him access to literary circles otherwise closed to him. These illustrated anthologies of verse and tales, aimed at the genteel end of the market, were immensely popular and attractive to established poets because they paid well. He also edited,

for several years, a monthly journal called the *Oriental Herald* which dealt with colonial affairs in India, but which under Pringle's editorship also included articles on the Cape, most of them written by Pringle himself; a fair number of Pringle's poems were also published in this journal for the first time. Despite its value to him as a publishing outlet, the *Herald* seems not to have engaged Pringle's energies in any significant way and to have been valued mainly as a source of income. Ironically, the publication for which Pringle is best known today was his editorship of the oral autobiography of a former West Indian slave, Mary Prince. *The History of Mary Prince* was reprinted three times in the year of its publication (1831) and there have been new editions in 1987 and 2000, both edited by feminist scholars with an interest in the book's status as the first narrative of a black woman's life to be published in England. As one might expect, this interest centres largely on Prince and is concerned with Pringle only to the extent of assessing his editorial role. The publication of *African Sketches* in 1834, just before Pringle's death, brought together for the first time his scattered South African output, with the addition of some new material prepared for the occasion and attuned to the latest developments in the Cape colony.

An understanding of this third phase of Pringle's literary career requires that we bring together his Scottish background, the impact of his colonial 'residence', and his attempt to engage a metropolitan, British readership at a time when this was fractured by different reading publics. The fact that Pringle published the bulk of his South African writing in England, and revised it, sometimes very extensively, means that one cannot always disentangle retrospective strategy from original intent. However, those emendations and additions that Pringle did make to this work, as well as new work dealing with South Africa written after his departure from the Cape, often offer strong evidence of a revisionist version of his colonial experiences that was more appropriate to metropolitan rhetorics of empire, particularly those of the humanitarian and abolitionist tendency. Thus, it is necessary to understand this work, and especially the poetry, in relation to what was to become its dominant – though not exclusive – mode: a form of public address in which issues relating to Britain's imperial conduct (notably those issues surrounding abolition and the treatment of

indigenous peoples) were the most prominent themes. Mixed in with these public concerns, of course, was an African exoticism that gave Pringle's poetry in particular a distinctiveness that it might otherwise not have possessed. In this poetry he moves away from the exploration of interiority (which we may understand as Romantic or at least proto-Romantic) that marked the early Scottish and South African poems towards the morally illustrative vignette or portrait or narrative, depending on the occasion, while his prose is increasingly geared towards advocacy and public issues. It could be argued, I think, that much of Pringle's poetry of this period finds its antecedents in eighteenth-century verse that addressed the frequently uneasy interaction of Britain's imperial conduct with its national and domestic values – verse described by Savir Kaul as “poems of nation, anthems of empire”, whose “key formal feature ... is their polemical repetition of ideas, positions, or sentiments” (2000:18). As we shall see, Pringle's poetry increasingly employs an iterative didactics of the evils of empire redeemed by a humanitarian and evangelical British righteousness. Precisely because of this commitment, much of the later poetry might be said to occupy a generically anachronistic position insofar as it mobilizes what was, by the late 1820s, a remnant form of poetic address.

In what follows I concentrate mainly on Pringle's poetry and its rough, and sometimes uneven, sequential development. As in previous chapters, I turn to Pringle's prose writing only when this bears on our understanding of the poetry or allows us a fuller comprehension of the context in which it was written. I begin by examining a series of poems which were included in George Thompson's *Travels and Adventures in South Africa*, published early in 1827. Thompson, an Englishman, was a Cape Town merchant who had travelled extensively in the interior of the country between 1820 and 1824. Thompson's book, subtitled “Eight years a resident at the Cape. Comprising a view of the present state of the Cape Colony with observations on the progress and prospects of the British Emigrants”, is a somewhat uneven compendium of observations and adventures on these interior journeys, as well as reports and speculations on the economy of the colony, and some chapters dealing with the state and prospects of the 1820 settlers. Pringle's editorial hand is everywhere evident – some of

the landscape description, for example, seems to have been worked up by him - and certain sections of the book are verbatim transcripts or close approximations of material that had appeared in the *Advertiser*, the *South African Journal* and Pringle's previously published pamphlet on the settlers. Clearly, Pringle saw his editorial role as an opportunity to bring his work before the British public and he appended seven of his own poems to the *Travels*. Three of these poems ("Afar in the Desert", "The Lion and the Camelopard" (a poem describing a Giraffe being attacked and killed by a Lion), and "The Song of the Wild Bushman") had already appeared in print, but four of the poems had not. As their titles indicate, they are character sketches or vignettes of tribal types: "The Hottentot"; "The Coranna"; "The Caffer"; "The Bushman". These four previously unpublished poems are, like the others, footnoted in the *Travels* as a kind of literary ornamentation to the text, although they are also proximate to the subject being discussed in the prose narrative. The editor of the 1967 edition of the *Travels*, Vernon Forbes, speculates that Pringle included the poems – an inclusion to which Thompson clearly did not object – because they "were a good advertisement for himself" (1967:xix) and there is little doubt that the appearance of the poetry was motivated by Pringle's desire to put himself into literary circulation.

The enumerative titling of this quartet of poems, and their range of racial typologies suggests something like an ethnographic catalogue or display-case of South African indigenous people. Although, strictly speaking, they should be considered as originally produced within a colonial context, since Pringle was working on the redaction of Thompson's material while still in the Cape Colony, I would maintain that the tone and intention of these particular poems, with their insistent and impassioned didacticism, are clearly directed towards direct engagement with a British reading public, relying as they do on an unambiguous settler (of a certain type)/native binarism and the exposure of colonial injustice. Three of the poems are sonnets – the exception is "The Coranna" – and in collections of Pringle's poetry they always appear in sequence in a subsection entitled "Sonnets". "The Coranna", on the other hand, is sequentially paired with "The Kosa" (first published a year later in 1828). I begin with the sonnets which offer an introduction to the

tenor of Pringle's British or metropolitan poetry dealing with indigenous people, while also serving as pertinent examples of how this poetry is manifestly polemical and strategically embedded within agendas that are extrinsic to its apparent subject matter. Although these poems were subject to a certain amount of revision when they appeared in later publications, I do not think these sufficiently substantial to qualify for comment and work from the final versions of the poems as they appeared in *African Sketches*. Of the triad of sonnets, "The Caffer" is perhaps the most typical in its shift from ethnographic portraiture to prescriptive exhortation:

Lo! Where he crouches by the cleugh's far side,
 Eyeing the farmer's lowing herds afar;
 Impatient watching till the Evening Star
 Lead forth the Twilight dim, that he may glide
 Like panther to the prey. With freeborn pride
 He scorns the herdsman, nor regards the scar
 Of recent wound – but burnishes for war
 His assagai and targe of buffalo-hide.
 He is a Robber? – True; it is a strife
 Between the black-skinned bandit and the white.
 A Savage? – Yes; though loth to aim at life,
 Evil for evil fierce he doth requite.
 A Heathen? – Teach him, then, thy better creed,
 Christian! If thou deserv'st that name indeed. (ll. 1-14)

Unlike "The Song of the Wild Bushman" and "Makanna's Gathering" in which indigenous voices, however factitious, are allowed to speak for themselves, "The Caffer" employs a mode of address in which a surveilling distance from the subject is inscribed from the start. "Lo, where he crouches by the cleugh's far side" invites the reader to assume an elevation above "the Caffer", whom the poem then figures in terms that stress his kinship with the natural world as he "crouches" and, cued by changes in the night sky, "glide[s] / Like panther" towards the "lowing herds afar". Pringle's habit of rendering indigenous people in terms which stress their similitude with the natural world was not without precedent in the repertoire of his reading. Consider, for example, the following description of an African chief in Thomas Campbell's *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799), a poem for which Pringle had expressed particular admiration: ¹

Lo! once in triumph, on his boundless plain,
 The quivered chief of Congo loved to reign;
 With fires proportioned to his native sky,
 Strength in his arm, and lightning in his eye;
 Scoured with wild feet his sun-illuminated zone,
 The spear, the lion, and the woods, his own!
 Or lead the combat, bold without a plan,
 An artless savage, but a fearless man! (1887:27)

Campbell's "quivered" African chief also exists in a state of unfettered reciprocity with nature, just as he might also be said to be "freeborn" since everything he beholds is "his own". One might observe here that both Pringle and Campbell, in rendering African indigenes as something like extensions or extrapolations of the natural world, run the risk of reducing their subjects to a bare or "artless" humanity, despite the fact that both poets frame these descriptions within a discourse of human rights (Campbell's Congo chief is sold into slavery).

The sestina moves away from the exotic registers of martial savagery into a consideration of rights and justice, as the generalised "Caffer" becomes an object-lesson in the unChristian conduct of bad colonials, who offer him no inducement to alternative behaviour. The interpolation of an interrogatory voice from line nine shifts the sonnet into a discourse of public address in which the humanitarian lobby confronts its colonial antagonists. A similar structure is evident in "The Hottentot", which begins by presenting the figure of its eponym as downtrodden and bowed, who "to th'oppressor yields/Submissively his freedom and his lands". This sketch again sets the stage for an exchange of question and answer which positions the Hottentot within a British public discourse of rights and duties:

Has he no courage? Once he had – but, lo!
 Harsh servitude hath worn him to the bone.
 No enterprise? Alas, the brand, the blow,
 Have humbled him to dust – even *hope* is gone!
 'He's a base-hearted hound – not worth his food'-
 His Master cries – 'he has no gratitude'. (ll.9-14)

There is a fearless and uncompromising scorn in these lines, which Angus Calder has described as “remarkably bitter” and “prefiguring ...the indignation of Sassoon and Owen in their First World War poems” (1982:9). While it may be true that the sonnet momentarily bursts out of formal containment in a manner reminiscent of some of the earlier poems, taken together the two sonnets operate under certain structural constraints. In both of them the eponymous protagonists serve a dual function: on the one hand, they are weighted with a degree of specificity which allows them a certain autonomy, while on the other hand they operate as pretexts for the upbraiding of colonial conduct in the concluding sestinas. The danger here is that the representation of the indigenes is refracted through colonial oppression rather than given any intrinsic weight of its own. The implicit logic of this is that indigenes can only be known, can only come into being, through whatever forms of reciprocation the colonists might offer or refuse them. In “The Bushman”, a very much more anodyne poem than the problematic but resonant “Song of the Wild Bushman”, the protagonist is again defined through his status as a victim. On this occasion the Bushman is depicted as peacefully subsisting with his family in the “lone wilderness” with “no foe but famine”. In the sestina he is set upon by armed colonials and shot, his mere existence an invitation to extinction. The sonnet concludes:

He dies – yet, ere life’s ebbing sands are run,
Leaves to his sons a curse, should they be friends
With the proud ‘Christian-Men’- for they are fiends! (ll. 12-14)

As he did in “The Caffer”, Pringle attacks colonial hypocrisy by foregrounding colonial violation of Christian norms. This violation is, however, attributed to Dutch rather than British colonists. In the final published version of “The Bushman” in *African Sketches* Pringle went so far as to alter what had previously been the final line - “With the proud Christian race – ‘for they are fiends!’” – to “With the proud ‘Christian-Men’ – for they are fiends!” and then pointedly advised in a note to the poem glossing this line that “Christian men” (*Christen menchen*) is the term always used by the boors to distinguish themselves from the coloured races” (1989: 112).

All three sonnets, then, are didactic dramatisations of colonial misdemeanour; their essential address, articulated entirely on an appeal to self-evident Christian values, is to the conscience of the coloniser. Though the poems aim to expose the amorality of colonial conduct, this uncovering aims to encourage, to envisage, perhaps even to create, another kind of colonisation. What that kind of colonisation might be remains unstated; it as though the poems perform a kind of theodicy in verse in which the existence of evil must confirm the providential justice of true Christian belief. It is perhaps no accident that in their anthologised form these sonnets immediately precede the sonnet “Slavery”, published in 1827 in the period of Pringle’s involvement in the Anti-Slavery movement. Like the preceding sonnets, “Slavery” appeals to the ethical sense of the reader by foregrounding the doubly damning nature of slavery, corrupting slave and slaveowner alike, and binding both into “shar[ing] the hell” of this form of bondage. This tactic of forestalling the depravity of colonial conduct by enclosing it within the condemnatory frame of a higher ethical judgement is problematic: it rests on an appeal to an indivisible truth which is not, despite its exalted status, incarnated in actual behaviour.

In “The Coranna”, and its companion piece, “The Kosa”, Pringle attempts to represent indigenous people *in situ*, rather than as victims of colonial injustice. These ethnographic sketches in verse are flat and ornamental, and have the feel of something written to demand. “The Coranna”, for example, is a poeticised appendage to a short customs and manners description of the Coranna in Thompson’s *Travels*, and its descriptive details offer a variation of Thomson’s account. Thus Thompson writes dismissively of the Coranna that, “They lead an indolent, wandering life, living chiefly on the milk of their cattle, and seldom roaming far from the banks of the Garieb and its tributary branches” (1967:123). Pringle renders this as:

Fast by his wild, resounding river
The listless Koran lingers ever;
Still drives his heifers forth to feed ...
A wanderer still unchecked doth range,
As humour calls, or seasons change; (ll. 1-5).

It is interesting to consider that in the *Travels*, Thompson's brief disquisition on the Coranna is accompanied not only by Pringle's poem, added, as Thompson puts it, "to diversify my pages" (123) but also by a "prefixed vignette" (122) of a Coranna encampment. In the space of two pages the Coranna are rotated through three complementary representational mediums; though the Coranna might be given to what Pringle and Thompson perceive as indolence ("languid sloth" as Pringle later puts it) and lack any exemplarity, they nonetheless retain a representational currency that is in excess, so to speak, of their human value. This suggests that, like Thompson, Pringle is consciously catering for a public taste disposed towards African exotica. Thus the notes to the poem which accompanied its second publication in Pringle's 1828 collection of his verse contain a profusion of detail about such things as the structure and sound of a musical instrument and leather stomach girdles worn to alleviate the pangs of hunger. As a category of writing, both the notes and the poem they accompany might be classified as a form of imperial ornamentation, an African equivalent of what Nigel Leask, with Byron in mind, describes as "the currency of 'oriental materiale' ... a *literary* commodification analogous to the massive eastwards extension of European commerce from the late eighteenth century on" (1992:74).

"The Kosa" employs similar forms of ethnographic ornamentation, though in this instance Pringle does not proceed from an assumption of tribal worthlessness; he does, however, seem uncertain about exactly how the Xhosa should be cast:

The free-born Kosa still doth hold
The field his fathers held of old;
With club and spear, in jocund ranks,
Still hunts the elk by Chumi's banks:
By Keisi's meads his herds are lowing;
On Debe's slopes his gardens glowing,
Where laughing maids at sunset roam,
To bear the juicy melons home: (ll. 1-8)

There is some effort here to insert the Xhosa into landholding and ancestral lineages that give them more civilisational weight than the nomadic Koranna. The reference to "free-born", like the one before it in "The Caffer", works to establish indigenous people as

autonomous, with their own distinct polities, though these apparently egalitarian gestures are undercut by inscribing the Xhosa into a pastoral idiom of reassuring familiarity. There is a brief moment when the realities of colonial dispossession intrude into this idyll: a nocturnal feast of “jest and tale” takes on the “sterner strain” of “The tale of Amakosa’s wrong”, but this threat of retaliatory vengeance is immediately dispelled by the serendipitous arrival of a midnight moon – “Tis time to part”. The poem ends with a “hardy hunter” rising when “the peep of dawn/Wakes on the hill the dappled fawn”. Into this familiar landscape he “gaily bounds/With club and spear and questing hounds”. While the poem might strike contemporary readers as contrived, we should recognise as well that by placing the Xhosa within the generic framework of a benevolent pastoralism, Pringle is countering competing notions of the Xhosa as predatory, martial savages and projecting them as potential candidates for admission into the civic genres of modernity. There is also in this poem an (unconscious?) alignment of the “free born Kosa” with the peasant class of Pringle’s native Scotland. Consider the following intertext in the *Autumnal Excursion*:

By now, all sterner thoughts forgot
 Peace broods upon the peasant’s cot;
 And if tradition still prolongs
 The memory of his father’s wrongs,
 ‘Tis blent with grateful thoughts that borrow
 A blessing from departed sorrow.

As I remarked in an earlier chapter, these lines might be read as a wishful reinscription of the violent subjugation of Scottish resistance to imposed English rule as a productive nostalgia: remembered for its heroism, but for all practical purposes other than poetic and sentimental recollection relegated to the archaism of a discarded past. In a similar manner the “sterner strain” of “Amakosas wrong” (not, of course, dissimilar to the “father’s wrongs” of the Scottish peasant), though not so easily blended into nostalgic recollection is nonetheless fortuitously dispelled. For the Xhosa, as for the Scottish peasants scorched out of their homes and evicted from their livelihoods, there is a high price to pay for an enforced abduction into modernity, but it will be worth every teleological cent. Implicit in this

intertext is the conviction that the Xhosa, like the Scottish peasantry, will, under the right circumstances, embrace their accelerated conversion into commerce and Christianity.

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Before considering the ongoing development of this dominant strain in Pringle's poetry, we need to thicken our understanding of the changing contexts out of which he wrote. We might start, in rather summary form, with Pringle's appointment as secretary to the Anti-Slavery Society in 1827, a post he held until shortly before his death in 1834. The Society had first been formed in 1787 as The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and achieved its intended aim, the ending of maritime slave commerce, in 1807. It is this first phase of concerted opposition to British trade in slavery with which we associate those names most famously connected to abolition, such as Wilberforce, Macaulay, and Clarkson. The second phase of abolition, whose goal was the enfranchisement of colonial slaves, began to gather momentum in the early 1820s and was in several ways distinct from the first phase of the movement. "The Anti-Slavery Society", as Debbie Lee puts it, "saw itself as [a] more wide-ranging movement than the abolitionist movement had been, harnessing people from all walks of life, and yet drawing its power from Britain's already existing social and political systems. It did not conceive of itself as a group outside of those systems, but as an integral part of them" (1999: viii). In this sense, Anti-Slavery's political alignment was more conservative than that of its predecessor abolitionist phase where, as David Brion Davis explains, even though the organisation remained structurally rooted in religious organisations, it also attracted "a considerable amount of diffuse anti-establishment feeling" and attracted "political radicals who had closer ties with Paine and the Enlightenment than with evangelical religion" (1984: 138). By the 1820s, the politics of the abolition movement had moved much closer to the mainstream of the "middle class reform complex" (Turley 1991:108) and formed part of the political agenda of the ascendant Whig party. Pringle's

own role in the Anti-Slavery society was, as Patricia Morris observes, largely functional: the taking of notes, the collection of subscriptions, the writing and distribution of circulars, and the editing of the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* (1982:366).

Although Pringle seems to have been a fairly low-key figure in the Anti-Slavery movement, and is rarely mentioned in the voluminous literature on this period, he had powerful connections and was significantly instrumental both in parliamentary lobbying around issues in the Cape Colony and in the representation of the colony's affairs in the periodical press. "His own articles aside", writes Morris, "Pringle seems to have had a hand in most of the works which were published in the late 1820s and early 1830s in London, which criticised the Cape Government" (374). It is this aspect of Pringle's involvement in the affairs of the abolitionist lobby, its role as a pressure group for colonial reform, specifically reform directed at the legislative amelioration of conditions for indigenous people, that is more immediately pertinent to our understanding of the poetry either written or published in this period. To claim this is not to assert that Pringle's poetry was unrelated to, or only faintly affiliated with, the abolition movement proper. Explicit abolitionist themes are evident in much of the poetry Pringle published in this period, especially in poems such as "Slavery"(1827), "The Slave Dealer" (1828) "Rhymes on Slavery for Youthful Readers"(1832), "The Captive of Camalu" (1832) and "The Bechuana Boy"(1830), his best known poem on the subject. In addition, issues such as colonial misconduct and the civilisational potential of indigenous people are obvious subsets of slave emancipation, and these are central to Pringle's ethnographic poetry. Nonetheless, some distinctions must be drawn. For a start, many of the indigenous people of the Cape were neither juridically nor affectively slaves (the Xhosa being the most obvious example) and a poem like "Makanna's Gathering" or "The Song of the Wild Bushman" sits rather uneasily in the registers of abolitionist poetry, with its emphasis on national guilt and the appeal to a redemptive Christian morality for slave and slaveowner alike. Even Pringle's frequent emphasis on Hottentot "servitude" cannot be understood as describing a state synonymous with slavery, especially since Pringle himself

was given to referring to Ordinance 50 of 1828 as the “Magna Charta” of the Hottentots. Furthermore, abolitionist verse reached its peak in an avalanche of publishing, often commissioned, in the 1780s and 90s. As early as 1788 Cowper, perhaps the best known of the earlier abolitionist poets, complained that slavery was no longer “a promising theme for verse ... The world has already been overwhelmed with remarks ... ” (quoted in Richards 2003: 5). The most comprehensive collection of abolitionist writing published in recent times, the multi-volume *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period* (1999), *Volume 4, Verse*, edited by Alan Richardson contains thirty seven poems of varying length of which only five poems, one of them by Pringle, were published after 1820. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that by the late 1820s abolitionist poetry was, if not entirely exhausted, then certainly attenuated through excessive reproduction.

I raise the question of the relation between Pringle’s ethnographic or ‘African’ poetry and abolitionist verse in order to establish the generic or typological niche which these poems occupied. For if this poetry demonstrably shares features with abolitionist verse, described by one critic as “a cross between eighteenth century moral poetry, Christian sermonizing, the political ode, and the poem of sensibility” (Mitchell 2003:2), then we can see at once that the local specificity and descriptive texture of Pringle’s poems sets them apart from this well established but worn out genre, where the representations of slaves and slavery is invariably abstract and generalised. Furthermore, many, indeed most, of the poems do not reference slavery at all. I would suggest that the very density of detail in these poems, their ethnic and locational nuance, must have struck Pringle’s metropolitan readers as singular and strange, and that in this respect those poems not overtly abolitionist in their themes might have been understood as an African form of Romantic exoticism – a popular subgenre best exemplified by the oriental poems of poets like Jones, Southey and Byron. In an earlier allusion to Pringle’s extensive use of annotation, I quoted Nigel Leask’s observation that this practice often served to tether the alterity of the poem itself to a more legible empirical discourse. Leask’s remarks were made in the context of a discussion of “Romantic exoticism” and it is

surely not accidental that the often hypertrophied notes to Pringle's African poems should find a precedent in this kind of verse. Leask additionally mentions that such footnoting is in turn derived from an "aesthetic of particularism" (1998:176) arising, in part, from the antiquarian revival and the writings of Scott. We are back again to some proximity with what I earlier called the "ethnographic picturesque". In thus attempting to map the generic affinities of Pringle's verse, I am not suggesting that such templates exhaust the interpretive possibilities of his work. They do remind us, however, of the specific affinities and influences which might originally have informed the writing of these poems, and these we cannot ignore.

Pringle also occupied another position of public visibility: from 1828 to 1834 he was editor of the Annual *Friendship's Offering*. These Annuals, the first of which began to be published in the early 1820s, were intended primarily for a genteel female audience. They were "lavishly produced gatherings of verse, prose and engraved plates, published in advance of the Christmas season" (Leader & Heywood, 1998:186). One of the features of this form was the dominance of the engravings, and contributing poets were often asked to write a poem which could be read in conjunction with the illustrative material. The Annuals paid exceptionally well and attracted major poets of the period (Pringle published Coleridge, Tennyson and Ruskin, among others), but the random combination of engraving and print as well as the polite banality of much of the verse encouraged "the limiting view that poetry was decorative, decorous, sentimental, quietist" (1988:186). Nevertheless, as Jerome McGann observes, the annual or gift book as it was also known, "came to dominate the Victorian poetical scene" and "constituted a kind of genre in itself" (1996:165). In addition to the financial rewards the position offered, the editorship also brought Pringle into prominence in the publishing world and helped to define his literary profile; in today's terms he 'marketed' himself through this position. He wrote to Scott, for example, that the sole reason he had published *Ephemerides* (which he did under rushed conditions) was to be better placed to encourage contributions to *Friendship's Offering*. "With a view of promoting my objects as an 'annualist' (more than with any expectation of profit or poetical reputation) I

have just published a little volume” (quoted in Morris 1982:336). South African readers of Pringle are not accustomed to thinking of him editing and publishing in this polite end of the market, still less that he published his first volume of South African poetry expressly to enter it! Yet, once Pringle had hit his editorial stride he published a number of South African poems in *Friendship's Offering*, as well as the article “On the Wrongs of the Amakosa”, which criticised colonial frontier policy. I am not suggesting that the circumstances of publication entirely circumscribe the possible meanings of what is published – Pringle might, for example, have used his editorial discretion to publish work that expanded the boundaries of reader expectations – but we have still to account for the fact that Pringle, whose work we reflexively associate with what is loosely called the Romantic period, clearly found a portion of his readership among an audience schooled in the protocols of an emergent Victorian period. Whatever we may think of the literary value of the miscellany of forms that made up the Annuals, the criteria for inclusion were notably prescriptive, and signalled a less flexible form of literary imagining for the intended reader. William St Clair, for example, traces the evolution of the Annual from the Commonplace Book in which the owners, mainly women, would fill empty pages with whatever material they found appropriate. The Annuals eliminated this element of choice:

I do not know if a time came when fathers, husbands, brothers or the printed-book industry began consciously to discourage women from keeping private manuscript commonplace books. But in the 1820s we see the arrival of a new type of printed book which co-existed and competed with them ... By 1829 they were a substantial sector of the book market, and the boom lasted for another ten years ... In their final form ... the printed books left nothing for the owner to write except her name, and she was even given a place in which to do that. The privacy of a manuscript gave way to the openness of the printed book. For the readerly freedom to control the texts to be reread in accordance with individual preference was substituted the confinement of receiving a commercially produced gift whose texts had already been pre-selected and pre-censored by others in accordance with mainstream official ideology and within the tight constraints of intellectual property. (2005:229)

In his forewords to *Friendship's Offering*, Pringle very explicitly assumed the role of spokesperson for the “mainstream official ideology” which St Clair identifies as informing the ethos of these publications. In the preface to the first issue he edited, Pringle informed

readers that his intentions were nothing less than the encouragement of a “more perfect development of a sound and national liberal taste” (1829: vi). By 1831 he was even more expansive: [T]he success this work has met with ... after seven years prosperity ... may be said to be perfectly unequivocal” (v), he declared, before going on to claim that the Annual’s ability to “unit[e] in so remarkable a manner the qualities of durability and elegance” made it eligible for no less an achievement than “taking [its] place in the permanent repositories of family literature” (vi). In this view the Annuals nestle deep within the family, that generative unit of the nation, where they “may be rendered fit to impress the mind, and to assist in forming the taste, exercising the judgment, and improving the heart” (vi). These are, in their way, extraordinary claims; for our purposes, however, they underline what should by now be an obvious point: the position that Pringle occupies in British public life is secure and institutionally recognised to the extent that he feels himself in a position to assist the formation of national taste. One could see something of the same editorialising impulses at work in the short life of the *South African Journal* and the *SACA* editorials, but in a lower, more subjunctive register. These two very different positions, I propose, oblige us to read Pringle through distinct but entangled perspectives. For now Pringle is writing his South African poetry or revising his South African poetry and putting it on the market both as a critic of Tory colonial governance *and* as a public or institutional guardian of “a sound and liberal national taste”. The convergence of these two positions is, I shall argue, evident in the next two poems to be examined: “The Bechuana Boy” and “The Emigrant’s Cabin”. We should not forget, though, that these two positions are subtended and thrown into parallax by a third: those writings that derive directly, or at least in a less mediated way, from the colonial encounter itself.

* * * * *

Pringle’s best known anti-slavery poem “The Bechuana Boy”, is set in the Cape Colony and its generic specificity offers us the opportunity to read it alongside his other colonial poetry.

As I shall argue, considered in this comparative way, the poem is considerably weakened by its adherence to a more formulaic set of conventions, and in particular by its deliberate or formal attempt to solicit the sympathy of its metropolitan readers. Pringle began the poem in South Africa in 1825 but it was published in a revised form in the 1830 edition of *Friendship's Offering*. No original for the poem exists so that we have no sense of the alterations or additions Pringle might have made; we do, however, have a sense of what Pringle sought to achieve in the writing of the poem for he was unusually forthcoming in his correspondence about the circumstances prompting the poem's composition, his intentions in writing it and the readership he envisaged for it. Here he is writing to Fairbairn in October 1825 from the Scottish settlement in the Baviaan's Valley:

'The Bechuana Boy' is adapted to please a class of readers whom you too much neglect ... I mean women, children, counting house clerks, country functionaries & Aides de Camp, etc. This imitation of nursery poetry will I hope please them & you. Joking apart, I have tried this *very simple* style with something [of] a further view – to excite some sympathy in *very common* readers, for this class of unfortunate strangers – about 5 or 6 hundred of whom have lately been distributed in this quarter of the colony. Nor is my little tale altogether fictitious. Indeed, almost every circumstance with the exception of my mode of falling in with him is borrowed from the history of my Bechuana Boy, as related by himself to me. I have thrown it into the shape you see – because I do not for several reasons wish it to be traced to me – or to be known as the author of these lines. Dr. Philip will be suspected perhaps but no matter – he has a broad back. (FB: I: 98)

Two matters in particular need comment here: first, the linking of simplicity of style and the communication to the common reader of "sympathy", and second, the ambiguity of the circumstances in which "this class of unfortunate strangers", as Pringle puts it, "have ... been distributed in this quarter of the colony". In this second case, not only does Pringle use an evasively agentless passive construction, he is also purposefully vague as to the "several reasons" why he does not wish to be identified as the writer of the poem. To understand Pringle's obfuscation of these circumstances (and to suspend, for the moment, any discussion of the metropolitan aesthetics of sympathy and simple language) we need to turn to the historical record and ask how it was that in the mid 1820s settlers like Pringle and his party were able to gain access to a much needed resource: domestic labour.

The disturbances that resulted in an influx of refugees from the north of the country over the boundaries of the Cape Colony in the early 1820s had their origins in a complex, and disputed, series of events. Traditional South African historiography told the story of a knock-on displacement of tribal peoples caused by the military prowess and aggressive territorial expansion of the Nguni or Zulu people in the South East of the country. In this scenario, commonly referred to either as the *mfecane* or the *difaqane*, the epicentre of the violence that spread through the region was to be found in Zululand, or the northern parts of Natal, and its engulfing cause was the aggressive expansionism of the Zulu chief, Shaka, whose marauding armies were held responsible for spreading mayhem throughout the region. This Zulucentric scenario, ideologically comfortable to official colonial histories since it confirmed fears of indigenous violence and irrationality, was decisively, if controversially challenged by the historian Julian Cobbing. In an article entitled “The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on the Dithakong and Mbolompo”, published in 1988, Cobbing contended that the territorial displacements of the early nineteenth century were primarily the result of demographic pressures exerted by the activities of European slavers at Delagoa Bay (today Maputo). It is not my concern here to enter into the complexities of this argument or the rebuttals and modifications which other historians have brought to it.² But one of Cobbing’s more controversial claims, even if we disagree with its central contention, bears directly on the circumstances in which Pringle came into the ‘possession’ of the Bechuana boy. Briefly, Cobbing maintains that the “5 or 6 hundred” refugees to which Pringle refers were in fact dispersed into the colony by missionaries from the London Missionary Society who provoked ‘battles’ with displaced tribes in the northern areas of the colony for the purpose of enslaving the survivors, mainly women and children, and selling them on the colonial labour market. Cobbing’s thesis about missionary collusion in slaving practices has not survived the scrutiny of other historians (see, among others, Comaroff & Comaroff 1997, Eldredge, 1992). But even if we allow that Cobbing might have erred on this point, the conditions under which this labour was acquired and dispersed remain open to question. Commenting on the absorption of refugees into the colony’s labour pool, Cobbing asserts that their status “hovered indeterminately between slave, serf and ‘free’ labour”; to

which he adds that “To split hairs over the terminology is to miss the essential point that they were involuntary labourers seized in battle” (1988:495). No historian that I know of denies that the acquisition of refugee labour by the colonists had elements of enforcement that shaded over into slavery. Thus even Elisabeth Eldredge, who is elsewhere deeply sceptical of Cobbing’s claims, concedes that “It is not inappropriate to characterise all of these helpless victims as slaves: whether working for the Griqua or in the colony, they were captive and had no control over their own fate” (1992:23).

Pringle’s disingenuousness about the circumstances under which he acquired the Bechuana boy is evident elsewhere as well. In the *Narrative*, for example, he claims that he obtained the “poor orphan boy” by a “singular accident” (219), while in the notes to the poem he records that the boy “fell accidentally under my protection” (1989:78). This was not the case. The Titterton manuscripts, which contain a record of Pringle’s correspondence with colonial officials during his two periods of residence on the Frontier, contain a letter to the Landrost of the Somerset (East) District, William Mackay, in which Pringle states that he has heard that the colonial government is distributing Mantatee refugees and requests “a few of them” for the Scottish party and “a single young man or boy of 14 years of age” (SAL. A.FOL. 968.7033 PRI: 34) for himself. This letter is dated the 23 July 1825; on 11 September Pringle wrote to Fairbairn that “I have got a little Mantatee orphan boy for Mrs P about 5 years of age. My father and brothers have also got a few of these poor creatures, till it is to be decided what is to be done with them” (FB: 1, 86). It seems clear that Pringle was well aware that the circumstances under which he gained possession of both the boy and other juvenile labour would be damaging to his humanitarian credentials and that he sought to suppress these facts; this might also explain why he sat on the poem for five years before eventually publishing it in the 1830 edition of *Friendship’s Offering*. This is not the first time we have encountered a disjuncture between Pringle’s discursive or literary persona and his actual behaviour.³ In this particular case the interest of the disjuncture lies, as I hope to demonstrate, in what it reveals about the limits of the operations of “sympathy” as they apply in this context, especially the disproportion between historical event and imaginative

construction. In order to do this, however, we need briefly to digress into the speculative background that informed the concept of sympathy, in particular those understandings of “sentiment” or the imagination which received their most significant elaboration in Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, first published in 1759.

My detour into Smith’s moral and aesthetic theories is intended to underscore both the circulatory difficulties of sympathy, its uneasy balance between projection and reciprocation, as well as the protocols governing its transmission and reception, protocols whose regulating edict is what Smith called “propriety”. Consider the often quoted opening observations of the *Sentiments*:

However selfish man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the feeling of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others is a matter of fact too obvious to require any instances to prove it; for this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous and humane, though they may perhaps feel it with the most exquisite sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it. (1976:9)

In this passage Smith posits as an “original passion of human nature” the existence of “pity or compassion”, but draws a distinction, as yet unexplored, between a compassion that arises from direct witness (“when we see it”) and a compassion that is excited by an indirect account or representation (“made to conceive it in a very lively manner”). This egalitarian contention that such feelings are common to all, including the most reprobate members of society, does not tell us whether this applies to direct or indirect types of passion, but Smith does maintain that an exclusive group, the “virtuous and humane” experience feelings for “the sorrow of others” with “the most exquisite sensibility”. This last phrase carries the implication that, for the educated class of person, the “sorrows of others” could be the occasion for a certain refinement of pleasure. Even in the second half of the eighteenth century the word “exquisite” carried associations of the “careful or highly elaborated” as well

as that which excites “intense delight or admiration” (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*) and the use of “sensibility” has more obvious connotations of refinement and taste.⁴ Smith continues:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is on the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our sense will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy ... For as to be in pain or distress of any kind excites the most excessive sorrow, so to conceive or to imagine that we are in it, excites some degree of the same emotion, in proportion to the vivacity or dulness (sic) of the conception.

Once again, Smith is raising the bar on sympathy by ascribing its operation not to anything “elemental” at all, but to the - presumably conscious, presumably deliberate - use of the “imagination”, which must work on the senses in order to provoke them into a state of similitude with the suffering person. In terms of this explanation, a premium is placed on a mental operation, a “conception” as Smith calls it, whose ability to elicit transferential emotion is proportionate to its powers of imaginative evocation. One must remark again that it is the “virtuous and humane”, the possessors of “sensibility”, who seem best placed to exercise such a facility both in terms of the exercise of sympathy and in the creation of those representative forms, mainly literary, which allow for the circulation of sympathy. And the question still remains - as I have indicated earlier - whether sympathy, understood in these terms, can be seen as a reciprocal exchange between two subjects or as an enrichment of self for those who exercise it. In short, does sympathy operate as an “exquisite” reminder to sympathisers of their own sensibility, rather than occasioning a sense of justice or retribution for the pain or injustice suffered by others? I shall return again to this question after a consideration of “The Bechuana Boy”, where questions of sympathy are complicated even further by their deployment in a colonial context.

Our final consideration is Pringle’s assertion that the poem employs a “*very simple style* ...

to excite some sympathy in *very common* readers for this class of unfortunate strangers”. In a letter to an unknown correspondent almost four years later, in August 1829, Pringle made similar claims about the language of the poem:

I am not a little pleased that you like my ‘Bechuana Boy’. Your own and your mother’s tears are tributes which I highly prize; not from any particular vanity in regard to this little piece, but because it satisfies me that my aim to attain the simple language of truth and nature has not been entirely unsuccessful. *Condensation* and *simplicity* are *now* the great aims in my poetical attempts, for without these I am satisfied that nothing I may write will *live* – or deserve to live – and many of my earlier pieces are very deficient, especially in the former of these qualities. (quoted in Ritchie 1838: xliii-cxlv)

The emphasis on simplicity and the “simple language of truth and nature” in correspondence about the poem suggests that Pringle was seeking to steer his work toward a more communicative mode, able, perhaps, to engage a larger set of readers. This was by no means a novel concern. The canonical case for ‘simple’ language was made by Wordsworth in the 1800 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, where he declared his intention to eschew “arbitrary and capricious habits of expression” (1978:735) in favour of “the language really used by men” (734), and similar claims were made by Scott in his Preface to the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* in 1805 when he declared a wish to “return to a simple and more natural style of poetry” (1899:8) – two sources of which Pringle must surely have been aware. I shall not explore the much longer history of the turn to simple language as a means of countering the artifice of eighteenth century poetic diction, but it is perhaps worth remarking that the reflexive association of Pringle with Wordsworth made by some critics – taking a direct cue from the very correspondence I have quoted – needs to be qualified. It seems more likely to me that in aiming for a condensed narrative with a simple style, and a distinct class of readers (literate, if not quite genteel), Pringle was simply attempting the modest goal of developing new audiences for the poetry of imperial protest.⁵

“The Bechuana Boy” begins with a familiar diurnal divide, “noonday”; a familiar topos, “the desert dun” and a familiar voice: the “I” of the poet. This time, however, the poem pivots not on how time and place frame a troubled lyric interiority, but how they act as portals for

a narrative rendition of another's experience:

I sat at noontide in my tent,
 And looked across the Desert dun,
 Beneath the cloudless firmament
 Far gleaming in the sun,
 When from the bosom of the waste
 A swarthy stripling came in haste,
 With foot unshod and naked limb;
 And a tame springbok followed him. (ll. 1-8)

The appearance of the Bechuana boy in this “waste”, where he comes into the field of vision full frame rather than gradually gathering definition, has about it an hallucinatory quality; the “bosom” of the desert, that most unfecund of terrains, miraculously births not only a grown child, but his tame and companionate springbok. The iconology here is by no means unfamiliar: a partially clothed black child, sometimes accompanied by a tame animal was a standard feature of aristocratic portraiture in the eighteenth century: “English ladies posed for their portraits”, writes David Dabydeen, “either with their pet lamb, their pet lapdog or their pet black” (1987:23). The poem’s conjuration of a compliant, posing subject continues into the second stanza when the boy presents himself for closer scrutiny:

With open aspect, frank yet bland,
 And with a modest mien he stood,
 Caressing with a gentle hand
 That beast of gentle brood;
 Then meekly, gazing in my face,
 Said in the language of his race,
 With smiling look yet pensive tone,
 ‘Stranger – I’m in the world alone. (ll. 9-16)

Before he utters a single word (we recall the prisoners in the Beaufort West *tronk*), the boy is endowed with indices of character that may be read off from his appearance and demeanour. He is, one might say, a picture of modesty, gentleness, and meekness and already, through the repetition of “gentle”, he is being conflated with his tame springbok (later a “fawn”, a resonant emblem of innocence for British readers of the poem). Before Pringle embarks on the narrative of enslavement which is to follow, his subject is positioned within the registers of a familiar iconology and a familiar typology of character. One might

argue that such a strategy humanises the boy by bringing him within the range of readerly experience and that such a move is essential to the boy being perceived as a sympathetic figure. This may be so. But such conversion or invention also comes at a price, and part of that price is the elision of the actual history of Hinza Marossi, who did not come into the Pringle household in the manner described here and who, for all we now, might have perceived his passage into this household as yet another stage in the trauma of displacement, violence, and severance from his family that his young life had become. Not only can we not know what he might have felt, but we (and in that “we” I would include Pringle himself) are likewise in no position to represent this experience without arrogating to ourselves a certain ownership of it, as though we were attuned, in some super-Smithian way, to the ontological pitch of what must have been, in so many ways, an excruciating existence.

In the third stanza the poet elicits from the boy the story of why he “roam[s]/This desolate Karoo” and, all at once, we have the narrative of his “hapless history”, fifteen stanzas of it. Pringle explains in the notes that the boy’s “simple narrative”, delivered in “broken Dutch”, forms the basis of the “incidents” which the poem recounts, with the “exception of his flying to the desert with a tame springbok” which is “poetical license” (1989:78). We should add to this, as Pringle admits elsewhere, that the circumstances of the boy’s arrival are also a poetic licence. When one considers that of the fifteen stanzas that follow, four are directly concerned with the Springbok fawn, and that this iconic creature is absolutely central to the poem’s ability to “excite ... sympathy”, as Pringle put it, then we are in a position to understand the poem as something other than a faithful rendition of the boy’s travails, embellished now and then with invented details.

The narrative account given by the boy tells a story whose broad form the historical record corroborates. He was seized by “Bergenaars” after a raid in which only women and children were spared, then herded into the colony to be sold to white slavers and forcibly separated from his family. From this point on, narrative embroidering sets in: scorned by the Boers and their children, he rescues a wounded springbok “fawn” and nurses it back to health; the

fawn, with whom he forms a closer bond than with any human, is taken away from him by his Boer overseer and given to the Boer's son. In the dead of night the boy steals off into the desert with his fawn where he remains for several days. A Bushman then tells him that there are English people encamped in the vicinity, and he throws himself on their mercy, believing them to be people from whom he can expect humane treatment. The poem ends with a stanza describing how, under the benign tutelage of Mrs. Pringle, the boy undergoes a transformation and becomes "Her child in everything but name". Within this narrative, however, patterns of parallelism and doubling emerge. In the fourth stanza, when the boy's narration proper begins, his initial abduction is described as follows:

"I have no home!" replied the boy:
 The Bergenaars - by night they came.
 And raised their wolfish howl of joy,
 While o'er our huts the flame
 Resistless rushed; and aye their yell
 Pealed louder as our warriors fell
 In helpless heaps beneath their shot
 - One living man they left us not! (ll. 25-32)

In the fourteenth stanza, the boy describes the circumstances that brought him and his pet springbok together:

While friendless thus, my master's flocks
 I tended on the upland waste,
 It chanced this fawn leapt from the rocks,
 By wolfish wild-dogs chased:
 I rescued it, though wounded sore
 And dabbled in its mother's gore;
 And nursed it in a cavern wild,
 Until it loved me like a child. (ll. 105-112)

The harrying of the "fawn" by a pack of "wolfish wild-dogs" has clear parallels with the Bergenaars (with their "wolfish howl of joy") who burn the boy and his family out of their home. Like the boy, the fawn is left to fend for itself in a hostile environment. The image of the fawn as "wounded sore/and dabbled in its mother's gore" further invites the reader to see in the fawn and its plight – and in the boy's response to it – a parallelism between animal and child (to be more explicitly drawn in the next stanza), since both suffer parental loss and wounding. The boy then proleptically enacts what will happen to him in the Pringle

household when he nurses the wounded animal “until it loved me like a child”. The boy’s role as maternal proxy continues:

‘Gently I nursed it; for I thought
 (Its hapless fate so like to mine)
 By good UTIKO it was brought
 To bid me not repine, -
 Since in this world of wrong and ill
 One creature lived that loved me still,
 Although its dark and dazzling eye
 Beamed not with human sympathy. (ll.113-120)

Parallelism begins to move toward doubling: the “hapless fate” of the fawn, like the boy’s “hapless history”, is redeemed through acts of compassionate caring or nursing. While the fawn loves the boy “like a child”, the boy records a reciprocal gratitude, “Since in this world of wrong and ill/One creature lived that loved me still.” The pattern is completed when the boy’s monologue comes to an end:

Such was Marossi’s touching tale.
 Our breasts they were not made of stone:
 His words, his winning looks prevail –
 We took him for ‘our own’.
 And One, with woman’s gentle art,
 Unlocked the fountains of his heart
 And love gushed forth – till he became
 Her child in everything but name. (ll.144-151)

This disconcerting final stanza elevates the boy, now particularised as “Marossi”, into the full humanity of “love”, or what was earlier called “human sympathy”. It is not, however, a condition which he is able to obtain for himself. He must be facilitated into this state by “woman’s gentle art”, a form of which he himself has practised on his fawn. Then there is the matter of the transfer of ‘ownership’: the boy becoming ‘our own’, the boy becoming “her child in everything but name”. If one considers the parallel, doubling or substitutive logic of the poem, then, completing a process begun earlier, the boy assumes exactly the same position in relation to his new ‘owners’ as the fawn had to him. He is, so to speak, their fawn, “beam[ing] with” the “human sympathy” they have “unlocked” in him. These transferences are unlikely to have been intended by Pringle, but he may well have been making use of the association of slaves and pets which informed both the visual iconology of

eighteenth-century painting and aristocratic social practice. Marcus Woods, drawing on the work of Keith Thomas on the domestication of pets in eighteenth-century Europe, comments that:

[S]lave-animal comparison, within the context of the domestic pet, opened up areas of positive emotional identification. This development provided a useful set of models for the metaphorical ‘petting’ of the black slave within a variety of artistic contexts. Black slaves, particularly children, became common, almost necessary, accoutrements of European aristocrats. They consequently came to constitute a staple element in the erotic portraiture of Europe throughout the Baroque. They were introduced into portraits, quite frequently alongside domestic pets, in order to set off the beauty, and emphasize the wealth and power, of the sitter. The usefulness of the slave-child-pet parallelism for European whites lay in the manner in which it provided a space for the non-threatening but intense emotional relationship with the black body. A carefully controlled form of ‘love’ could flow from white to black. To love a black slave child as if it were your own child was unthinkable, to love a black slave like your favourite dog was the most natural thing in the world, and enforced the identification of blacks with animals in a gesture of sinister benignity. (2002:403-4)

While I am not suggesting that Pringle’s ‘adoption’ of the boy exactly reproduces the dynamics of aristocratic behaviour toward their black slave children, we do have to consider Pringle’s strategy of investing in the fabulation of a tame springbok or fawn, and why this fabulation works to conflate the child and his pet in such obvious ways. Woods’s comments are useful in that they allow us to understand why Pringle should have turned to the kinds of parallelisms and substitutions we see at work in the poem, mechanisms which are extrinsic to the main body of his narrative. Perhaps Pringle was trying to deflect some of the risk involved in taking a black child for ‘our own’, or perhaps he was anxious to legitimate the borderline legality of his acquisition of the child – we cannot say for sure. Whatever the case may be, it is difficult not to detect elements of “a gesture of sinister benignity” in the way in which Pringle has worked up the association of the boy and the animal since its final effect is, paradoxically, to diminish the boy’s humanity. In his notes to the poem, Pringle works hard to convince the reader that the ‘real’ Bechuana boy embodies a full, and particularly a Christian, humanity:

This little African accompanied my wife and me to England; and with the gradual development of his feelings and faculties he became interesting to us in no

ordinary degree. He was indeed a remarkable child. With a great flow of animal spirits and natural hilarity, he was at the same time docile, observant, reflective, and always unselfishly considerate of others. He was of a singularly ingenuous and affectionate disposition; and, in proportion as his reason expanded, his heart became daily more thoroughly imbued with the genuine spirit of the gospel, insomuch that all who knew him involuntarily and with one consent applied to this African boy the benignant words of our Saviour – ‘Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven’. He was baptised in 1827, and took on himself (in conjunction with Mrs P. and me) his baptismal vows, in the most devout and sensible manner. Shortly afterwards he died of a pulmonary complaint under which he had for many months suffered with exemplary meekness. (1989:78)

These are equivocal claims: the first sentence makes it clear that it was only when the boy responded to the tutelage of the Pringles (“the gradual development of his feelings and faculties”) that their interest in him was kindled; one has to assume that before this happened, their interest in the boy was not of the same order, that the boy becomes interesting only in and through this development. In addition, the observations about the boy’s character are awkwardly paradoxical: he exhibits “a great flow of animal spirits and hilarity”, yet is “at the same time docile, observant, reflective”. Furthermore, there is a strong suggestion in these notes that the boy’s character, indeed his very being, is fundamentally metamorphosed “in proportion” to his daily immersion in the “spirit of the gospel”. In short, the boy is being held up as a test case for Christian conversion, and it is this evidence of religious devotion, one assumes, that leads to outsiders regarding him as the very incarnation of “the Kingdom of Heaven”. The boy’s early death from a pulmonary disease (an affliction commonly afflicting people from warmer climes who found themselves domiciled in Britain) is also an occasion for the celebration of his Christian virtues: he suffers it with “exemplary meekness”.

One cannot know, one will never know, how Hinza Marossi experienced the last few years of his life, or how he experienced the few years preceding these. In the account that Pringle gives of the boy, both in the poem and elsewhere, he never allows that there are things he might not know, and things, perhaps, which he might not even imagine. The sole occasion when Hinza does speak of the inaccessibility of his own experience occurs in stanza twelve:

O Englishman! thou ne'er canst know

The injured bondsman's bitter woe,
 When round his breast, like scorpions, cling,
 Black thoughts that madden while they sting. (ll.93-6)

There is a sprung precision in these lines that anticipates Roy Campbell, but it hardly needs stating that this diction, these sentiments, have everything to do with anti-slavery sentiment and little to do with Hinza Marossi. For despite their declaration that the “bondsman’s bitter woe” is inaccessible to the “Englishman”, the lines do not in fact leave it at that. The concluding couplet, with its clinging and stinging scorpions of the mind, does precisely the opposite: it attempts, as Smith would say, to “conceive or imagine that we are in” this experience, that this is how it feels to be a bondsman. Repeatedly, the poem invites such figural or imaginative exchange; indeed, it relies on the “vivacity” of these transfers for its imaginative efficacy, for its ability to move its readers (and in this it succeeded, as the tears of Pringle’s 1829 correspondent and her mother testify).

If we return to the main body of the poem, the ethics of slavery and anti-slavery are set out for us with schematic simplicity. The boy’s first abductors, the Bergenaars are presented to us as barely human. With their “wolfish cries” they murder and pillage without compunction, and, as they drive the women, children and captured herds toward the outer reaches of the colony, they leave behind them a trail of corpses for scavenging animals to feed on. In these stanzas Pringle repeatedly creates a metonymic association between the Bergenaars, and the “foul-beaked birds of prey” and “vultures” which follow the convoy of prisoners; at one point he underlines this association when the “wolfish cries” uttered by the Bergenaars in their original assault are echoed by the boy and his companions hearing “as the grim night was falling/The wolf to his gorged comrade calling”. Though the figurative use of slave traders as predators or scavengers is common in abolition poetry, this characterisation of the Bergenaars as irremediably bestial is caricaturally inaccurate.⁶ As Elisabeth Eldredge notes:

The white colonists were both directly and indirectly responsible for the activities of the Griqua. The slavery of the Cape spawned unified groups of people of Khoi and mixed-race descent who moved beyond the border and became known by various names: Bastaards, Kora, Koranna and

eventually Griqua and Bergenaars. But traders in the Cape Colony armed the Griqua and wanted them to supply legitimate goods acquired by hunting, such as ivory, skins and ostrich feathers. Colonial officials also wanted the Griqua to provide security on the northern frontier ... For both of these reasons the white frontiersmen and the colonial government were happy to continue supplying the Griqua with guns, which the Griqua used to attack and raid their neighbours ruthlessly both for cattle and for the illicit item of commerce, slaves. (1992:16)

The Bergenaars, then, were both perpetrators and victims of the violence endemic to the colonisation of the region; to single them out for special treatment as virtually sub-human, as Pringle does, is to ignore the complicities which bound together the different colonial groupings (British colonial officials among them).

The next set of people incriminated in slavery are the colonial Dutch. Although initially the slave buyers are referred to as “White Men” (l.68), “Christians” (l.70), and “man-stealers” (l.82), the generic description soon gives way to the more specific “Boor”. As we know, the Boers, in the form of the boy’s master, fare badly: the master is a “tyrant”, and even the “rough brood” of his children are insensible to the humanity of other races. A pointed contrast is then set up between Boer and “Englishman” when the boy relates the circumstances, and the motives, which led to him to seek out the Pringle encampment:

‘But yester morn a Bushman brought
The tiding that thy tents were near;
And now with hasty foot I’ve sought
Thy presence, void of fear.
Because they say, O English Chief,
Thou scornest not the Captive’s grief:
Then let me serve thee, as thine own –
For I am in the world alone!’ (ll. 137-144)

In the final point of this triangulation, it is the English who stand at the moral apex of colonial society; they alone, it would seem, can be appealed to for a compassionate or sympathetic understanding of the plight of slaves (a point apparently understood even by a displaced youth from the sparse interior of the country where direct colonisation had not yet taken hold). One may argue that this kind of schematisation is necessary to the design of the poem, which makes deliberate use of “condensation” and “simplicity”, and that even though Pringle was well aware, for example, that the colonial English were capable of

brutish behaviour, he simply chose to use the imaginative space of a poem to create a moral fable with an easily communicable anti-slavery theme. But this is to miss the point, made more than once by Pringle himself, that the poem is “not entirely fanciful”, but possesses to a significant degree the authority of actual experience. It is this claim that is so unsettling, since Pringle feels able to ‘authorise’ not one form of possession, but two: not only does he own the boy in a literal sense, a boy he has transported across the seas to act, we assume, no matter what has been “unlocked” in his heart, as a servant; he also owns the boy as an object in the aesthetics of sympathy where he is, as it were, lent out to a wider audience.

Recent critical responses to the notion of Smithian sympathy have questioned its operational intentions in the context of two types of colonialism: the internal colonialism of Scotland in the second half of the eighteenth century and the broader imperial colonialism of the ascendant British Empire. Luke Gibbons, for example, argues that the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* “was instrumental in negotiating the moral and psychological grounds for a civic investment in colonialism” (2003:88) insofar as “it derives from a profound cultural experience of displacement and a lived experience of the continual presence of another within one’s own sphere of existence” (89). The experiences Gibbons has in mind are, of course, the Union of 1707 and the dismembering of Highland culture after the Battle of Culloden in 1746; in the first, Scotland entered into an uneven alliance with its more powerful neighbour that threatened to erode its own identity and in the second stood culpable of allowing the destruction of an indigenous grouping which stood in the way of economic improvement. Briefly put, Gibbons argues that, in contradistinction to Burke, for whom aesthetic categories could be violently dissevering, Smith sought in sympathy the emollient virtues of social cohesion and fellow feeling – qualities which would assist successful integration with Scotland’s English neighbours. Gibbons’s analysis concentrates particularly on Smith’s notion that sympathy is facilitated by the internalised presence of an “impartial spectator”, who responds to others in terms that are, as Smith puts it, “consistent with propriety” (1978:27). Indeed, the opening chapter is entitled “Of Propriety” and is anxiously concerned that the flow of sympathy be moderated by “tranquillity” or self-

control. “The standards of propriety which [*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*] so assiduously endorsed”, writes Gibbon, “were precisely those belonging to the decorum of polite British society” (96), and he identifies the impartial spectator as the key “psychic mechanism” by which this emulation is attained. Gibbons pays particular attention here to a passage in which Smith describes sympathy as a reciprocal action in which an afflicted person is not only consoled by the sympathies of others, but, in the specular relays of reflecting and doubling so characteristic of Smith’s text, becomes to some extent the spectator of his own misfortune. Smith begins his point by noting that there is only “some correspondence of sentiments between spectator and the person principally concerned”, since the “imaginary change of situation” (21) felt by the spectator is inevitably “momentary” and unable to conceive “anything that approaches the same degree of violence” as that “felt by the sufferer” (22). Then Smith avers that, precisely because the suffering party is aware of this discrepancy, he in turn moderates his behaviour in order to elicit a fuller degree of sympathy. As Smith explains:

The person principally concerned is sensible of this, and at the same time passionately desires a more complete sympathy. He longs for that relief which nothing can afford him but the entire concord of the affections of the spectators with his own. To see the emotions of their hearts, in every respect, beat time to his own, in the violent and disagreeable passions, constitutes his sole consolation. But he can only hope to attain this by lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten, if I may be allowed to say so, the sharpness of its natural tone, in order to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him (22).

This stoic injunction to sufferers to “flatten” the extremity of their feelings in order to render their suffering socially acceptable places an additional burden on the afflicted party, who must find the presence of mind to engage in some calculated dissimulation. In this formulation suffering is drained of its “violence” by being diffused through a social circuitry whose governing principle is a stoic “coolness”, as Smith later puts it, that lowers the temperature of excessive emotion. You will suffer even more, the logic seems to run, if you display your suffering in an unsympathetic way. Furthermore, though the sufferer is granted a sympathetic alleviation of his suffering through sharing it with others, the encounter is

dominated by the authority of the spectator with whose emotions the sufferer must seek “harmony and concord”.

For Gibbons, passages such as these may be read as coded directives to Smith’s contemporaries to put aside the violence and disturbance of the past and embrace the advantages that Union will bring. “In bringing about this apparently felicitous concord between both parties to the Union”, writes Gibbons, “the role of ‘impartial spectator’ merges imperceptibly with Britishness, in its colonial guise as a synonym for progress, civility, and humanity itself” (98). If sympathy might be viewed as, in one sense, a doctrine of stoic suffering then it contains a message, as Gibbons suggests, “for any colonised culture stretched on the cultural equivalent of a rack” (99). We should also add that viewed thus, sympathy is not likely to be elicited by those subjects of empire unable or unwilling to “lower[] their passion to that pitch” acceptable to imperial spectators of their plight. Which brings us back to the Bechuana boy and his successful solicitation of the sympathy of his British readers.

We might begin by noting again the introductory ‘framing’ of the boy within an acceptably restrained behavioural register: despite the extremity of his condition, he has an “open aspect, frank yet bland”, a “modest mien”, even a “smiling look” to offset his “pensive tone”. This admirable fortitude of manner is briefly interrupted by a “sob-like sigh” when the Bechuana boy is asked by Pringle what has occasioned him to leave his home and “roam/This desolate Karoo”. This momentary loss of composure is the boy’s only concession to any display of grief, however. In true Smithian manner, he seems to have understood that the expectation of “sympathy from an assembly of strangers” requires restraint, that one must “always endeavour to bring down our passion to that pitch, which the particular company we are in may be expected to go along with” (23). Both here, and in what ensues in the poem as well as in the notes, the boy is constructed as something very much like an ideal subject of sympathy, who does everything to encourage, and nothing to offend, “the decorum of polite British society”. Beyond this, the very structure of the poem, with the

doubling and mirroring effects I have already discussed, uncannily reflects the specular logic of Smith's text, in which people enter into association with one another via a series of interlocking spectatorial exchanges and then imagine themselves exchanging places. Although I have no wish to arraign Smith's theory of sympathy *in toto*, since it obviously performed far more complex functions than I am able to suggest here, "The Bechuana Boy" seems to me an object lesson in the limits of such sentiments when their imaginative ambit extends to imperial subjects. In fairness to Pringle, it should be remarked that in other poems like "Makanna's Gathering" and "The Song of the Wild Bushman", though Pringle might attempt an imaginative and transferential understanding of the indigenous imperial subject, he does not engage the proprieties of sympathy at all. As I have argued, whatever critique we offer of poems like these does not diminish their importance as instances of an incipiently dialogical relation between settler and indigene in which indigenous voices, however manipulated, are acknowledged as a contestatory force. No such dynamics are at work in "The Bechuana Boy", where the indigenous subject is enfolded into colonial consciousness to such an extent that he loses his distinction altogether.

An argument, implicit for some time, is now – I hope – gathering shape: that Pringle is reworking the often distressing and traumatic experience of his time on the Eastern Frontier into modes of sensibility that are more attuned to the taste of the metropolitan reading public. If "The Bechuana Boy" rewrites the ethnographic encounter as a grateful surrender, then another poem, "The Emigrant's Cabin" might be said to rewrite the experience of frontier settlement as an exercise in the untroubled spread of colonial civility. Before going on to examine this poem, which functions in some ways as a counterweight to the fraught intensities of "Afar in the Desert" and the fractured, elliptical sense of place and belonging in "Evening Rambles", I wish to turn to the text for which Pringle is best known to contemporary readers, *The History of Mary Prince*. Although the *History* is an edited rather than an original text, and Pringle's role in its production is slightly ambiguous, it is instructive to read this text in conjunction or collocation with "The Bechuana Boy". Both pieces of writing, I shall argue, are articulated around the question of what kinds of

representation Pringle invests in the enslaved or colonised subject, and what such representations permit and what they obscure.

* * * * *

The History of Mary Prince had as its primary function the political or propagandistic intent to raise public awareness of the iniquities of colonial slavery; it was published in 1831 and ran to three editions in the same year. The book was the written redaction of an oral autobiographical narrative which was transcribed by Susanna Strickland, a visitor in the Pringle household, and then edited by Pringle himself.⁷ The history describes the suffering and degradation of a female slave in the West Indies (Prince was born in Bermuda), and follows the trajectory of her life from childhood till her arrival in London as a slave/servant to a white West Indian family when she was in her 40s. During this period Prince, in revolt against the continuing abuse of her owners, left the family to take her chances earning a living in London. After falling into a state of destitution, she appealed to the Anti-Slavery Society and by this route ended up as a domestic servant in the Pringle household with Pringle taking up the role of, in his words, “her advocate with the public” (49). Although in his Preface to the book Pringle claimed to have published it “in my private capacity” (4) there is little doubt that the *History* was perceived as fully endorsed by the Anti-Slavery Society. Sarah Salih, for example, writing in the introduction to the latest edition of the book, informs us that “Prince’s narrative ... was marketed as a piece of propaganda” (xxviii) and explains how the bulk of its readers, most of them women, were associated in some way with the abolitionist cause. Further confirmation that the *History* was read in this way is supplied by the frontispiece to the third edition where we are told, below the listing of the publishers, that the book is “supplied at trade price to Anti-Slavery Associations”. I raise the matter of the book’s social and institutional affiliations in order to underline the first of its intersections with “The Bechuana Boy”: that of audience and motivating intent. If we recall

the readers that Pringle initially envisaged for the poem, i.e. “women, children, counting house clerks, country functionaries & Aides de Camp, etc”, then we have a reading public similar in its broad outlines to the extended social audience the Anti-Slavery Society attempted to address. This similarity is further extended when we consider that the poem eventually appeared in the annual *Friendship’s Offering*, a publication aimed specifically at genteel female readers. There are also convergences insofar as motivating intent is concerned. In an editorial supplement to the narrative, Pringle defends Prince against the ongoing calumnies of her owners, and declares that their actions are intended to “frustrate any appeal which the friendless black woman might make to the sympathy of strangers” (2000:40). In a postscript to the second edition, as part of an appeal to “the friends of humanity to promote more zealously the sale of this publication” in order to secure financial aid for the ailing Prince, Pringle again invokes the keywords sympathy and strangers: “the reasonable sympathy thus manifested in her behalf ... will serve to mitigate and relieve, as far as human kindness can, the afflictions of ‘the stranger and the exile who is in our land within our gates” (2000: 4-5). Although the interplay of sympathy and strangers has a slightly instrumental cast in the context of Prince’s narrative, since the profits from the sale of the book were to go directly to Prince herself, the sentiments here are unmistakably affiliated to those which motivated the poem (“to excite some sympathy in *very common* readers, for this class of unfortunate strangers”).

If the poem and Prince’s narrative converge at certain points, then there are also moments of significant divergence and none more so than in the fact that the narrative, unlike the poem, is not exclusively controlled by Pringle. Despite this apparently autonomous status, however, Prince’s narrative is enfolded in an elaborate editorial apparatus which positions the text within the protocols of Anti-Slavery propriety; it is also coded into linguistic and grammatical registers which familiarise or normalise a vernacular speech whose direct transcription would surely have baffled its British readers. Pringle’s editorial interventions consist of a short preface, a short postscript to the second edition, a lengthy supplement in which Pringle “state[s] some circumstances connected with her case “(2000:39) – these

mainly concern the conduct of Prince's owners, a Mr. And Mrs. Wood – and an appendix consisting of a letter written by Mrs. Pringle to the Birmingham Ladies Society for Relief of Negro Slaves in which she verifies that the unclothed Prince's body is covered in scars – a bizarre testimonial to the 'truth' of her narrative. Tacked on to this apparatus is a short captivity narrative entitled *The Narrative of Asa-Asa, A Captured African*, described as “ a convenient supplement to the history of Mary Prince” since it relates “the horrors in which [slavery] originates” (a slave abduction in Sierra Leone). This narrative is slightly less than three pages long and seems to have been included as extra publicity for the Anti-Slavery Society. Readers of contemporary editions of the book then have to contend with the notes, introductions and extra appendices of their editors: the business of annotation, authorisation and explication did not end with Pringle.

Critical attention to the *History*, much of it written by scholars broadly feminist in orientation, has been attentive to the uneven interactions between editorial superstructure and the transcribed but still highly mediated autobiographical narrative. As one might expect, these critics, writing out of a very different conjuncture (the first reissue of the *History* was published in 1987) are wary of Pringle's interventions and read the text against the grain of his intentions in an attempt to recuperate “the ex-slave's agency in the proliferation of voices in her narrative” (Todorova 2001:285).⁸ In addition, these readings position the *History* within the genres of the slave narrative and the autobiography and, when they do refer to Pringle's writings on the Cape Colony, give them only the scantest consideration. Part of what I offer here – by no means a complete or formal analysis - is an attempt to restore the South African connection to this text; I also argue that the *History* functions as a reminder to us that by in and about 1830 Pringle's representations of slaves and of indigenous subjects is strongly conditioned or overcoded by his abolitionism and by the construction of a persona consistent with his public profile.

Structurally, the *History* possesses three distinct phases: in the first a happy childhood with a much loved mother and siblings is disrupted by the death of their mistress, a “kind-hearted,

good woman” (8) and the subsequent dispersal of the family to different owners; in the second phase, which dominates the book, Prince, passed from master to master, enters a hell of seemingly illimitable abuse and physical pain, while in the third phase she is restored to bearable human life by her residence in the Pringle household and the Christian ministrations of Mrs. Pringle. Prince explains this final situation as follows:

At last I went into the service of Mr and Mrs Pringle, where I have been ever since, and I am as comfortable as I can be while separated from my dear husband and away from my own country ... My dear mistress teaches me daily to read the word of God and takes great pains to make me understand it. I enjoy the great privilege of being able to attend the church three times on the Sunday, and I have met with many kind friends since I have been here, both clergymen and others.
(36)

The phases of this narrative trajectory are not new; they repeat, with minor variations, the story of the Bechuana boy, who, like Prince, suffers the traumatic disruption of familial life and the descent into the hell of slavery and the abuse of his Boer masters. He too finds a passage back to human normality with the aid of the Pringles and in particular the maternal and Christian solicitations of Mrs. Pringle: both lives are shaped by similar structures and both their destinies are inseparable from the intersection of their lives with that of Pringle, who in concert with his wife converts them to Christianity and then ‘converts’ them into the narratives that both disclose and foreclose their identities. As domestic servants they also, we might add, minister to the needs of their adoptive family, and it is in this service that both of them ‘die’. With Hinza Marossi it is a literal death from a pulmonary complaint; with Mary Prince it is death of another kind, a death from archival inanition, since she completely vanishes from view after Pringle fails to secure her right to return to the West Indies as a free woman. In an astonishing reversal of her public visibility in 1831, Prince simply drops out of the archive and becomes, for reasons which remain completely unknown, a non-person (there is surely a novel waiting to be written here, another version of the history of ‘black Mary’ as Susanna Strickland called her).

Jenny Sharpe has commented on how slave narratives which come into being through the agency of abolitionists are mandated by the “double objective” of revealing the inhumanity

of slavery and the humanity of the slave. The difficulties inherent in this contradictory gesture are resolved by what Sharpe describes as “a splitting of the slave narrator away from the slave life he or she left behind ... [which] meant that the narrated “I” spoke only inasmuch as he or she was on the path toward Christianity, Enlightenment, and freedom” (2003:119). As Sharpe notes, Mary Prince proved to be a refractory narrating subject whose behaviour could not always be contained within this prescription. One example she cites is that of sexual behaviour and the deliberate exclusion from the published account of an incident in which Prince recounted her relations of concubinage with a white man. I would like to explore this unstable splitting in a different context: a passage in the Supplement where Pringle offers a testimonial defence of Mary’s character against imputations of, among other things, sexual licentiousness:

I have ... had the opportunity of closely observing her conduct for fourteen months, in the situation of a domestic servant in my own family; and the following is the deliberate opinion of Mary’s character, formed not only by myself, but also by my wife and sister-in-law, after this ample period of observation. We have found her perfectly honest and trustworthy in all respects; so that we have no hesitation in leaving everything in the house at her disposal ... She is not, it is true, a very expert housemaid, nor capable of much hard work, (for her constitution appears to be a good deal broken,) but she is careful, industrious, and anxious to do her duty and to give satisfaction. She is capable of strong attachments, and feels deep, though unobtrusive, gratitude for real kindness shown to her. She possesses considerable natural sense, and has much quickness of observation and discrimination of character. She is remarkable for *decency* and *propriety* of conduct – and her delicacy, even in trifling *minutiae*, has been a trait of special remark by the females of my family. This trait, which is obviously quite unaffected, would be a most inexplicable anomaly, if her former habits had been so indecent and depraved as Mr Wood alleges. Her chief faults, so far as we have discovered them, are, a somewhat violent and hasty temper, and a considerable share of natural pride and self-importance; but these defects have been but rarely and transiently manifested, and have scarcely occasioned an hour’s uneasiness at any time in our household. (55)

There is a paradox at work in this passage: Pringle’s desire to praise Prince, to find merit in her character, is at the same time also a desire to uncover “defects”. Thus Prince, after protracted domestic surveillance, has no sooner been designated as a person of well-nigh exemplary decency, propriety and delicacy (the latter an especially feminine attribute), than she is designated, however momentarily, as somebody quite the opposite: a prideful person

with a violent temper (and hence not a candidate for Smithian sympathy). Although Pringle is quick to downplay these defects of character, the damage has been done. We recall here a very similar dissonance in the representation of the Bechuana Boy in the notes to the poem, where he evidences a “flow of animal spirits” and yet is “docile, observant, reflective”. Prince and Marossi are alike, it would seem, in possessing characters that, though praiseworthy, are not yet complete in their compliance to implied norms. They are probationary subjects, on the path to citizenship in proper civility, still split between what they are and what they may become. And yet, in the case of Prince, as Clare Midgely has pointed out (and as Sharpe similarly observes) the very qualities that Pringle reads as negative attributes are precisely those which enabled Prince to exert her limited powers of action and challenge the behaviour of her white slave masters: “For the Pringles as employers”, she writes, “a rebellious household slave should transform into an obedient domestic servant ... For the Pringles as philanthropists Prince’s history of active resistance to slavery must be underplayed by presenting her as a victim dependent on their benevolence. Thus black agency in undermining slavery is devalued and ... freedom is granted as the gift of white philanthropists who leave class relations undisturbed” (xxxx: 90). These animadversions on Pringle’s editorial role make no allowance for the fact that Pringle’s status as a public advocate for Prince more or less demanded that he adhere to certain positions on race, gender and class. These were, after all, positions which he would have to defend in the civic space of the courts against people who were all too willing to invoke the spectre of the “indecent and depraved” black woman and were not averse, either, to implying that Pringle himself might be a less than respectable figure – “a man of the most worthless and abandoned character” (2000:52) as one of his detractors put it. Even allowing for this possibility, however, there is little doubt that Pringle – and we have observed this elsewhere – is deeply committed to the vertical hierarchies of class and its dispositions and that, in this particular frame, though he might avow the humanity of the black or colonial subject he must insist on her subordination to the rules of British civility: the paragraph of the supplement from which the quotation above was taken ends with the following sentence: “In short we consider her on the whole as respectable and well-behaved a person in her

station as any domestic, white or black (and we have had ample experience of both colours,) that we have ever had in our service.”

* * * * *

It is unusual for colonial writing, of whatever sort, to constitute itself retrospectively rather than in and through the evolution of colonial experience. Although Pringle did produce a significant body of work during his residence in the Cape Colony – much of which we have already looked at – he also wrote extensively about this experience from his metropolitan vantage, a vantage heavily invested with his public role in the Anti-Slavery Society as well as his campaigning role in parliamentary pressure groups concerned with colonial reform. Any appraisal of Pringle’s work, and in particular of the poetry, which fails to take these shifting perspectives and reads this work as a continuum rather than as heteronomously divided by different national and transnational locations runs the risk of simplifying it – a simplification which usually takes the form of constructing Pringle’s life and work as a *telos* of liberal development, when, as we have seen, it was very often conjunctural, responding to circumstances as they arose or recasting past experience in a manner considered appropriate to the present. As another example of the uneven entanglement of past and present experience which informs Pringle’s metropolitan writing, I turn to “The Emigrant’s Cabin” first published in 1834 but begun in 1822 while Pringle was still living on the frontier. The poem celebrates, with some confidence, the growth of a nascent settler society; this celebration has proved a durable one: the editors of the two most recent South African editions of his verse (Wahl, 1970; Chapman & Perreira 1989) commend the poem for, among other things, its inaugural employment of a distinctively South African register. My understanding of the poem owes much to placing it within two distinct contexts, and then reading the poem as the rewriting of one context by another. The first of these contexts is that provided by Pringle’s writing on the Eastern Frontier, both archival and published. The

second, as the date of the poem's publication indicates, is that of Pringle in London in 1834, the year of his death but also the year in which the Bill abolishing slavery in the colonies was finally passed by the British parliament and the humanitarian cause enjoyed an unprecedented ascendancy.

In *Bloodground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853* Elizabeth Elbourne insists on the inextricable connection of colonial and metropolitan affairs during this period, the "impossibility of disaggregating 'national' histories from one another" (2002:5). These interpenetrations are especially apparent in this poem, which functions, I shall argue, as an attempt to refashion Pringle's frontier residence into a paradigmatic instance of humanitarian colonial settlement. We have already encountered one version of the emigrant's hut or cabin and its surrounding location; it is the "wattled cot" towards which the disorientated speaker makes his way at the end of "Evening Rambles". There, as I remarked, that "cot" seems to offer frail protection from the looming dangers of the African night. It now undergoes a strategic transformation into a dwelling that acts as the epicentre of an incipient community, whose energies are remodelling the surrounding landscape.

"The Emigrant's Cabin", subtitled "An Epistle in Rhyme" is the longest poem in Pringle's 1834 *African Sketches*, a publication that drew together, for the first and last time, the corpus of his African prose and poetry in a single volume. There is evidence that *African Sketches* was hastily assembled: an olio of Pringle's previously published writing on Africa for the periodical press, unpublished material which was most likely revised for this publication, his already existing African poems as well as some that were worked up for the occasion – among them "The Emigrant's Cabin".⁹ In a letter to Fairbairn, Pringle explained the circumstances of the poem's composition as follows:

You will be surprised to find yourself hitched into rhyme in a long piece of verse you have never seen. The fact is that in turning over my old scraps one day, I found the rough commencement of a rhyming epistle to you, the germ or embryo of what you now see, & which I had begun, but never sent to you, & indeed had

entirely forgotten. I set to & with little labour extended it to the thing you now see –(not the worst of my attempts in my own opinion)- and retaining the original date, I managed by a little anachronism to bring in the Dr. & other friends. I really think it improves my African collection considerably by giving a view of our familiar and domestic condition. My friend and neighbour the Wizard Coleridge is very fond of it. You will find also some other pieces. – all extended from scraps begun at Glen Lynden. (FB:1:150;150A)

At the time of the publication of *African Sketches* in 1834, Pringle was deeply involved in the politics of colonial petition and most of this letter is concerned with events surrounding the appointment of a Parliamentary Committee to investigate the treatment of indigenous people by colonial officials, especially at the Cape. For the moment I will leave these details aside, but it is worth noting that in the same letter Pringle talks of *African Sketches* as serving the “higher purpose” of expediting liberal reform; so pressing was this concern for Pringle that because of the “valuable service” rendered to the Committee by Andries Stockenstrom (a former Commissioner-General of the Eastern Cape) “I have consequently brought his merits forward prominently in my book”. Such a direct use of *African Sketches* as an intervention in issues current at the time suggests that we read it, at least in part, as advocacy literature. As we shall see, there are sections of “The Emigrant’s Cabin”, particularly in the appended notes, where this tendency is very marked. There are also grounds, however, to read the poem as an exercise in the imaginative actualisation of a colonial ideal, a poetic counterpart to the politics of improved colonial governance then being played out in the metropole.

The poem opens with a series of pastoral depictions that would not have troubled the expectations of its British readers:

Where the young river, from its wild ravine,
Winds pleasantly through Eildon’s pastures green,
With fair acacias waving on its banks,
And willows bending o’er in graceful ranks,
And the steep mountain rising close behind,
To shield us from the Snowberg’s wintry wind,-
Appears my rustic cabin, thatched with reeds,
Upon a knoll amid the grassy meads;
And, close beside it, looking o’er the lea,
Our summer-seat beneath an umbra-tree. (ll. 1-10)

This opening stanza is of particular interest in that Pringle does not – as he does elsewhere in the poem – explicitly favour the use of a local terminology. Hence we have the invented “umbra-tree” (so named for its shade?) for the witte-gat boom, and “Snowberg” for Sneeuberg; the Scottish place name “Eildon”, an example of Pringle’s habit of using Scottish designations for the settlement on the Baviaans river (designations that, as it happened, never stuck). Add to this the familiar pastoral indices of “willows”, a “knoll”, “grassy meads”, “the lea”, a “rustic cabin”, and the measured stylistic propriety of the stanza as a whole and we have an introduction that sets the most conventional of templates for whatever deviations are to follow. The poem then signals its impending diversion into a non-standard variation of this template (which recasts the colonial landscape as a variation on familiar scenes), by describing the ensuing “colloquy” as being conducted “in Fancy’s Dream”: this marks what is to follow as not only an imagined event, but one in which a descriptive licence is allowed for in advance.

The body of the poem is structured in the form of an exchange between the two friends, but it also employs a series of ‘stage directions’ (“Exeunt Ladies”; “outside the Hut” etc) which allow Pringle to shift location and to cue in *dramatis personae* who enlarge the poem’s terms of reference. In the letter to Fairbairn quoted above the poem is described as “giving a view of our familiar and domestic condition” and though Pringle freely admits to “a little anachronism to bring in Dr [John Philip] and other of our friends” and concedes in his notes that an allusion to a scene involving an “Amatembu chief” is a “poetical fiction”, it is clear that “The Emigrant’s Cabin”, despite being structured around the “Fancy” of Fairbairn’s magical transportation to the Eastern Cape, is intended to be read as a faithful depiction of frontier life. In fact the poem encompasses a lot more than local “condition”: in its proselytising and moralising aspects it offers something like a summation of evangelical-humanitarian desiderata, while the testimonial or interventionist notes very often draw attention to matters in the public domain at the time of publication. Considered in its entirety, the “The Emigrant’s Cabin” is both generically and discursively scattered; there are

also tonal shifts within the poem itself that even further disaggregate its already uneven parts. In looking for models for the poem, nothing lies ready to hand; it has elements of, but is not, a “conversation” poem, since it lacks the extended meditative interiority that characterises, say, Coleridge’s poems in that genre. Neither is it quite a “dialogue” poem, for although it employs two voices, the reciprocation between them is uneven, Pringle’s voice being by far the dominant one. The subtitled description of the poem as “An Epistle in Rhyme” is slightly misleading, since the epistolary aspects of the poem – the address to Fairbairn – are intermingled with other voices, most notably Fairbairn’s own. Similarly, though the poem uses elements of the pastoral (in the opening stanza for example) it also engages the picturesque, particularly in its manipulations of “prospect” or view while an emphasis on the power of the imagination, visual omnipresence and the enduring bonds of male friendship follows fairly standard Romantic patterns. All four of the poem’s direct quotes, however, are from eighteenth - century sources (Pope, l.99; Cowper, l.140 and Goldsmith, l. 305) and the poem looks back to eighteenth-century antecedents as much as it engages its late Romantic context.

The opening stanzas of the ‘dialogue’ section are marked by an ironic wit noticeably absent from the rest of the poem. Consider the initial exchanges between Pringle and Fairbairn:

P.- Enter, my friend, our beehive-cottage door:
 No carpet hides the humble earthen floor,
 But it is hard as brick, clean-swept, and cool.
 You must be wearied? Take that jointed stool;
 Or on this couch of leopard-skin recline:
 You’ll find it soft – the workmanship is mine.

F. – Why, Pringle, yes – your cabin’s snug enough,
 Though oddly shaped. But as for household stuff,
 I only see some rough-hewn sticks and spars;
 A wicker cupboard, filled with flasks and jars;
 A pile of books, on rustic frame-work placed;
 Hides of ferocious beasts that roam the waste;
 Whose kindred prowl, perchance, around this spot –
 The only neighbours, I suspect, you’ve got!
 Your furniture, rude from the forest cut,
 However, is in keeping with the hut.
 This couch feels pleasant: is’t with grass you stuff it?

So far I should not care with you to rough it.
 But – pardon me for seeming somewhat rude –
 In this wild place how manage ye for food?

P.- You'll find, at least, my friend, we do not starve:
 There's always mutton, if nought else, to carve;
 And even of luxuries we have our share.
 But here comes dinner (the best bill of fare),
 Drest by that 'Nut-Brown Maiden', Vytje Vaal.
 (*To the Hottentot Girl*). Meid, roep de Juffrouwen naar't middagmaal:
 [To F.] Which means – 'The ladies in to dinner call.' (ll. 17-43)

In these exchanges Fairbairn assumes the voice of an amused but sceptical civility, a distancing device which frames the description of the settler cabin from an outsider or metropolitan perspective. Pringle collaborates in this deprecation of a rudimentary settler domesticity by playfully exaggerating its mimicry of middleclass amenities (“we do not starve:/There’s always mutton, if nought else, to carve;”). The dinner that is to be served follows standard protocols in that it is “drest” by a servant who is instructed to call the “ladies” in to a conclave over which males preside. If one discounts the reference to “Snowberg”, this is the first occasion on which the specifically local makes an appearance: the servant is a “Nut-Brown Maiden’, Vytje Vaal” and she is addressed in a pidgin Dutch (later described by Pringle as “boorish” – a pun?). On both occasions when Dutch is used for purposes other than naming, it is the language of address to or of servants and deprecated, as we have noted, for its expressive poverty. Although in the notes to the poem Pringle professes himself averse to the prejudices of “caste and colour”, he shows a more than passing interest in the complexion of his ‘Nut-Brown Maiden’ and glosses these lines with the comment that in Dutch “*Vaal* signifies a pale reddish colour, the hue of a faded leaf – which is precisely the colour of the Hottentot”. (1989:96). Though there is no derogation in these remarks, the attention to skin colour suggests that it was not an indifferent detail for Pringle and his intended readers. The note then goes on: “The girl’s real name, however, was Vytje Dragoener. She was a native of Bethelsdorp, and was an extremely faithful, neat-handed, and respectable servant; and most affectionately attached to her mistress” (96). While comments like these might serve to bolster perceptions that frontier master-servant relations are conducted under conditions of well regulated propriety, they can do so only by

blocking out what we know to have been an intractable problem: the acquisition of domestic and field labour at prices within the reach of the settlers.

In the stanzas that complete this section of the poem, Pringle, Fairbairn and “the ladies” (Pringle’s wife and her sister) engage the rituals of a formal dinner; the occasion is dominated by Pringle’s comic catalogue of settler fare, of which the following is a representative sample:

P.- First, here’s our broad-tailed mutton, small and fine,
 The dish on which nine days in ten we dine;
 Next, roasted springbok, spiced and larded well;
 A haunch of hartebeest from Hyndhope Fell;
 A paauw, which beats your Norfolk turkey hollow;
 Korhaan, and Guinea-fowl, and pheasant follow;
 Kid carbonadjes, a la Hottentot,
 Broiled on a forked twig ... (ll. 44-51)

And so on. This culinary exoticism is gently parodied and, as in the preceding stanzas in the exchange between Pringle and Fairbairn, the dominant tone is whimsical. Taken together these stanzas give the impression of a light-hearted literary sally, which Pringle tossed off for his own amusement. Perhaps they are the “germ or embryo” of the poem which Pringle abandoned because he could find, at the time, no finalising structure for his *jeu d’esprit* – a conjecture which is strengthened when this light and deftly accomplished opening exchange gives way to a poem with far more earnest designs on its reader.

Since Fairbairn has been “wafted cross the tide” he occupies an anomalous imaginary in that he has no sense of what goes on outside his immediate location; this conceit is then used by Pringle as the occasion for correcting a litany of assumptions Fairbairn makes about his supposed way of life. The gravamen of these assumptions is that Pringle has exiled himself from all forms of wider sociality and especially the “finer joys” of “Books and Men”. That “save for her who shares and soothes your lot,/You might as well squat in a Caffer’s cot!” These suppositions then take a personal turn, with Fairbairn asking whether this voluntary

exile to “dreary, soulless solitude” is perhaps the result of “disappointed pride” – a reference to the circumstances of Pringle’s departure from Edinburgh. Interestingly, when querying his friend’s motives for embracing such isolation, Fairbairn raises the spectre of an unrestrained Rousseau-ism:

As if, believing with insane Rousseau
Refinement the chief cause of human woe,
You meant to realise that raver’s plan
And become a philosophic *Bosjesman!* (ll. 130-133)

Here Rousseau operates as a convenient shorthand for a rejection of ‘civilised’ values and the embrace of ‘primitive’ ways of life (one assumes that the reference here is to the 1754 *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*). Although the lines have a humorous intent, coded into them is a Francophobic aversion to ‘radicalism’ which the poem’s original readers could not have missed. In his rebuttal of Fairbairn’s imputations, Pringle first of all settles the personal matter: “You’ve missed the mark .../Duty and Destiny...Constrained my steps: I had no other choice” before moving on to affirm the sociality and the humanitarian utility of his new station. It is important, again, to emphasise the retrospective nature of these comments. We can with some certainty date this section of the poem (Pringle’s lengthy six stanza response to Fairbairn) to 1833 or early 1834 since it is here that “Dr. P. & other friends” make their appearance in the poem “by a little anachronism”. In 1822, the date of the poem’s original composition, Pringle had not yet come into significant contact with humanitarian missionaries such as Philip, Read and Brownlee; nor had he ever identified himself with the causes they represented. By 1833/4, however, his involvement with the evangelical and abolitionist causes was at its height: not only was the bill abolishing colonial slavery about to be tabled in the British Parliament but the Protection of the Aborigines Society, which Pringle was instrumental in setting up, was beginning to exert parliamentary pressure for the reform of colonial law at the Cape. In both instances the prime mover in Parliament was the evangelical Whig, Thomas Fowell Buxton, who had close ties both to Pringle and to John Philip.

Pringle's next rebuttal responds to Fairbairn's surmise that "dull ... solitude" characterises life in the colonial wilderness. In response Pringle insists that despite his remote location, he is active and busy, his days filled with Protestant industry ("Some duty or amusement, grave or light"/To fill the active morn from day to night") aimed at cultivating the wild and civilising the indigenes: "I have my farm and garden, tools and pen; /My schemes for civilising savage men;". Pringle then claims that "vexations ... and privations" seldom disturb frontier life and are of no great occasion when they do: "For though perchance they plague us while they last,/They only serve for jests when they are past". This fantasy of contented toil in the wilderness, consecrated by the "Sabbath Bell" and its "welcome chime in Lynden dell" is then complemented by a topographical tour of the region ("glancing o'er this district map with me") which reveals "all around us" the presence of a Scottish community. This community is designated by Scottish place names ("Glen-Lynden"; "Glen Yair") and Pringle also uses the Scotticism "cleugh" (a steep sided ravine or gorge) twice. Though Pringle also uses "kranz" and "kraal" in this stanza, both here and elsewhere in the poem he blends a smattering of Dutch and the occasional use of Xhosa with Scottish place names and Scottish phrasing. While this mixed usage strongly flavours the dominant standard English and gives the language of the poem a certain distinctiveness, it is an effect achieved by both localisation and Scotticisation.

The stanza performs not only the topographical functions of naming and detailing what Fairbairn, in conventional expectation, imagines as the blankness of "Afric's deserts rude"; it also naturalises the settler presence by juxtaposing it with previous inhabitants of the land in a way that suggests succession rather than dispossession:

And the steep Tarka mountains, stern and bare,
Close round the upland cleughs of lone Glen-Yair,-
Our Lothian friends with their good mother dwell,
Beside yon *kranz* whose pictured records tell
Of Bushmen's huntings in the days of old,
Ere here Bezuidenhout had fixed his fold. (ll. 170-175)

Here two sets of previous inhabitants of the land are described. The first, the Bushmen, are safely immured in the distance of an (almost) immemorial past: their rock paintings are “pictured records” (Pringle seems to interpret them as a kind of archive) which tell of “huntings in the days of old”. But these “days of old” are a lot more proximate than Pringle acknowledges. In the notes he lets the temporal cat out of the bag, so to speak, when he glosses “*kranz*” as “a steep cliff or overhanging rock” and then adds, in the present tense, “such as the Bushmen often select for depicting their rude sketches on”. Then in an adroit – but entirely misleading- move he situates this now supposedly vanished settlement in a period chronologically prior to its subsequent habitation by the frontier Dutch, who in turn become the predecessors of the Scottish settlers. Phrases like “fixed his fold” suggest that this second phase of settlement was accomplished without complication. This serene erasure of the blood-soaked history of the frontier then moves toward the present:

-Then up the widening vale extend your view,
 Beyond the clump that skirts the Lion’s Cleugh,
 Past our old camp, the willow trees among,
 Where first these mountains heard our sabbath song;
 And mark the settlers’ homes, as they appear
 With cultured fields and orchard-gardens near,
 And cattle kraals, associate or single,
 From fair Craig-Rennie up to Clifton-Pringle. (ll. 176-183)

The visual frame of the stanza (“view”) now expands (“widening ... extend”) into an encompassing panorama which skirts the “old camp” (a relic after two years) before the “settlers homes ... appear” with a theatrical immediacy. This commanding aerial perspective also brings into visibility fields, gardens, and livestock enclosures which run the length of the settlement and render it a single, productive unit. No longer the mere “fold” of the Dutch frontier farmer, nor the site of the vanishing remnants of the “rude” and cryptic rock archive of the Bushmen, the Scottish settlement now approaches a civilisational plenitude: all that is missing are some suitable people to populate it, and these Pringle proceeds at once to supply. One might note here that the use of a panoptic or encompassing point of view, in which the eye assumes an unconstrained vision is a familiar Romantic trope (Wordsworth’s “I Wander’d Lonely” is perhaps the most familiar example) which, in the colonial context,

doubles as an instrumental prerequisite for the first stage of settlement: surveying the land.

In the stanza that follows Pringle creates a rudimentary public sphere, or “polity”, of educated middleclass males: army officers, a merchant, colonial officials of a certain standing, farm owners, and, “by a little anachronism”, missionaries. Excluded from this imagined community are the bulk of the labouring classes (of all races) and, except for rather nominal purposes, women. First up in Pringle’s enumeration of eligible males is “Landrost Stockenstrom”, a figure we have already encountered as being among the star witnesses summoned before the Aborigines Protection Committee in London in 1834 and in consequence being “brought ... forward” in Pringle’s *Narrative* – just as he is here:

There’s Landrost Stockenstrom at Graaf-Reinet
A man, I am sure, you would not soon forget,
Who, though in this wild country born and bred,
Is able in affairs, in books well read,
And – what’s more meritorious in this case –
A zealous friend to Afric’s swarthy race. (ll. 188-193)

Whether Pringle intended it or not, the effect of these lines is to suggest that Stockenstrom’s most significant achievement is to have overcome the deficit of being born in the “wild country” of South Africa: not only is he properly educated and socialised (“able in affairs”) but, more “meritorious” still, he is a humanitarian. What is left unstated here is that Stockenstrom has been granted a kind of honorary Britishness, for Pringle’s polity of “thinking men” are either British colonials or temporarily encamped British military officials. Furthermore, on the only occasion when Pringle details the kind of “intercourse” that binds this group together, we have:

-Sometimes a pleasant guest, from parts remote,
Cheers for a passing night our rustic cot;
As, lately, the gay-humoured Captain Fox,
With whom I roamed ‘mid Koonap’s woods and rocks,
From Winterberg to Gola’s savage grot,
Talking of Rogers, Campbell, Coleridge, Scott,
Of Fox and Mackintosh, Brougham, Canning, Grey;
And lighter themes and laughter cheered the way-
While the wild elephants in groups stood still,

And wondered at us on their woody hill. (ll. 204-213)

Though one might understand that conversation with a visiting British officer is likely to turn to 'home', there remains something deeply incongruous about this juxtaposition of the place names of a local landscape and an audience of immobilised "wild-elephants" with a litany of British surnames – a line of poets, a line of politicians. Conversations in the colony, it would seem, circumvent the colony itself. Pringle's frontier community of "thinking men" replicate, undisturbed, the ethos and the interests of their metropolitan counterparts. All that has changed, as though place were nothing other than a giant stageset, is the backdrop. Nor is such name dropping innocent or accidental: the poets indicate a preference for the uncontroversial – no Byron or Shelley, for example - while the politicians are all establishment figures. In a curious note that glosses "the good-humoured Captain Fox", Pringle brings us up to date on Fox's military rank and then alludes to an evening in London when Fox repaid his hospitality "by seating me at his English fire-side with Sir James Mackintosh and the poet Rogers" (1989:97). This is followed by a lengthy quote from an untitled poem by Rogers which celebrates "cheerful converse" where "Wit and Taste their mingled charms supply" (thus following Pope's prescriptions for sociality in the "Letter to Mr. Fortescue" quoted earlier in the poem: "The feast of reason and the flow of soul"). Whatever Pringle's intentions were in supplying this extended and entirely superfluous gloss, it reinforces our sense that "friendly intercourse" (to use the term from Pringle's poem) is commutable across very wide divisions and that, however unequally weighted, there is a relation of reciprocation between Pringle's "bee-hive cabin" and an "English fire-side". The note also has the effect of credentialising Pringle as a member of polite society with its indispensable social ingredients of "Wit and Taste": a crucial move in a poem which relies on an implicit appeal to the moral and social propriety of the poet himself.

A similarly extraneous set of concerns informs the series of notes that follow, which gloss the names of local missionaries, particularly James Read and William Wright. This section of the poem to which these notes are appended (it completes the stanza from which I have been quoting) reveals Pringle at his most prosaic: a roll call of (mostly) missionary names

and deeds. Although this is poetry of a negligible order, it tells us much about the intentions informing the poem, and nowhere more so than in the extensive notes on Read and Wright. In the case of Read, the notes defend the propriety and respectability of the Read family and are clearly aimed at those detractors of Read who defamed him on the basis of his marriage to a “woman of the Hottentot race”. The notes on Wright, which include a potted biography, intervene on his behalf in a still simmering wrangle with the mother church. The poem now invites a reading which spills over from one genre (poetry) into another (public advocacy). This generic overspill or blurring has, among other effects, that of enlisting the poem in a certain cause; the poem is not only about itself: it also speaks in the name of a certain abolitionist and evangelical discourse with which Pringle’s readers would have been familiar. The note on Read is of particular interest in that it links the “truly respectable and becoming ... demeanour of Mrs Read and her well-educated and intelligent family” (98) with larger claims concerning abolition and colonial reform. Pringle asserts, for example, that the “*social* proscription” attendant on mixed marriages in the Cape Colony will soon cease to exist: “but now that the dragon slavery is destroyed, its odious brood of caste and colour, must ere long also expire” (98). The optimism of this expectation needs no comment; more immediately relevant is the fact that Pringle, at that time, entertained such millennial confidence in the legislative powers of the British state. Such a confidence, if misplaced, is at least understandable. As a British subject active in the abolitionist cause, Pringle would have been buoyed by imminent passing of the 1834 Abolition act, a triumph for the Anti-Slavery movement and their representatives in the Commons. The magnitude of this event, its enormously charged moral valency, and its implications for empire are easily forgotten today. As Linda Colley observes:

Anti-slavery supplied the British with an epic stage upon which they could strut in an overwhelmingly attractive guise. Acknowledging that this was so does not detract from what was achieved. Not all great powers are so anxious to redeem past oppressions, or so eager for the world’s good opinion ... At exactly the same time as Great Britain established itself as unquestionably the foremost European and imperial power, it had acquired, through its anti-slavery campaigns, a reputation for moral integrity that even the most cynical foreign observer was likely to pay some tribute to. Successful abolitionism became one of the vital underpinnings of British supremacy in the Victorian era, offering – as it seemed to do – irrefutable proof that British power was founded on religion, on freedom

and on moral calibre, not just a superior stock of armaments and capital.” (Colley 1992:359)

The same sense of providential destiny informed Pringle’s views on developments in the Cape Colony. The final chapters of the *Narrative*, written at about the same time as the revised version of “The Emigrant’s Cabin”, are thick with references to the achievements of local evangelical-humanitarians working in concert with sympathetic British parliamentarians to pressure the British government into colonial reform. On pages 248-249, for example, referring to the passing of Ordinance 50 at the Cape in 1828 and its parliamentary ratification in 1829, Pringle refers to several people (Stockenstrom, Mackintosh, Philip, Wright) mentioned in “The Emigrant’s Cabin” as having been instrumental in securing the “Magna Charta of the Aborigines of South Africa” (249). Pringle also enthuses about the establishment of the Kat River Settlement, a scheme which, by granting the “Hottentots” rights of land tenure, sought to demonstrate that they were capable of responsible citizenship. Although Pringle died shortly before humanitarian pressure registered another conspicuous political success (the Glenelg Despatch of 1835 which overruled the Governor of the Cape and his settler supporters in their attempts to annex further land from the frontier Xhosa) he wrote poems like “The Emigrant’s Cabin” at a time when evangelical-humanitarian influence had reached its political high water mark. Without wishing to debate here the complexities and contradictions of this influence and its signal failure to maintain a long term influence (see for example, *passim*, Crais ,1992; Elbourne, 2002 ; Keegan, 1996; Lester, 2001; Mostert ,1992; Bank, 1999) the fact remains that for actors on the metropolitan stage like Pringle in the early 1830s, these developments must have seemed compellingly propitious. Read in this light, “The Emigrant’s Cabin”, particularly the stanza with which we are dealing, represents something like the investiture in verse of an ideal evangelical-humanitarian community of settlers. That such a community was wildly aslant of actually existing conditions at the time would have mattered little to Pringle; what did matter, as the letter to Fairbairn makes clear, was the “higher cause” of abolition and a “just and humane” colonialism, then showing every sign of being significantly recognised as a force in British politics and colonial policy.

To return to the notes: the entry on “Ingenious Wright” is notable for its rambling and disjunct extensiveness, as well as the sheer oddity of its tone. Pringle begins by establishing Wright as an exemplary biblical scholar (“a gentleman of no ordinary acquirements in Biblical erudition”) and Christian humanitarian (“the only clergyman of the Church of England in the Colony, during my residence there, who was friendly to the freedom, or active in promoting the improvement of the coloured classes” (99)). Hereafter, Wright becomes the victim of an elaborate plot involving the “colonial government” (under Somerset), various unnamed colonial “functionaries, lay and ecclesiastical” and “his own Society in England” swayed by the “studious calumni[ation]” of his enemies. This strangely paranoid web of conspiracy has as its motivating force the simple fact that Wright has “kept company and sat on Committees with such respectable individuals as Dr Philip, Mr Fairbairn, &c.!” Whatever we may make of the accuracy of these claims, they are articulated in a language of unrestrained opprobrium: we have people playing “degrading parts”, engaging in “disreputable transactions” and an italicised insistence on “*secret* calumnious reports from the *most impure sources*”. Pringle concludes his accusations with the hope that this intervention will improve matters in the Missionary Society responsible for sending Wright to the Cape only to relieve him of his services: “Having witnessed with disgust all this, and *much more that I cannot here allude to*, I print this notice expressly in the hope that it may meet the eyes of respectable and upright men connected with the Propagation Society, and lead to some scrutiny into this and such like cases” (99) (Italics mine). This annotatory assessment of colonial life as riven by vengeful factionalism and venal conduct is completely at odds with the depiction of domestic and civic propriety in the poem itself.

Pringle ends his idealised sketch of a settler community by supplying Fairbairn with a moral itinerary for a ‘just’ colonialism. Part of this reads:

Some purpose to accomplish for the band
 Who left with me their much-loved Father-Land;
 Something for the sad natives of the soil,
 By stern oppression doomed to scorn and toil;

Something for Africa to do or say –
 If but one mite of Europe's debt to pay –
 If but one bitter tear to wipe away.
 Yes, here is work, my Friend, if I may ask
 Of heaven to share in such a hallowed task! (ll. 225-234)

The recasting of colonial conquest as the reparation of moral “debt” and the sacramental labour of a “hallowed task” is an excessively rhetorical reinscription of the frontier experience, and works toward its erasure rather than its remembrance or its re-creation. The same cannot be said of the initial stanzas of the poem, where the oblique ironising of colonial domestic propriety and the jocular but questing interrogations of Fairbairn implicitly acknowledge the precariousness of colonial life. This acknowledgement is inverted rather than sustained in the subsequent stanzas (Pringle's lengthy response to Fairbairn) which construct an imaginary consonant with the elated expectations for colonial rule among the metropolitan humanitarian abolitionist lobby in 1833/4.

As if sensing a dead end in the sermonising account of his colonial vocation, Pringle contrives a switch in emphasis, before reintroducing the “ladies”:

But these are topics for more serious talk,
 So we'll reserve them for an evening walk.
 Fill now a parting glass of generous wine-
 The *doch-an-dorris* cup – for 'Auld Lang Syne';
 For my good M -----t summons us to tea,
 In her green drawing room – beneath the tree; -
 And lo! Miss Brown has a whole *cairn* of stones
 To pose us with – plants, shells and fossil bones. (ll. 235-242)

We note again the italicised Scotticisms texturing the vocabulary of the poem in the same way as local South African languages, thereby suggesting a structural equivalence in their novelty or distance from the poem's semantic norms. The cameo appearance of Pringle's wife and sister underscores again their awkwardly peripheral status. Previously they had appeared as silent interlocutors during dinner; now, likewise without direct voice, they “summons” the men to the feminised ritual of tea, incongruously held in the “green drawing room” of a shading tree where the women “pose” the company with a collection of

local artefacts, at once domesticating the exotic and holding it in the freeze frame of accepted representation (the informal outdoor “pose” of the company with these arranged artefacts suggests the popular pictorial convention of the “conversation piece”). The poem’s concern with domestic decorum and its proper female maintenance must be read against the alarmed reports of domestic despoliation in the *Account* where middle class women are expelled from domestic into menial and labouring spaces. Here the white women occupy a representative status not dissimilar to that of the indigenes in the poem, also ‘posed’ in certain functions that suit the purposes of the poem’s typification of their roles.¹⁰ As for refractory white labour, it has simply disappeared altogether.

The poem concludes its ‘presentation’ of frontier life in the early 1820s by bringing into its frame what has hitherto been a significant absence: the presence of indigenous peoples in roles other than those of domestic servants. To achieve this, Pringle manoeuvres his focus to the surrounding landscape:

[*Outside the Hut*]

F.- ‘Tis almost sun-set. What a splendid sky!
 And hark – the homeward cow-boy’s echoing cry
 Descending from the mountains. This fair clime
 And scene recall the patriarchal time,
 When Hebrew Herdsmen fed their teeming flocks
 By Arnon’s meads and Kirjath-Arba’s rocks;
 And bashful maidens, as the twilight fell,
 Bore home their brimming pitchers from the well.-
 - But who are *these* upon the river’s brink?

P.- Ha! armed Caffers with the shepherd Flink
 In earnest talk? Ay, now I mark their mien;
 It is Powana from Zwart-Kei, I ween,
 The Amatembu Chief. He comes to pay
 A friendly visit, promised many a day;
 To view our settlement in Lynden Glen’
 And smoke the Pipe of Peace with Scottish men.
 And his gay consort, Moya, too attends,
 To see ‘the world’ and ‘Amanglezi friends’,
 Her fond heart fluttering high with anxious schemes
 To gain the enchanting beads that haunt her dreams!
 F.- Yet let us not these simple folk despise;
 Just such *our* sires appeared in Caesar’s eyes:
 And, in the course of heaven’s evolving plan,
 BY TRUTH MADE FREE, the long-scorned African,
 His Maker’s image radiant in his face,

Among the earth's noblest sons shall find his place.

P.-[*To Flink, an old Hottentot Shepherd, who comes forward.*]

Well, Flink, what says the Chief?

Flink. Powana wagh'

Tot dat de Baas hem binnenshuis zal vraagh'.

P. – [*To F.*] In boorish Dutch which means, 'Powana waits
Till Master bid him welcome to our gates'.

[*To Flink.*] – We haste to greet him. Let rush mats be spread

On th'cabin floor. Prepare the stranger's bed

In the spare hut, - fresh-strewed with fragrant hay.

Let a fat sheep be slaughtered. And, I pray,

Good Flink, for the attendants all provide.

These men dealt with us at Zwart - Kei side:

Besides, you know, 'tis the Great-Guide's command

Kindly to treat the stranger in our land.

[*Exeunt.*] (ll. 243-281)

This is poetry of a predictable cast that serves only as the vehicle for a by now predictable set of ideas. Almost immediately, Fairbairn invokes the prospect from outside the hut in terms of the foundational Christian (“patriarchal”) time of the Old Testament, yet again displacing the present into the past in order to hasten the arrival of an imagined future. This figural reverie is interrupted by the appearance of some “armed caffers”, but Pringle easily transmutes a brief threat of possible violence (“now I mark their mien”) into the archaic formality of a ceremonial visit to “smoke the pipe of peace with Scottish men”. We know from the notes that this visit is a “poetical fiction” and the artifice is evident in the fact that Pringle does not risk bringing his Xhosa into any kind of voiced exchange, or indeed of even describing them. The closest we get to any rendition of the Xhosa world is when Pringle attempts an internalisation of Powana’s “gay consort”, Moya: “her fond heart fluttering high with anxious schemes/To gain the enchanting beads that haunt her dreams” - lines which stereotype a primitive cupidity for trinkets. Fairbairn’s rejoinder might offset this (“Yet let us not these simple folk despise/Just such *our* sires appeared in Caesar’s eyes”), but serves as the occasion for *his* sermonising of an evolutionary redemptivism wherein the “long-scorned African” will be Christianised into co-equal status with the European. This apostrophising is interrupted by the appearance of “Flink” described as an “old Hottentot Shepherd” who acts as an intermediary between Pringle and the visiting chief, and answers Pringle’s queries in Dutch, though Pringle then addresses him in English, thus cancelling

out whatever real problems of communication might have existed. Pringle's instructions to receive the chief and his retinue with a ceremonial return of favours creates the impression that Pringle, the settler chief, maintains relations of formal cordiality with his Xhosa counterpart. The irony of the biblical injunction that the settlers and their retinue of servants should "Kindly ... treat the Stranger in our land" should by now come as no surprise, following as it does the poem's many fabulations of colonial history, the most immediate of which is the "poetical fiction" of a feudal amity between coloniser and Xhosa.

"The Emigrant's Cabin" concludes with two stanzas celebrating the enduring friendship of Fairbairn and Pringle, and the role of memory, "written thought" and the imagination in keeping "bright the links of Friendships golden chain". There is a significant excursus in this section insofar as Pringle diverts entirely from the poem's colonial preoccupations and subordinates them to the celebration of male friendship and the sustaining power of the imagination. This abrupt abandonment of the poem's colonial theme suggests an irresolution on Pringle's part: he seems unable to open these themes up to any futurity, or to bring together the personal and its larger context.

Yet, Comrade dear! While memory shall last,
Let our *leal* hearts, aye faithful to the Past,
In frequent interchange of written thought,
Which half the ills of absence sets at nought,
Keep bright the links of Friendship's golden chain,
By living o'er departed days again;
Or meet in Fancy's bower, for ever green,
Though 'half the convex globe intrudes between'. (ll. 297-305)

These final lines enclose the poem's colonial representations within the most conventional of formats. Such an enclosing is apparent also in the poem's self-attenuating and echoic structure: ostensibly a dialogue with John Fairbairn, it is in fact a monologue for two voices, Pringle talking, and then talking back, to himself. In this respect the poem resembles Pringle's endless letters to Fairbairn, in which a repeated refrain is the request that Fairbairn sometimes reply to them! Fairbairn, always a reluctant correspondent, was subsequently to ignore the pleas of the Pringle family to write an autobiography. He even contrived, in circumstances that are not clear, to lose the papers which the Pringle family

entrusted to him to facilitate this task (Morris 1982:410). The “golden chain” of their friendship was certainly tarnished by this inattention and when Pringle completed the poem he must have been aware of this. Thus the poem invokes a dialogical mode of address only to cancel it: just as its invocation of colonial life exists in clear contradiction to the reality of its experience, so this mode of address rests not on an ostensibly interlinked “chain” of reciprocity but on the solipsism of “fancy”. Its final claim that the “bower” of the imagination, like the reviving memory of friendship, remains “for ever green,/Though ‘half the convex globe intrudes between’” shifts the poem even further into the dematerialised or virtual realm of ‘imagination’, which, in a fantasy of self-replicating repletion, remains identical to itself across transcontinental shifts in location.¹¹

In looking back at “The Emigrant’s Cabin”, with its delayed process of composition, its discrepant registers and its confident simulations of colonial history one is struck by its decorative or ornamental manipulation of colonial life. The “cabin” turns out to house not the harsh rigours of frontier existence but rather something like a cabinet of colonial curiosities which, with some tilting of the poetic mirror, easily resettles its contents into passably familiar domestic shapes and social practices. Everything about the poem suggests that Pringle, with varying degrees of facility, wishes to project a view of colonial life which promotes a view of a certain spectrum of colonial behaviours and practices as “respectable” and socially benevolent. That this intent is achieved at the cost of an elision of the material circumstances I have examined elsewhere does not necessarily imply a ‘covering up’ of real circumstances so much as a belated and strategic attempt at intervention – as the tendentiously copious notes testify – into legislative matters that were of immediate importance at the time and that had positive if limited material consequences for the Khoisan inhabitants of the Cape Colony. Although the extent of this particular intervention must surely have been very limited if not entirely negligible, it still allows us to understand the poem’s omissions and emendations of actual circumstances as geared toward strategic goals: in this case the presentation of an imagined “polity” of British humanitarian colonials standing as a kind of proxy for some future colonial state.

The circumstantial complexities of the poem's composition and publication might enable a closer understanding of what the poet was trying to achieve but these do not, however, mitigate the sheer arbitrariness of Pringle's colonial representations, in which the colony functions primarily as a site for the investment of metropolitan values. David Cannadine has observed that Empire was often understood by British subjects as being "in large part about the ... comprehending and reordering of the foreign in parallel, analogous, equivalent, resemblant terms" (2001:xix) and such substitutive understandings and representations are, as I have sought to demonstrate, everywhere evident in "The Emigrant's Cabin". Furthermore, Pringle's manifest and even obsessive concern with the proper gradations of class and the paramount claims of "respectability", most explicitly expressed in his observations of the settlers camped on Algoa Bay and the shocked expostulations on class inversion in the *Account*, evince an understanding of empire or the colony as a place in which "individual social ordering often took precedence over collective racial othering" (2001:10). These concerns with class also surface, of course, in "The Emigrant's Cabin" where men of "taste" ("able in affairs, in books well read") and "enlightened hopes" occupy the imagined apex of colonial society, while the footnotes zealously defend the "respectable" status of a properly conducted interracial marriage. But Pringle's class-inflected colonial representations are so attached to their metropolitan provenance that in "The Emigrant's Cabin" race relations are cast in terms of a status archaism in which indigenous peoples are depicted either as faithful retainers or friendly but deferential chiefs. Such representations offer no resources for the understanding of the violent dynamics of dispossession, racial fear and colonial class inversion that characterised the Eastern Cape frontier at that time.

South African critical responses to "The Emigrant's Cabin", exiguous as they are, display a marked polarity. The poem has either been criticised for its evidently colonial colourations, particularly its tendency to occlude the violence and dispossession that enabled and accompanied settlement; alternatively, in a reversal revealing in itself, the poem is praised

for its creation of a recognisably South African register. The first point of view is found in an article by Dirk Klopper, “Politics of the Pastoral: The Poetry of Thomas Pringle”, published in 1990, which perceptively examines a number of Pringle’s poems, among them “The Emigrant’s Cabin”. For Klopper, the poem is “clearly attempting to assimilate details of the African landscape into a familiar European schema” (1990:33) and in this attempt “the frontier district of the Cape is described as reproducing British social organisation, agricultural pursuits, cultural values and religious aspirations” (36). Working with the notions of the pastoral and the picturesque, Klopper maintains that Pringle naturalises colonial conquest through the notions of redemptive labour, “transform[ing] the wilderness into the pastoral garden of Christian civilisation” (37) while ignoring the subjugation of indigenous peoples indispensable to this enterprise. Similarly, his use of biblical allusion conceals and sanctions the brutal materiality of dispossession. There are obvious points of agreement between Klopper’s analysis and my own; there are also substantial differences. Klopper does not, for example, allude to the poem’s extensive notes, nor does he take into account its temporally staggered composition – he seems to assume that the poem was substantially written in 1822 and can be understood from that perspective.¹² Even though this section of Klopper’s article is, remarkably, the *only* extended analysis of the poem yet published, it is a selective and limited critical engagement occurring as it does within a more extended survey of Pringle’s poetry. The other responses to the poem are relatively brief and rely on generalised assertion rather than analysis. These responses occur, however, in editorial introductions to Pringle’s South African poetry. In the conventions of academic or specialist publishing, such introductions tend to be seen as benchmark evaluations of the work under consideration and are likely to wield interpretative influence on this account alone.

In his introduction to the 1970 edition of *Poems Illustrative of South Africa*, John Wahl begins by favourably comparing the poem with Pringle’s “highly derivative” Scottish poem, “The Autumnal Excursion” and continues:

In evoking this miniature ‘scene from colonial life’ Pringle draws freely upon words of

English, Scots, Cape Dutch and Xhosa origin as he needs them. For dramatic effect he includes two complete sentences in early Afrikaans ... All the characters portrayed, Pringle himself, Fairbairn, Mrs Pringle, her sister Janet Brown, even Moya, the wife of the Amatembu chief, emerge vividly and distinctly. Even when Pringle modulates into seriousness and a direct affirmation of his humanitarian beliefs, he remains confident of the dramatic occasion, and preserves the poised, confident social tone of the poem ... we find our first poet recognising that English poets in South Africa would require new themes and a new diction to express a new sensibility. (1970: xvii-xviii)

Quite apart from one's perplexity at Wahl's claim that the three women "emerge vividly and distinctly", there seems very little substance in the assertion that Pringle is "recognising" the need for a "new" articulation of specifically South African concerns. There might be, in part, some "new diction" but there is surely no significantly local innovation in "themes" and "sensibility", both of which remain resolutely tied to metropolitan models of the most conventional order. Ernest Pereira and Michael Chapman, editors of the 1989 edition of Pringle's South African poems (which they title *African Poems of Thomas Pringle*) make similar claims:

Begun as a verse epistle addressed to John Fairbairn in England, "The Emigrant's Cabin" was expanded and published in 1834 as a 'conversation poem' or dialogue between Pringle and Fairbairn. Models for this were not wanting; what sets Pringle's poem apart is its mastery of tone and technique, as well as the way it functions as both a defence of his way of life and as a domestic documentary. The strong autobiographical element – amounting almost to an *apologia pro vita sua* – is offset by a detailed account of the settler's life: the rude but comfortable hand-made furniture of his 'cabin'; the variety of meats and home grown vegetables available to his guest; his daily activities and limited (but stimulating) intercourse with farmers, officers and officials living within visiting distance. The dialogue is interrupted by the dramatic arrival of the 'Amatembu Chief' come to 'pay/A friendly visit'; there are also touches of humour ... The use of Cape Dutch gives colour and character to the verse, and Pringle shows great skill in his handling of the idiom as well as changes of tone, mood and pace as he switches from one speaker or topic to another.... One has but to compare Pringle's earlier 'Epistle to Mr R[obert] S[torey]', with its elegant poeticisms and refined sensibilities, with the freshness and force of the verse epistle to Fairbairn to appreciate what the 'African experience' had done for Pringle. (1989:xxii-xxiii)

As with Wahl, my disagreements with such understandings of the poem are fundamental. It is perplexing, for example, that the editors should claim that the poem functions as a "domestic documentary" when it seems clear that its documentary aspects, aside from light descriptive touches in the opening stanzas, are invariably evasive or contrived. A certain sleight of hand is also at work: the extract begins by informing us that models for the

“conversation poem” or “dialogue” are not “not wanting” (in itself a disputable point) and then, without supplying any examples of these models, proceed to praise Pringle’s poem for what “sets it apart” from them. This offered and then elided comparison inflates the achievement of the poem before any discussion of it has even begun. It also enables the claim that Pringle’s poem displays a “mastery of tone and technique”, since this mastery is entirely putative, measured as it is against absent examples. In an appended section entitled “The Textual History of the Poems and Pringle’s Notes to the Poems” the editors further note that:

‘The Emigrant’s Cabin’ is undoubtedly one of Pringle’s most important ‘African Sketches’, not only for the insight it provides into the life of an 1820 settler – albeit an unusually gifted one – and for the light it throws on the multi-faceted personality of Pringle himself, but for the adroit intermixture of Dutch-Afrikaans terms and phrases and the witty depiction of an embryonic indigenous culture, notably ‘South African’ in character. (1989:96)

The assertive confidence of “undoubtedly”, coupled with claims for the “indigenous”, reveal something of the agenda behind the reading of these particular editors: the desire to secure Pringle as an originary figure for a white African humanism. In this formulation he stands, in “embryonic” form, as a proleptic figuration of late twentieth-century critics who can now retrospectively endorse him as an early model for their own sensibilities and in the process construct a genealogy or historical authorisation for their own positions. However, might we not posit an analogy between Pringle’s very evident equivocations of colonial settlement and subsequent critical endorsements of these equivocations? I shall not pursue this instance of what is a recurrent concern in the extended history of Pringle’s critical reception: can he be claimed as a foundational figure, lineal to a South African literature and an accruing white African identity, or is he essentially an incidental figure or an import, frozen in the impostures of the colonial past? That this question is posed in such antithetical terms is perhaps not useful to its real difficulties of adjudication, which may require that we move beyond these polarised terms of reference.

* * * * *

In July 1834 Thomas Fowell Buxton addressed Parliament with the request that legislative measures be put in place to protect the rights of indigenous peoples in the British empire. This was the first move in what was later to become the establishment of the Aborigines Protection Committee, the humanitarian successor to the anti-slavery movement and, as Elisabeth Elbourne notes, it was “originally inspired by southern African politics” (2003:5) thanks to the “canny alliance” (6) that John Philip had forged with Buxton in the 1820s. At the time Pringle thought Buxton’s address was too generalised and wrote to Philip protesting that “Buxton is not firm enough. We must have a com[mit]tee”. He urged Philip to “stir up” Buxton to campaign for a committee that would be legislatively empowered to request evidence from colonial informants and publish their depositions. “I wd. have a committee”, he wrote in the same letter, “and get all the facts brought up in their naked and startling deformity” (quoted in Morris, 1982:402). Pringle’s insistence on the marshalling of evidence, of facts, and the public impact of their “naked and startling deformity” is in striking contrast with the approach he employs in poems like “The Emigrant’s Cabin”, where precisely the opposite tendency is evident: the poetic ‘clothing’ and *conforming* of this “naked ... deformity”. How do we account for the fact that Pringle was so eager for the assertion of damaging “facts” in one forum of colonial representation, the parliamentary hearing, but opted for representations of a strenuously mediated order when it came to the writing of much of the poetry? In attempting to unravel this apparent contradiction we might first consider that, at the time of its publication, Pringle’s poetry was unfailingly approved for its decorousness and taste. The tenor of this critical reception is perhaps best summarised by John Lockhart’s review of *African Sketches* in the Tory *Quarterly Review* in December 1835. Lockhart, notorious for his barefisted attacks in *Blackwoods Edinburgh Review* on the “Cockney School” of Keats, Hunt and Hazlitt, wrote that “What strikes us as most remarkable about Pringle’s poetry is its almost constant elegance ... there is rarely in his prose, and almost never in his verse, anything with which the most fastidious reader can

have the smallest right to be offended" (1835: 81). Lockhart is clearly referring here to Pringle's style (for certainly the content of his prose offended any number of people) and in claiming for it unfailing "elegance" and propriety he registers in this stylistic decorum precisely what Pringle so approved in the "upper orders" encamped at Algoa Bay: the discriminations of "taste", the conflation of aesthetic and ethical capabilities. In a similar vein, an anonymous obituarist in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, wrote that "Mr Pringle is favourably known to the public as a sweet and graceful poet" who, in his capacity as editor of "Friendship's Offering" displayed "sound judgement and a refined taste" (1835:326). The fact that Pringle's poetry was so approvingly received by the British reading public despite the distance and novelty of much of what it described should stand as evidence enough that a poem like "The Emigrant's Cabin" - described in Lockhart's review as "pleasing verses" about a "picturesque frontier" - offered no resistance to received understandings of poetic form and sentiment. The broader point I wish to argue here is that we should not underestimate the normative capacities of colonial representations such as Pringle's poems, their ability to recast otherness or difference into formal or generic structures congenial to a metropolitan audience.¹³

A very much more abrasive tactic, however, is at work in other kinds of colonial representation, such as evidence submitted to committees, or some of Pringle's explicit advocacy writing. The function of testimonial or revelatory representation is to bring into public visibility the "deformity" of colonial practice, its violation of social norms, as a prelude to state intervention and correction. Here - in intention at least - the emphasis is on representation stripped of artifice, the direct voice or the indivertible fact. In a slightly bizarre conjunction, the success of such representation is dependent on the degree of depravity it reveals. Consider the following letter from Thomas Buxton to his family, describing proceedings at the hearings of the Aborigines Select Committee:

Tell Ann that we had Capt[ain] Stockenstrom today and that his evidence has been most delightfully frightful and most cheerily horrid. O such a set of villains[,] such robbers [,] such murderers. And Stockenstrom did answer most nobly ... I think the enquiry will do the greatest possible good. I begin to hope that we shall be able to alter the whole of our policy to savage nations. I am getting vehemently interested in the subject. (quoted

in Laidlaw 2004:14)

Buxton's gloating, oxymoronic pleasure in Stockenstrom's testimony, where the recounting of "frightful" events elicits not a transferential sympathy but a gleeful sense of vindication, hints at the perversity that attends the humanitarian investment in making visible the violence and pathology of others. This unsettling paradox could be productively explored, but if we return for the moment to the seemingly incompatible tactics of representative propriety in Pringle's poetry and the recourse to damaging, unmediated 'facts' in other forms of testimony or advocacy, we are now perhaps in a position to understand their inter-relation. On the one hand, in the entirely inoffensive figural exemplarity of the poems, we are offered a mode of representation that conforms to, and confirms, the most acceptable and mainstream metropolitan models. On the other, direct testimony or unadorned 'fact' acts as a transparent window onto colonial transgression and prompt the need for its redress. In Pringle's case the two strategies work in mutually affirming ways: the poems credentialise Pringle as a person of discriminating taste and this in turn lends authority to his attestations, direct or otherwise, of colonial abuse. An obvious instability inheres in such representations since their apparent reciprocations do in fact cancel each other out (we saw a similar process at work in the tensions between footnote and poetic text in "The Emigrant's Cabin"); in addition, the revelation of the misdeeds of others requires that the advocates of the humanitarian cause are not themselves stained by any misdemeanour (one compelling reason for Pringle's backdating of his humanitarian sensibilities and his self-presentation in the *Narrative* as one who, *in propria persona*, embodies the ethical virtues he proposes as indispensable to the imperial mission).

In time these humanitarian preoccupations with settler recidivism would abate, to be replaced by the starker and far more irresolvable antinomies of race. But at this stage humanitarians like Pringle were convinced that settler intransigence, and not indigenous resistance, constituted the most significant impediment to a humane and productive colonial state. From this position it followed that metropolitan legislative measures aimed at curbing and directing settler behaviour, combined with an expansion of the role of missionaries,

provided the best path forward. In this scenario, indigenous people were scripted as willing participants in these “schemes for civilising savage men”, and part of the mission of the Select Committee was to bring such participants into public visibility as exemplars of humanitarian achievement. But these representative relays between the colonies and the imperial capital were quite explicitly slanted away from any kind of substantive ‘representing’ of indigenous people. The “political struggles” around colonial governance in this period had, as Alan Lester notes, “very little to do with the compromised relationships” between indigenous peoples and *all* types of settlers: “they were fought through the politics of representation across a discursive terrain connecting the Cape with Britain” (2001:105).

My concern here has been with the politico-aesthetics of this late phase of Pringle’s writing and in particular how it fashioned its discursive tactics on the model of metropolitan paradigms in order to promote an idea of the colony as a place of (potential) similitudes while at the same time relying on the negative advocacy of unsettling “facts” relating to colonial misdemeanour and the necessity for their legislative correction. In Pringle’s poetry, the translation of colonial experience into the received registers of polite verse credentialises the colonial for a middle class reading public and in so doing affirms the social profile of the projects for colonial reform with which Pringle was associated. Pringle himself was explicit about this. In the preface to *African Sketches* he expressed the hope that the book would be “found in no respect incongruous with his recent labours, and, in so far as it relates to the condition and improvement of the long-oppressed Natives of Southern Africa, even strictly subsidiary to the same cause” (1989: 138-9). This project of a poetry “subsidiary to the cause” is most programmatically realised in what was, as far as can be ascertained, the last poem Pringle ever wrote. Entitled “Pass of the Great Fish River, South Africa” and published in 1834 in the evangelical magazine *The Missionary*, the poem is an astonishing evangelical endeavour to re-inaugurate the first contact on the Eastern frontier between missionaries and Xhosa. In this poem, as in others he wrote towards the end of his life, the lines between Pringle the evangelist proselytiser and Pringle the poet become increasingly blurred.

There is not much to be said about “Pass of the Great Fish River” that the poem does not say for itself. It opens as follows:

SCENE – Party of Missionaries passing the river with wagons and attendants A Caffer chief, with a few followers, meets them on the Eastern Bank. The leading missionary (suppose old VanderKemp) addresses the chief, announcing the character and objects of his message to the Heathen. The scene is supposed to occur at a period when the Great Fish River was still the boundary of the colony to the eastward.

The frontier ford is passed. Unyoke the teams;
Let the tired oxen, drenched by Kankai's streams,
Have pasture and repose. Seek we the shade,
Where clustering evergreens a bower have made
Between the mountain and the river's brink,
Which winds around in many a mazy link.

And lo! A group of friendly natives wait
To welcome us at Amakosa's gate.
I mark the chieftain by his lordly eye,
The leopard fur and glittering assegai;
Let us accost him – and with earnest speech
Win his attention to the truths we teach.

Pringle's recasting of this scene is very freely imagined. He must have been well aware, for example, that Johannes van der Kemp, the first LMS missionary allowed by the colonial government to proselytise among the Xhosa, did so under conditions of extreme hostility and suspicion (Mostert 1993: 306-314). While Pringle implicitly allows for the invention of his version of events – consider the suppositional awkwardness of “supposed to be old VanderKemp” and “the scene is supposed to occur” – we still have to ask what motivates this quite extraordinary revision of colonial history, as though it is now free to be evangelically re-invented in the image of an imagined future. If we turn to the stanza above, its most obvious move is to set up the moment of contact as one of amicable reception: first by configuring the surrounding landscape into an embowering and “clustering” protectiveness, and second by presenting the “friendly natives” as willing auditors of the “earnest speech” which is to follow - four lengthy stanzas which sermonise relentlessly on sin and redemption. The full details of the poem need not concern us; what is striking, however, is the poem's absolute insistence on the worthlessness of the Xhosa lifeworld. Despite appealing to an eschatology in which sin is universal, and even allowing for this through an

imagined interjection (“– But white men, you reply, are wicked too! Yes – *all* are vile, Ham, Japhet, Gentile, Jew”), this is a forbiddingly proscriptive universalism which conceives the Xhosa world as a dualism. Its exterior aspects are “bright and fair”, abundant with resources, but beneath the surface lurks a Satanic disposition to evil:

- But are you happy midst these blessings? No!
 Witness your bitter feuds, your ceaseless jars,
 Your burning jealousies, your bloody wars;
 And darker still, where Superstition lends
 Her fiendish arts to aid inhuman ends, -
 Where SORCERY compounds her cursed spell –
 Fear, folly, cruelty and hate from hell –
 Sprinkling the hissing venom from the land,
 Till chief and vassal speed at her command -

There is much more to quote in this vein: but what motivates this vituperative descent into the rhetoric of moral absolutism? The answer, or at least part of the answer, might be found in the concluding note appended to the poem by the magazine’s editor, which contains the astonishing claim that Pringle’s adjurations to the Xhosa have had the desired effect:

The message of Divine mercy borne by the first heralds of salvation to the aboriginal tribes of South Africa, both within and beyond the Great Fish River, though long neglected, perverted, or despised, has through the Divine blessing, been since received by multitudes, who are living in obedience to the pure and salutary precepts it enjoins, experiencing the ennobling and elevating influence of the moral principles it inculcates, and the glorious hope of immortality which it enfolds; and the rising settlements, the cultured fields, the blooming gardens, the grazing herds, the lively children in the schools, whose countenances beam with vivacity and intelligence, together with a sober, industrious, free, and happy population, are among the proofs that the wilderness and solitary places are glad for them. –ED. (1834:183).

What do we make of this mirage of indigenous converts rising up out of the “wilderness and solitary places” imbued with the spirit of the gospel and the habits of an industrious modernity, as though commerce and Christianity had affected a sudden acceleration of historical time and achieved their objectives overnight? Strange as such projections might now seem they were, at the time, fairly commonplace among the evangelical abolitionists. In a fascinating commentary, David Brion Davis has described how the abolition of colonial slavery was understood by this group not merely as a secular political act, but as

instantiating the ontological or providential fulfilment of “the eschatological promise of Christianity, prefiguring an era of universal freedom and harmony” (1984:119). Drawing on Paul Ricoeur’s temporal distinction between *chronos*, the accumulative time of one thing after another, and *kairos*, a time in which there is a decisive rupture in the chronology of history and a singular event or “eschatological leap” (128) occurs, Davis argues that the evangelicals were convinced that the events of 1834 signalled precisely such a moment and would precipitate a period of utopian social transformation. Amongst the evidence he cites for these expectations is an anthology published in 1834, *The Bow in the Cloud*, which advertised itself as containing “prose and verse illustrative of the evils of slavery, and commemorative of its abolition in the British colonies” (quoted p.125). One of the prose contributions, written by a clergyman and entitled “Description of Jamaica”, contains an extraordinary passage which imagines the blessings of abolition as resulting in the mutation of the physiognomy of the island’s former slave inhabitants, a mutation which renders them quite literally in the image of their creator: “The brow which receded now rises into a mass of power and sublimity; the chin, which in consequence of this deformity, once protruded, now fixes the right angle of the facial line; the lips have lost their sensual thickness, the nostrils their brutal dilation ...” (quoted p.126). These concentrated facial aesthetics, in some ways reminiscent of the appeal to “European eyes” in the Beaufort West *tronk* passage examined in an earlier chapter, might be grotesquely wishful, but this very wishfulness, as Davis reminds us, invites the contemplation of the converse picture:

Utopian dreams often half conceal a latent nightmare. It is clear that many reformers feared that the revitalising *kairos*, once unleashed, would bring on the very disaster predicted by the slaveowners: that after being liberated, the blacks would reject Christianity and “civilisation”, turn against their benefactors, and become lazy, violent, barbarous, and ungovernable. On an important psychological level, this negative image is the true subject of *The Bow and the Cloud*. (129)

If we return to Pringle’s poem, then the appended fantasy of instant colonial regeneration is clearly cognate with the bizarre facialisations of the clergyman, just as the poem itself, with its stricken renditions of Xhosa depravity, might be taken to illustrate the latent anxiety that the Xhosa will refuse the civilising mission and remain entrenched in, as Pringle puts it,

“your refuges of lies, /Your deeds of shame, your horrid sorceries”. Even within the poem, the sheer entreaty of its tone betrays an apprehension that the projected future might not come to pass. The poem ends with the following lines:

- To-day Salvation cometh to your land,
Christ’s lowly messengers before you stand;
Receive us, Chief! and hail the Day of Grace
Thus dawning on thy long-benighted race:
O! spurn thou not the boon, lest God remove
The light, and leave you to the lusts you love
Of which the fruit is death. To-day! to-day!
Is the accepted time: ‘twere madness to delay.(1834:163)

Might we not understand this apparently retrospective entreatment as in fact constituting a present tense appeal to the Xhosa to embrace Christianity in its *kairos* moment, lest the “Day of Grace” then “dawning” over empire be “remove[d]”? Whatever its motivating intents, “Pass of the Great Fish River” is a poem that reveals an attitude towards the Xhosa distinctly at odds with the general tenor of Pringle’s remarks about them, where he frequently registers admiration for their behaviour, particularly in the face of extreme and unwarranted colonial intrusion and provocation – such as that shown in the commando raids. The final pages of Pringle’s *Narrative*, written at much the same time as this poem, speak of the “unvindictive disposition” of the Xhosa and praise “the generosity of the Caffer character towards persons placing confidence in their protection” (1966:334). It is unlikely that this poem marks a turnaround in attitude; it is an indication, rather, of Pringle’s absorption in the millenarian fervour so characteristic of this period, and its conviction that the passing of the anti-slavery act vindicated the abolitionist movement as “the most liberal and progressive force in human history” (Davis 1984:129). It is nonetheless a disquieting augur of the future that, at its moment of triumph, abolitionism could so freely voice its anxieties about the inherent disabilities the indigenous or slave people of empire would now be obliged to overcome.

One is, in any case, never quite done with Pringle, in the sense of reaching a confidently conclusive sense of the positions he occupied. Up to this point I have examined a central tendency of his poetry, its move towards a metropolitan vantage in which the anxieties of colonial life are modulated into the more formal enactments of mainstream or polite verse and, beyond this, a poetry explicitly tied to evangelical causes. Yet this poetry reveals, at times, tensions and dissensions which suggest that Pringle might well have found his public persona constraining. Consider, for example, the poem "The Honeybird and the Woodpecker", written for juvenile readers. It was first published in the *Tourist* in 1833, a magazine set up by the Anti-Slavery society to widen their reading constituency. In this first publication, the poem consists of a dialogue between the two birds in which the Honeybird asks for the help of the Woodpecker to open up a beehive:

So he flew to the Woodpecker - 'Cousin' quoth he
 'Cherr-a-cher, cherr-a-cher, cherr-a cu-coo-la
 'Come help me to harry the sly Honey-bee '
 Cherr-a-cherr, Wood-peck-er, cherr-achop-hoola

Says the Woodpecker, gravely, 'To rob is a crime',
 'Tic-a-tac, tic-a-tac, chop-at-a-hoola -'
 'Besides I hate honey, and cannot spare time',
 'Tic-a-tac, tic-a-tac, snap-at-a-snoola!' (1989:89)

And so forth. The Honeybird eventually manages to persuade the Woodpecker into pecking the hive open with the inducement of "juicy young-bees" and the latter puts away his scruples on the grounds that "insects are things". The poem then closes with a didactic "moral" in which the young readers are advised to draw an analogy between themselves and the Honeybird ("If thou art a Honey-bird, who is the Bee? -) - with the bee, of course, being "the poor Negro - who suffers for thee/In the slave-cultured islands far over the sea". In this version the poem sits fairly predictably within the generic expectations of popular abolitionist poetry, which often allegorised the production and consumption of sugar in pointed ways. But Pringle then published the poem again in *African Sketches*, not as a self-

standing piece but attached to the notes on "The Kosa". In a gloss to the lines "With fragrant horde of honey-bee/Rifled from the hollow tree", he explains at some length the habits of the African "Honey-Bird, or Bee-Cuckoo (*Cuculus Indicator*)" and in particular its curious practice of alerting both other animals and humans to the presence of wild honey, since the bird is unable by itself to extract the honeycomb. Pringle then relates a Hottentot tale that the Honeybird is known to call on the assistance of the Woodpecker, partial to bee larvae, to gain access to hives in hollow trees. (1989: pp.88-9). He concludes his account by saying that though he cannot vouch for the Woodpecker story from his own experience, "it may, at all events, be admitted as sufficient poetical authority for the following little fable, which, though written only for juvenile readers, has a moral serious enough to entitle it to a place among these African notices" (89). This cryptic authorisation is followed by a verbatim version of the poem published in the *Tourist*, but instead of "The Moral" with which that poem concludes Pringle substituted the following stanza:

While thus with pungent gibe and jest
 The friends gave relish to their feast,
 Suddenly burst on their ear
 Sounds of tumult, fury, fear –
 The rush of steeds, the musket's rattle,
 The female shriek, the shout of battle,
 The bellowing of captured cattle. –
 Flew the startled birds on high,
 Of this rout the cause to spy,
 Perched upon the topmost bough,
 Quoth *Cuculus*, 'I see it now:
 'Those unfeathered bipeds, MEN,
 'Are at their bloody work again;
 'Dutch and English in a band
 'Are come to rifle Cafferland.
 'Lo, like bees around their hive,
 'The dusky Amakosa strive;
 'But they buzz and sting in vain,
 'The honey-nest, the kraal is ta'en;
 'Young and old in death are lying,
 'And the harried swarm are flying;
 'While around the cattle pen
 'Loudly laugh the "Christian men"!
 'How can Dutch or English care
 'For Africans with woolly hair?
 'What care they who dies or lives?
 'They have got the bonny beeves,

'And, to hallow this day's work,
 'They'll tithe the soil to build a kirk
 'Faugh! I hate the smell of blood,
 'Let us down into the wood –
 ' Let us back into our feast –
 'We're no hypocrites at least!' (1989: pp.90-1)

The mordant bluntness of this addition to the poem is startling; it is hard to believe that it is intended only for juvenile readers. There are no pointed distinctions between Dutch and English, nor any attempt to mitigate the savagery of colonial behaviour by placing it within the frame of a moral reprobation which implicitly claims an alternative course of action. At the end of the poem the Honeybird does not speak with the condemnatory voice of another colonialism: he only says he does not like the smell of blood and that their raiding of the bees does not seek cover in sanctimony. To be sure, there is disapproval in this, but it is not - as it is in the sonnet sequence examined earlier - a principled, Christian disapproval that allows Christian ethics to halt the slide of colonial depravity. No such privileged signifier is at work here and the result is a disquieting directness: the colonial enterprise is legalised theft and those institutions which should stabilise social behaviour and keep it from common transgression, the army and especially the church, are themselves deeply implicated in inadmissible actions. The lines "For how can Dutch or English care/For Africans with woolly hair" have a disarming candour, as though they are nothing other than the statement of self-evident fact over which there is no need to equivocate. The cumulative effect of such plain statement is, to my mind, far more powerful a critique of colonialism than the overtly didactic and accusatory register which characterises most of Pringle's other poetry on "Afric's wrongs" because it suggests, with considerable prescience, that colonialism is abandoned by Christian precept, as immune to moral improvement as it is to the scoldings of birds in trees. To locate the poem in colonial actuality, Pringle provides two telling glosses: the first refers to the kraal as a "honey nest" and gives details as to how this term was used to describe an expedient attack on a Xhosa chief who had been promised immunity and, expecting no hostilities, was easily subdued and looted, with some of his principals murdered in the process; the second refers to a controversially illegal confiscation of Xhosa cattle, the bounty of which was used to build a church -

although these "consecrated funds" were subsequently diverted "to a different purpose" (1989:91). These criminal misdemeanours, so common to events on the Eastern frontier, constitute the dismal substrate of colonial life, and Pringle's bleak little fable does nothing to disguise this.

The tension between a poetry which arrests and corrects the movement or slide toward irredeemable colonial behaviour by framing it within a redemptive Christianity, and a poetry in which these tendencies – what Pringle earlier called the "startling and naked deformity" of colonial life – are not framed or curtailed in this way is apparent elsewhere as well. Consider the poem "The Caffer Commando".

Hark! – heard ye the signals of triumph afar?
 'Tis our Caffer Commando returning from war,
 The voice of their laughter comes loud on the wind,
 Nor heed the curses that follow behind.
 For who cares for him, the poor Kosa, that wails
 Where the smoke rises dim from yon desolate vales –
 That wails for his little ones killed in the fray,
 And his herds by the colonists carried away?
 Or who cares for him that once pastured this spot,
 Where his tribe is extinct and their story forgot?
 As many another, ere twenty years pass,
 Will only be known by their bones in the grass!
 And the sons of the Keisi, the Kei, the Gariap,
 With the Gunja and Ghona in silence shall sleep:
 For England hath spoken in her tyrannous mood,
 And the edict is writing in African blood!

Dark Katta is howling: the eager jackal
 As the lengthening shadows more drearily fall,
 Shrieks forth his hymn to the horned moon;
 And the lord of the desert will follow him soon:
 And the tiger-wolf laughs in his bone-strewed brake,
 And calls on his mate and her cubs to awake;
 And the panther and leopard come leaping along;
 All hymning to Hecate a festival song:
 For the tumult is over, the slaughter hath ceased –
 And the vulture hath bidden them all to the feast! (ll. 1-26)

Though not in any way an accomplished poem (there are obtrusive echoes of Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib" in lines 2 to 4 and the concluding couplet), "The Caffer Commando" is unsparing in its depiction of the brutally exterminatory policies of the Cape

colonial government. The poem positions an unqualified “England” as the tyrannical ‘author’ of a colonial necropolitics written in blood and memorialised by bones – a politics that is set to continue, as lines 11 and 12 suggest, into an unredeemed future. Colonialism features here as a Burkean nightmare of destructive modernity, rendering the traditional polities of the colonised extinct and forgotten while it fattens on the booty of their destruction. If the first stanza is unremittingly critical of colonial practice then the second records a bizarre displacement of embodiment from people to animals. In this scenario, an unlikely gathering of animals (a lion, a tiger-wolf with its mate and cubs, a panther and a leopard) alerted by a howling jackal, gather at nightfall to join in with the vultures in feasting off the “slaughter” described in the first stanza. These animals recall the ominous “wizard-wolves” and “vultures” from the final stanza of “Makanna’s Gathering”, who are similarly summonsed to feast on the “glorious prey” of what one assumes is a defeated British army. These evocations of scavenging beasts feasting off human corpses, lurid though they might be, indicate a grotesque and fundamental disturbance in the relations between nature and culture, a disturbance consequent on the behaviour of the coloniser, whether inviting desperate retaliation or inflicting unnecessary death. The second stanza in “The Caffer Commando” also contradictorily suggests that its nocturnal African predators are performing a rite which reaches back into a Western canon: they are “All hymning to Hecate a festival song” (in “Makanna’s Gathering” the animals gather “at UHLANGA’s call”). Hecate, associated with the nocturnal and with witchcraft, seems an unlikely convoker of African animal spirits, and in his marginalia to the manuscript of *African Sketches* Charles Lamb noted as much: “Hecate is not in Hottentot mythology. What is she in Caffer fables?” (Nelm: Coll.Pri, np). And yet Pringle chose to ignore Lamb’s advice, so we must assume that he saw some logic in this reference. What this logic was we cannot know, but at least one assumption, far-fetched though it might sound, is that Pringle pointedly attributes this breach in the social order to spirits ancestral to the European tradition. There is, in any event, an unmistakable sense of disturbance working in the poem, and though Pringle’s contemporaries might well have read this second stanza of “The Caffer Commando” as an African version of the kind of oriental bizarrerie we find

in poems such as Southey's *Kehanna's Curse* (1804), I would suggest that this poem, unlike those which appeal directly to the sensibility of their readers, invites a reading more attentive to the particularity of its context.

There is a further peculiarity to attend to in "The Caffer Commando", for the version we have examined was preceded by an earlier one, first published in the *Oriental Herald* in 1827 and then in *Ephemerides* in 1828, in which the first stanza ended on the present line 12 and was followed by the stanzas below:

Who, then, is the bandit? – the heathen – or he,
 With his Christian burghers and Cape chivalry,
 Who, marking his track with fire, rapine and blood,
 Has left half a nation despoil'd of their food?

'But they are but savages – not worth a thought –
 Who thus must be taught to behave as they ought;
 And six thousand cattle will make a good show
 In print – and in paying some pledges we owe.

Promotion will follow – and, as for the rest,
 'Tis *powder and ball* suits these savages best:
 You may cant about Missions and Civilization
 My plan is to shoot – or enslave the whole nation'.

Thus spoke the gay Chief in his arrogant mood –
 And his words are now writing in African blood. (1989:102)

Why did Pringle choose to excise these stanzas and replace them with the stanza we have already examined? Such a move, on the face of it, entails a direct reversal of the decision to remove the formulaic "Moral" about slavery and sugar from "The Honeybird and the Woodpecker" and replace it with pointed depiction of colonial misconduct. While the substituted passage in the final version of "The Caffer Commando" is not without disquieting resonance, it still employs poetic figurations familiar to its British readers and these, in themselves, soften its critical edge. Yet – such is the contrariety of Pringle – he now chooses to do the opposite and expunge from "The Caffer Commando" a passage very similarly critical of unwarranted colonial excursions into Xhosa territory and their brutally instrumental motivation. In these lines "Missions and Civilisation" are reduced to a

sideshow, mere “cant”, while the business-end of colonialism is conducted by a militia intent on plunder and subjugation. Perhaps such implications were not considered judicious in 1834, but even in 1828 these lines, with their unadorned condemnation of British complicity in acts of unlawful violence, must surely have stretched the limits of polite taste.

As a strong example of how both these tendencies in Pringle converge in a single poem – the tendency toward an exposure of the deformed or ‘obscene’ (in the etymological sense of that which is hidden away) aspects of colonialism, and its promissory and utopian pact for the future – I turn to “The Desolate Valley”. Two of the poem’s stanzas were published as self-contained poems in the 1830 and 1832 editions of *Friendship’s Offering* and it appeared in its final form in *African Sketches*. The poem, though not particularly striking on the expressive level, is interesting in that it offers us something like a genealogy or compressed history of Pringle’s colonial engagement and the different impulses at work within it. “The Desolate Valley” is in one sense a landscape poem, and the two stanzas published separately in *African Sketches* offer us African, or Africanised landscapes which deploy familiar techniques to render alien or exotic scenes. The stanza published in the 1830 edition of *Friendship’s Offering* was titled “African Woodlands” and the stanza published in 1832 “African Scenery”. Though Pringle emended these stanzas when he included them in “The Desolate Valley”, they were tightened up rather than substantially altered. As examples of landscape or locodescriptive poetry the first four stanzas offer no attempt to place the subject within his surroundings in the manner of “Evening Rambles”; instead, the field of vision is entirely unrestricted. The first stanza is typical:

Far up among the forest-belted mountains,
Where Winterberg, stern giant old and grey,
Looks down the subject dells, whose gleaming fountains
To wizard Kat their virgin tribute pay,
A valley opens to the noontide ray,
With green savannahs shelving to the brim
Of the swift river, sweeping on his way
To where Umtoka hies to meet with him,
Like a blue serpent gliding through the acacias dim. (ll. 1-9)

This aerial view allows the poem's narrating subject an unobstructed power to venture where it will. In a similar manner the landscape is personified and brought into assimilable scale, particularly by the "stern giant" of the mountain summit, who, from an elevation similar to that occupied by the reader, "looks down the subject dells" over which he reigns. The exotic touches ("wizard Kat"; "like a blue serpent gliding" etc) then offset the poem without in any way encroaching on its generic typicality. That such descriptions were understood by metropolitan readers as offering them an Africa for spectatorial consumption is evident in the following reference to Pringle in *The Court Magazine* in 1834:

We may next mention the African Glen, at the Colosseum, in Regent's Park. This attractive novelty, aided by a magnificent panoramic painting, transports us at once into the wilds of Africa, with its hills and valleys, its rivers and its animals. Here, in the heart of London, we have the reality of the scenes so vividly painted by the African poet, Thomas Pringle. (no. 5, July - December 1834:44)

The throwaway reference to Pringle as "the African poet" is an indication of how strongly his reputation rested on an association with a generalised "Africa" - which seems here to be understood solely as a scenic phenomenon devoid of human presence, not unlike the panoramic painting to which it is likened. The fact that Pringle began this poem as a two-part set of landscape sketches in a publication guaranteed to reach a wide audience perhaps indicates that he was aware of the predilection for such poetry, and sought deliberately to cater to it. Be that as it may, this strategic use of African material should not obscure the other impulses informing this work. After four stanzas of "scenes ... vividly painted", "The Desolate Valley" ceases to be a generalised poem of the African landscape and the animals which populate it (the fourth stanza describes a herd of elephants and the trumpeting that summons them to a nocturnal gathering). Instead, we move towards the scenes of 'desolation' which the poem has, until this moment, delayed:

Such the majestic, melancholy scene
Which 'midst that mountain-wilderness we found;
With scarce a trace to tell where man had been,
Save the old Caffer cabins crumbling round.
Yet this lone glen (Sicana's ancient ground),
To nature's savage tribes abandoned long,

Had heard, erewhile, the Gospel's joyful sound,
 And low of herds mixed with the Sabbath song.
 But all is silent now. The Oppressor's hand was strong. (ll. 37-45)

The stanza begins with an awkward attempt at transition: the “Such” introducing the first line has no prior referent, and refers instead to the depopulated scene of lines 39 to 41. Once again Pringle is grafting one poem onto another and on this occasion it seems likely that the events of 1834 are the motivating occasion for a further four stanzas which both decry the consequences of the destruction of an unspecified Christian mission on the Eastern Frontier and look forward to its triumphant resurrection. Pringle’s notes on the poem extend only as far as its opening stanzas, where they supply geographical and other details; the remaining stanzas are uncharacteristically unannotated, and the reason for this may well be that Pringle has constructed the poem as an allegorical Christian fable of colonial loss and redemption rather than weighting it with specific detail. In the stanza above, for example, Pringle wishfully casts colonial history as having suffered the loss of a former (“erewhile”) Christian plenitude; it is not just “man” who has disappeared from this “lone glen”, but a specific man, the converted Xhosa, for this abandoned site was “Sicana’s ancient ground” (in a footnote to another poem, Pringle says of Sicana that he was “a remarkable man [who] composed the first Christian hymn, or sacred song, ever expressed in his native tongue”(1989:107). Exactly why this site has been “To Nature’s savage tribes abandoned long” is not made clear; as the poem proceeds, however, what is established is that these are the ruins of a missionary village “scathed by flame and smoke”, while “The Oppressor” who committed these acts is not named.

The stage is nevertheless set for Pringle to dramatise two antithetical forces and he begins by juxtaposing the “roofless ruin” which “Tells where the decent mission-chapel stood” with a “jabbering” baboon, a creature who menaces the human with intimations of evolutionary descent that “mock” the aspirations of Christian redemption:

While a baboon with jabbering cry doth mock
 The pilgrim, pausing in his pensive mood,
 To ask – ‘Why is it thus? Shall evil baffle GOOD?’ (ll. 52-3)

This melodramatic emplacement of opposites is then ‘resolved’ by those who “wait in faith” for the end of the “season” in which “Satan may prevail,/And hold, as if secure, his dark domain”. Faith controls the temporal, and those who wait will be rewarded by the providential rains of renewal: “The long – parched land shall laugh, with harvests crowned,/And through those silent wastes Jehovah’s praise resound”.

If this is dead, doctrinal verse then the excessive figurations of the final stanza reach towards a Protestant Gothic:

Look round that Vale; behold the unburied bones
Of Ghona’s children withering in the blast:
That sobbing wind, that through the forest moans,
Whispers – ‘The spirit hath forever passed!’
Thus, in the Vale of Desolation vast
In moral death dark Afric’s myriads lie;
But the appointed day shall dawn at last,
When, breathed on by a spirit from on High
The dry bones shall awake, and shout – ‘Our God is nigh!’ (ll. 64-72)

This colonial Golgotha, a graveyard of “unburied bones”, attests both to the relentlessly destructive impact of the European incursion, which shatters even the rites of the dead, and to its potential operation, in other forms, as the emissary of a power which can undo this shattering by an act of magical pneumatology capable of breathing life even into that most absolute evidence of its disappearance: “dry bones”. By contemporary standards such belief-systems might be considered delusional or even psychotic, but it would be a mistake to underestimate the efficacy they possessed in their time; as we have seen, such millennial beliefs were central to the ambitions of the abolitionists. They were also central to the promise of colonial Christianity itself which, as Achille Mbembe has argued, always carried a message of utter transformation to its pagan converts, offering in the place of their eradicated world “the promise of redemption ... a set of ideas that, because of their ability to enchant, could be defined as magico-poetic” (2002:634). As Mbembe notes, this “magico-poetic” pledge had as its central premise precisely what we see at work here: the “sublime dream” of “resurrection from the dead” – a dream that, as it happened, was adapted to

African belief systems in ways that its Christian promulgators could not have anticipated. We might also observe that, despite the rational calculus in which the eschatology of redemption was embedded, its underlying premise was quite as fantastical and ‘superstitious’ as those belief systems it sought to replace.

Pringle’s invocation of these logics of redemption, with their appeal to an authorisation beyond appeal, seeks to forestall the sheer awfulness of South African colonialism by installing it within an eschatology which promises deliverance from the dire temporality of the present. Such interventions or forestallings, which seek to halt the slide of colonial signifiers into a morass of amoralism, are central to the dynamics of the later South African poetry, and may usefully be understood as a variant on the Lacanian conception of the *point de capiton* or ‘quilting’ point. To put it briefly – and without making anything other than an improvisatory use of this concept – the *point de capiton* (in literal terms the upholsterer’s button holding down the fabric on furniture) functions as a node of arrest or an enclosing signifier for the potentially endless repetition of language along the signifying chain. Lacan incorporates and reworks Jakobson’s distinction between the substitutive and combinative functions of metaphor and metonymy and displaces these functions from the linguistic level to the more general production of meaning. If, in their abstract formulation the workings of metaphor and metonymy produce a limitless chain of signifiers that do not in principle know any terminus, then this is not the case in practice where, without forms of stabilised reference, or consensually acknowledged master signifiers, shared exchange is impossible. For Lacan such consensual agreement does not constitute a return to essentialism or nominalism, but is a practice of behaviour or “schema ...essential in experience” (1993:268). Interestingly, in the seminar in which he elaborates this concept, Lacan chooses the Christian “fear of God” as his primary example of a quilting point, a decisive “transmutation of the situation through the intervention of the signifier”(267) or a “point of convergence which enables everything ... to be situated retroactively and prospectively”(268).

If we return now to the disturbed sociopolitical ethos of colonialism, it should be evident that the need for a signifying “knot” to bind together the volatile and often menacing ‘field’ of colonialism is particularly acute. In the case of the ascendant humanitarian lobby, with its confidence that the abolition of slavery marked a “transmutation’ of the conduct of empire, there is a further need for a swift and incontrovertible demonstration that the thaumaturgic powers of Christian redemption be made manifest in actual behaviours. For Pringle, as for other humanitarian abolitionists concerned with the Cape Colony, this concrete objectification took the form of the establishment of the Kat River Settlement, the subject of a late flurry of reportage in Pringle’s *Narrative*.

* * * * *

The settlement consisted of productive land confiscated from the Xhosa and set aside for cultivation by Hottentots, who were granted an unprecedented degree of autonomy in their own affairs. For the humanitarians, this experiment in colonial governance and the allegedly swift progress of civility in the new settlement countersigned their claims by, as Pringle put it, “furnish[ing] a lesson full of instruction to all whose hearts and understandings are not sealed up by the most vulgar prejudices of caste and colour”(1966:263). He continues:

Here we behold a people, debased by oppression and contumely till they had sunk below the level even of the Negro slaves, their brothers in misfortune; a people for generations made a bye-word to the civilised world for stupidity, indolence, improvidence, intemperance, - held forth to universal scorn as the most brutalised family of the human race, and utterly unfit to be intrusted with the common privileges of humanity. This nation of African Helots, to the number of 30,000 souls, has been raised from the dust at once and without any preparations (except what a *few* had received at the missionary institutions), to the full rights of free men ... (263)

Pringle’s characterisation of the Hottentot is not without point: in both colloquial and evidential discourse of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Hottentots were indeed a “bye-word” for a regressive and inalterable human type, uniquely immiserated and

immune to improvement.¹⁴ For this reason they were all the more potent as exemplars of the new imperial order inaugurated by the abolition of slavery, able to “raise ... from the dust at once” even the most abject of its subjects. A little earlier in the *Narrative* Pringle had quoted Fairbairn who, in a manner reminiscent of the passage in *The Bow and the Cloud*, imagined the Hottentot inhabitants of the Kat River Settlement as undergoing an instant physiological enhancement of being: “The Hottentot escaped from bonds ... [and] stood erect on his new territory; and the feeling of being restored to the level of humanity and the simple rights of nature, softened and enlarged his heart, and diffused vigour through every limb” (257).

The Kat River Settlement thus became – for a while anyway – a concentrated symbolic space in which British as well as local abolitionists and humanitarians invested their hopes for revived colonial rule. In an account of the interactions between metropolitan and colonial reformers, Elizabeth Elbourne speaks of their construction of the Kat River Settlement as a “community of the imagination” (2002:273) – exactly repeating a phrase used by Timothy Keegan (1996:118) to describe the same phenomenon; both historians insist on the primarily discursive function to which the settlement was put, its status as a rhetorical event far outweighing its actuality as an inconclusive socio-political experiment.¹⁵ It is within the framework of such rhetorics, as I have argued, that much of Pringle’s later South African poetry should be understood. If one considers those later poems which I have not looked at – notably “The Rock of Reconcilement” (1829), “The Captive of Camalu” (1832), “The Ghona Widow’s Lullaby” (1833) – they are, unsurprisingly, poems of proselytisation in which indigenous subjects (Xhosa and Ghonaqua Hottentot) ‘speak’ in the accents of conversion and redemption. Thus “The Captive of Camalu” is, as Pringle puts it in the notes to the poem, “supposed to express the feelings of some of those Caffers and Ghonaquas converted by the missionary Willams who, after the devastating wars of 1818,1819, were forced to become bondmen among the boors, or imprisoned on Robben Island” (1989:105). These “feelings” turn out to be imbued with an exemplary Christian forgiveness of the savage acts of colonialism, and an anticipation of the redemptive acts that will succeed such forgiveness. After seven stanzas recounting a fall from the pastoral grace of “green Camalu” to a state of

subordination strongly resembling slavery (“Upon my flesh to bear his brand - /His blows, his bitter scorn to bide! –“), the poem concludes with three stanzas in which the captive Xhosa speaker, who feels “Death’s shadowy clime” to be imminent, surrenders his tribal futurity to the “Father-God”. The final stanza reads as follows:

Thy Kingdom come! Let Light and Grace
 Throughout all lands in triumph go;
 Till pride and strife to love give place,
 And blood and tears forget to flow;
 Till Europe mourn for Afric’s woe,
 And o’er the deep her arms extend
 To lift her where she lieth low -
 And prove indeed her Christian friend. (ll.72-80)

In a strangely untroubled projection, Pringle’s Xhosa speaker, who is so generalised as to be a representative type, reveals himself as an already fully assimilated evangelical, awaiting only the acceleration of his people into the millennial time of the new Christian order when “Light and Grace/Throughout all lands in triumph go.” A very similar projection operates in “The Ghona Widow’s Lullaby”, first published in a slightly shorter version in the evangelical magazine *The Missionary* in 1833 before being revised again for *African Sketches* in 1834. Originally entitled “A Christian Caffer Widow’s Lullaby to her Child”, the poem makes use of a familiar generic convention to inscribe its African widow within the moral discourse of Christianity. Each of its seven stanzas is rounded with a couplet of maternal assurance that the dangers of colonial life (vengeful tribesmen, predatory animals, hostile Bushmen) need only faith to be held at bay. The final stanza completes this embrace of Christian value in anticipation of a generational passage of faith from mother to child:

Then, let us calmly rest my child;
 Jehovah’s arm is round us
 The God, the Father reconciled,
 In heathen gloom who found us;
 Who to this heart by sorrow broke,
 His wondrous word revealing,
 Led me, a lost sheep, to the flock,
 And to the Fount of Healing.
 Oh may the Saviour-Shepherd lead
 My darling where his lambs do feed. (ll. 61-70)

There is nothing other than specificity of reference either in this poem or in “The Captive of Camalu” that suggests the texture of Pringle’s experience of the Cape Colony: these are poems that catechise an attitude and dramatise a state of being that exists only in the evangelical imagination. There is nothing in the historical record – including, for the most part, that record left by Pringle himself in the *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* – to suggest that indigenous people, and in particular the Xhosa, embraced Christian beliefs on any significant scale. Furthermore, it is a commonplace among historians that those exiguous forms of African Christianity that did take hold in the early nineteenth century were far removed from any form of doctrinal orthodoxy and disseminated largely by local proselytes who simply absorbed aspects of Christianity into indigenous eschatologies. The example of Makanna, discussed in an earlier chapter, is an illustrative case.

“The Rock of Reconcilement” also offers a reconfiguration of the reality of colonial experience; on this occasion Pringle fabulates a moment of iconic Christian contact between a Xhosa chief, his son, and the LMS missionary John Brownlee. The poem was first published in the *Wesleyan Missionary Magazine* in 1829 under the title “Scene in Cafferland” and was clearly intended to address a particular audience and to address it in a particular mode: that of triumphal Christian advancement across the empire. Though Pringle explains in the notes that the poem describes “an *imaginary* scene”, he nonetheless insists that it is “drawn with a strict regard to truth, both as regards scenery and sentiment” (1989: 109). This latter qualification underscores again the degree to which Pringle’s optimism about the colonial future significantly overdetermined his understanding of the colonial present: not only does the poem traffic in a social and religious imaginary, but it does so in a manner which takes calculated advantage of the fact that one of the poem’s protagonists, Jan Tzatsoe (Dyani Tshatshu) was well known to the evangelical readership as an exemplary convert. His value as a publicity figure culminated some years later in 1835/6, when Tzatsoe accompanied John Philip on a visit to England where he was “showed off ... at evangelical gatherings as “ocular proof” of the feasibility of remaking primitive man”

(Elbourne 2002: 188).¹⁶ If we turn to the poem itself, it begins with a twenty-one line stanza of landscape poetry describing the location of “the Missionary’s hermit cell”. This might seem an unnecessary digression from the poem’s evangelical objectives, but “scenery and sentiment”, as Pringle put it, are not without their interlinking intents. The missionary’s cabin inhabits a space that appears sanctified by nature itself:

..... [T]he missionary’s hermit cell.
 Woven of wattle boughs, and thatched with leaves,
 The sweet wild jasmine clustering to its eaves,
 It stood, with its small casement gleaming through
 Between two ancient cedars. Round it grew
 Clumps of acacias and young orange bowers,
 Pomegranate hedges, gay with scarlet flowers,
 And pale-stemmed fig trees with their fruit yet green,
 And apple blossoms waving light between.
 All musical it seemed, with humming bees;
 And bright-plumed sugar-birds among the trees
 Fluttered like living blossoms. (ll. 10-21)

This colonial Arcadia – its derivative links to the third stanza of “Evening Rambles” are obvious – contrives to present the cabin as a habitation which is continuous with the most expressive and bountiful forms of the natural world. The long introductory stanza sets the scene for a parallel act of reciprocation and exchange: the passing down of Christian belief from Xhosa father to Xhosa son under the benign tutelage of Brownlee:

..... By his side was seen
 An ancient chief of Amakosa’s race,
 With javelin armed for conflict or the chase.
 And, seated at their feet upon the sod,
 A Youth was reading from the Word of God,
 Of Him who came for sinful men to die,
 Of every race and tongue beneath the sky.

Unnoticed, toward them we softly stept.
 Our friend was rapt in prayer; the Warrior wept,
 Leaning upon his hand; the Youth read on.
 And then we hailed the group: the Chieftain’s Son,
 Training to be his country’s Christian guide –
 And Brownlee and old Tshatsu side by side. (ll.30-39).

One has once again to confront the extraordinary wishfulness of the evangelical belief in the redemptive power of “the word” and its purported ability to enchant converts into the abandonment of their own beliefs and the embrace not simply of a religion, but of a whole way of life deeply inimical to everything they have hitherto called their own. A rapturous faith in the efficacy of Christian belief and its power to remake the colonised subject pervades these late poems of Pringle’s to such an extent that, though they are ostensibly poems about South Africa they are not in any distinct sense South African poems. It is rather the case that South African subject matter is marshalled to provide a context for exemplary scenes or narratives of conversion and redemption; here the local operates merely as a screen on which to project an instance of an emancipatory project which extended across the entire region of empire. It is significant also that many of these late poems of Pringle’s first found publication in missionary magazines, an “evangelical genre” which, as Isabel Hofmyer notes, “is imagined as transnational in its address [and] intended for distribution across a vast domain” (2005:23).

In historical retrospect – one has only to consider current Western perceptions of Africa as still staging a belated, dysfunctional entrance into full modernity – these early nineteenth-century evangelical envisionings of a colonial world in the process of a dramatic transformation of its former status seem fantastical in their exaggeration and completely counterfactual in their contention that such changes were already a substantial material reality. Although commentators have argued that the millennial impulse in nonconformist or evangelical circles fed directly into subsequent reform phenomena, such as the huge world peace conference held in Paris in 1849, and that millennial idealism informed the secular energy of the Victorians (Tyrell 1978), the optimism of the 1834 abolitionists did not enjoy a significant afterlife. The primary theatre of expectation for abolitionist and evangelical hopes for a transformed future was the West Indies, but within thirty years, after an accumulating series of setbacks, these expectations were decisively reversed in the Morant Bay rebellion of 1864. The project of “fashioning ex-slaves into bourgeois subjects” (Holt 2000:50) foundered as it became increasingly clear that Afro-Jamaicans would not

become willing wage labourers, coveting the new social identities that such activity could offer them. The story of the rollback of abolitionist and humanitarian expectations for colonised people is more complex and territorially differentiated than I can suggest here. It is generally agreed, however, that the turn towards the more aggressive and unflinchingly racist forms of imperial expansion which marked the second half of the nineteenth century may be traced to a series of interlinked ‘failures’ by colonised people to become the kind of imperial subjects so fervently imagined by the reformers of the 1830s. What Colonial Secretary Edward Stanley in 1833 called “the liberal and humane spirit of the age” (quoted in Holt 1990:371) created expectations for colonial governance which, paradoxically, enabled the legislative entrenchment of the very views which the abolitionists and their allies had worked so hard to discredit.

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How did these events play themselves out in the Cape Colony, whose humanitarian advocates had played so crucial a role in influencing British public and parliamentary opinion on the question of the rights of colonial ‘aborigines’? Andrew Bank argues that the trajectory of post-emancipation events in the Cape provides evidence of a far sharper decline of “humanitarian liberalism” than in other comparable areas of empire. According to Bank, a consensus exists among historians that it was during the decades of the 1850s and the 1860s – the key events here are the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1864, the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the Waikato War of 1863 in New Zealand – that an “era of humanitarian retreat” set in, and that this set the stage for a “transition toward the strident racism of the age of high imperialism” (1999: 364). Bank seeks to complicate this periodisation with the counter-example of the Cape, where he claims that “By the middle of the nineteenth century the political influence of Cape humanitarians and, even more strikingly, their very faith in their civilising mission had eroded” (366). Bank’s account of this precipitous decline in political

influence and ideological valency is detailed and persuasive, and its value to this study lies in its anatomisation of the political career of John Fairbairn, who acts as exhibit A for the case Bank constructs. In his capacity as editor of the *Advertiser*, a position he held from the resumption of the paper's publication in 1826 until his retirement in 1859, Fairbairn was the most publicly visible figure of the humanitarian cause. The fact that he was also married to John Philip's daughter meant that the *Advertiser* was in many respects considered something like the secular wing of the London Missionary Society. In common with many of his fellow humanitarians, Fairbairn turned his back on the causes he had embraced in the 20s and 30s, until by mid-century he began to sound eerily like the settlers he had once so relentlessly censured for their belief that there were "new principles of action in the minds of men who differ from us only in the colour of their skin" (367). We have already encountered some measure of these earlier views in a previous chapter, but it is worth reminding ourselves of their fundamental conviction: given the right circumstances, indigenous people are capable of rising to the same civilisational level as Europeans. "Knowledge and mental improvement" wrote Fairbairn in 1831 "are not hereditary" (quoted in Bank 1999:367). This belief in the educability of the indigene is the *leitmotif* of humanitarian thought, and we find it time and again in Pringle too.

The story of Fairbairn's abandonment of the humanitarian position is not one of simple apostasy, but is inseparable from the evolution of colonial events. In an earlier chapter I alluded briefly to Timothy Keegan's thesis that the influence of the humanitarians in the colony was greatly augmented by their *de facto* alliance with the mercantile class because they shared the same economic objective: "the dismantling of the old order... based on monopoly and patronage, coercion and unfreedom" (1996:99). In the post-reform era, however, when many of these objectives had been achieved and the Somerset oligarchy was largely a thing of the past, the major threats to settler economic expansion and social stability came from indigenous hostility to the colonial presence and their failure to civilise along the prescribed lines. The turning point for Fairbairn's public renunciation of his former beliefs was the Frontier War of 1846-47, a conflict occasioned by yet another

recurrence of the tensions around cross-border livestock raiding and the ceded or neutral territory which after the 1836 war the Xhosa were allowed to reoccupy. As the settler-indigene endgame played itself out in mid-century, the humanitarians suffered the additional indignity of seeing the inhabitants of the Kat River Settlement form an alliance with the Xhosa and rise up in rebellion against the colony. So vehement was this uprising that “some rebels would remain in the bush as late as 1858, despite colonial pardons and despite the formal submission of the Xhosa chiefs to the British in 1853” (Elbourne 2002:349). In another “melancholy postscript” (Mostert 1992:873) to this brutally divisive war Dyani Tshatshu, paraded before evangelical audiences in London in 1836 as the proof incontrovertible of Christian regeneration, joined sides with his fellow Xhosa and accused the British of responsibility for the war. “The missionaries as a whole”, writes Noel Mostert, “had lost all credence. They were despised by the Xhosa and hated by the colonists” (873).

Fairbairn’s reaction to the breakdown of rapprochement between colonisers and colonised was to pronounce the Xhosa unfit for anything other than direct conquest. In an editorial on 14 October 1846 he warned that “both chiefs and people have to learn that the effects of an unjust war are not to end with the termination of actual resistance in the field. They have forced the British government most reluctantly to declare that not victory but conquest is to be the end of this outbreak”. A little over two months later, on 19 December, the tone had hardened: “before the sword is sheathed ... the Caffers, chiefs and peoples, must be made to feel that the colony is too strong for them ... [T]hey must be made to feel at their throat the impartial sword of justice”. On the matter of innate distinctions between European and African, the reversal was complete. “In race, colour, language, customs”, he wrote on 24 April 1847, [the Xhosa] differ as much [from the colonists] as any two varieties of the same species ever did or can do”. The contempt of this last statement, as well as its explicit appeal to a scientific racism, put the seal on Fairbairn’s former convictions. The two leading humanitarian evangelicals, John Philip and James Read both died in the early 1850s, the projects to which they had devoted their lives in ruins. In the late 1840s Philip wrote to a correspondent “I feel at present the care of the churches as a very heavy burden pressing me

to the earth. Things are very dark with us at present. Our Society was among the first in the field of missions, and I am afraid that we shall be among the first out of it” (quoted in Bank 1999: 375).

Which brings us back to Pringle, who had been dead for almost twenty years by the time the evangelical movement in the Cape faltered towards its end, its mission reversed rather than accomplished. Though it would be wrong to indict Pringle for the humanitarian failure, or even for the retrogressions of his friend Fairbairn, it would be misleading simply to freeze Pringle’s career in the *annus mirabilis* of 1834, as though subsequent events cast absolutely no retrospect on the positions he occupied and the writing which was so direct an expression of these positions. Furthermore, if one were to conduct a thought experiment, and imagine Pringle successfully returned to the colony in 1835, as he wished to do, and living through the next two decades, what would we encounter? Such conjecture remains purely speculative, but my guess is that his reputation of principled liberal resistance to colonial wrongdoing would have been tarnished by the attritional events of the 1840s and 50s. How could it not be? Pringle’s premature death spared him the brutal counterthrust of colonial violence during these decades and in this, at least, he remains fortunate.

There is a curious passage in John Lockhart’s 1835 review of *African Sketches*, a section of which I have already quoted, in which he reflects briefly on a provoking disparity between Pringle the man and Pringle the man of letters:

What strikes us as most remarkable in Pringle’s poetry is its almost constant elegance. Nothing could be more remote from the image of conventional elegance than the appearance, the manners, the spoken language even, of the man himself: yet there is rarely in his prose, and almost never in his verse, anything with which the most fastidious reader can have the smallest right to be offended. (1835:81).

Lockhart does not spell it out but the bottom line of what he is saying is clear enough: Pringle may have written himself out of his class, but in every other way he remained part of it. The remarks also hint at a kind of uncanny doubling in Pringle, as though his writing incarnated an imagined rather than an actual person. Whatever we may make of these

observations (in other parts of the review Lockhart's class condescension and a haughtily inaccurate summary of Pringle's colonial career cast doubts on the reliability of his judgement), I would suggest that the idea of a disparate doubling or splitting still offers us a useful optic for a schematic overview of the structural conditions which both constrained and enabled Pringle's writing. In the opening chapter we saw how even Pringle's Scottish writing was divided between the gentility of *belles lettres*, with its emulation of English models and its deference to the registers of English speech and the attempt to formally recuperate a vanishing oral past and its very different set of traditions. In the "Notes Concerning the Scottish Gypsies", Pringle's endeavour to think his way through gypsy alterity stumbles on their stubbornly enduring indifference to the narratives of historical progress, and in this too he is split between finding in the gypsies both a resource for figural investment and an affront to the social order. Both Pringle's uncertain class status, and the willed relinquishment of aspects of his Scottish identity, meant that he had to construct for himself an identity with which, as Lockhart so shrewdly intuited, he was never fully coincident. The poetry Pringle wrote in South Africa confronted as its central problem a compound of novelty and alienation and has constantly to negotiate material that is recalcitrant to the modes of aesthetic formalisation that were available to him. In certain poems this split between form and content is fairly explicitly dramatised (I am thinking in particular of "Evening Rambles" and "Afar in the Desert"), but even in those poems which do not ostensibly engage this problem ("The Song of the Wild Bushman" and "Makanna's Gathering" might be taken as examples here) the content still remains resistant to its generic enclosure. When Pringle moves toward stable and structured forms, like the sonnet sequences describing ethnic groupings, these are vitiated by the nominal or ornamental status of the eponymous types the sonnets describe. This study has attempted to give a thick context to this "content", and to be alert to the elisions the poems often impose on their material, particularly the scripting of indigenous people into an evangelical imaginary where they perform roles prepared for them by others. Similarly, the endeavour of poems like "The Bechuana Boy" and "The Emigrant's Cabin" to rework colonial experience into forms (the slave narrative, the narrative of successful colonial settlement)

that confirm metropolitan expectations, is undercut by, among other things, the omissions and emendations they perform on their primary material. Then there are those occasions when Pringle drops his guard, so to speak, and allows us to glimpse the lawless and immiserating reality of colonial conquest. A central characteristic of this poetry is its contrariety, its shifting of focus, and a relation to its subject matter that is always equivocal and often wishful.¹⁷

Such summary does no justice to the complexity of this poetry, its unevenness, and the very palpable strain that may often be discerned beneath its controlled surfaces. But it is a useful reminder to us of how, in its totality, Pringle's South African poetry – with its distinct status as the first substantial body of literary work in English to be produced in this country – already bears within it the irresolutions and tensions which have come to be seen as constitutive of this literature. Leon de Kock's theorisation of the "seam", for example, an aporetic disjuncture or "crisis of inscription in South African writing following colonisation" (2001:276), draws our attention to the representational tensions that arise when a colonising culture attempts to ground itself in a subjugated territory. Because the act of representation must always work against the grain of the difference surrounding it, and because this difference is impossible either to erase or to assimilate, the "effort of suturing the incommensurate", of closing or narrowing this gap, "unavoidably bears the mark of its crisis, the seam" – with the seam defined as "the place where difference and sameness are hitched together – where they are brought to self-awareness, denied, or displaced into third terms" (277). Might we not argue that Pringle's work inhabits precisely such a divided space, that indeed it stages something like an originary moment for this "paradox qualifying any attempt to imagine organicism or unity"? Pringle criticism has for some time been preoccupied with lineal anxieties about his place not simply in literary history but in the larger history framing it as well. "Pringle is the narrative beginning", writes David Bunn, "both for the myth of origins that enables liberal ideology to dissociate its own history from that of the monster apartheid and for a patriarchal and racist version of South African literary history that portrays him as the 'father of South

African poetry” (1994:156). While it might have been understandable that, in the pressure-house of apartheid, the search for counter or alternate white histories had its place, is it not now time to approach Pringle with a less exclusive agenda, one that allows for the fluidity and contradiction of his work as “the mark of its crisis” rather than the measure of its failure – or its success – as an ethical engagement with colonialism. This is not to argue that these latter considerations are negligible, but to acknowledge that Pringle’s tortuous and often compromised negotiations of colonial life resonate into the future precisely because of their irresolution.

Allied to this problematic of Pringle’s lineal status is his status as a national poet: although he wrote prose and poetry with the Cape Colony as its subject, his British reading audience was local, metropolitan and transnational. If one considers that the Cape Colony was a node in an official imperial network that also spanned Asia, North America and Australia, with any number of interlinking points in between, and that Pringle, especially during the London years, wrote with a full awareness of this globally dispersed audience, then to regard him solely as a South African poet is restrictive and even parochial. Katie Trumpener has commented on how early nineteenth-century literatures of settlement are invariably characterised as possessing an “imitative, reactive, and subordinated relationship to the literature of the imperial centre” (1997:289) with an autonomous colonial literature only emerging once a degree of national consolidation takes place. As Trumpener argues, though, this model of derivative stasis leaves “unexamined a significant body of literature ... which describes the experience of empire in terms of the transcolonial consciousness and transperipheral circumstances of influence it creates” (289). Pringle’s writing is at all points inflected by his diverse locations and their different circumstances; if, as I have tried to demonstrate, these shifting positions are integral to his work then his status as a national poet is problematic. Though Pringle might belong to his South African context more enduringly than to any other, he very often wrote about South Africa from within “circumstances of influence” that were located elsewhere. His work is the product of an entanglement of different national spaces and belongs wholly to none of them.

In drawing this study to a close, I wish to examine some passages from the final chapters of Pringle's *Narrative* which, in various ways, draw him disconcertingly close to the present. These are passages in which Pringle reflects on – or allows the voices of others to reflect on – the past and future of the colonial state. As I have mentioned before, the *Narrative* is loosely structured along a temporal axis that encompasses the stages of Pringle's stay in South Africa. This looseness of structure allows Pringle ample space for digression and conjecture, and for this reason the *Narrative*, as we have already seen, is a lot more expansive and unguarded than the poetry, which must work both within generic constraints and within the expectations of a predominantly middle class periodical and newspaper press (in which almost all of it was published). Let the contrariety of Pringle have its final word here.

¹ The Pringle-Campbell connection is revealing. Thomas Campbell (1777-1844) was a Scottish poet and journalist, who, like James Thomson before him, broke into London literary circles and became a widely read British poet. Though Campbell, unlike Thomson, no longer registers even in the lower levels of the academic canon (he is not, for example, included in the omnibus Norton Anthologies), he was widely read at the time. His first and best known collection, *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799) combines particularized meditations on the nature of Hope with, as Campbell puts it in his introductory "Analysis", "prospects of political improvement in the future state of society – the wide field that is yet open for the progress of humanising arts among uncivilized nations" (1887: np). We know that Pringle greatly admired Campbell: in the "Biographical Sketch" by Josiah Conder which prefaces the *Narrative* there is a reference to the young Pringle's "peculiar delight" (1966:xxiv) in *Pleasures of Hope* and in his later years Pringle composed a sonnet to Campbell which praised him for, among other things "The thrilling cords thy touch can wake so well/ To patriot strains". Like Thomson (who wrote "Rule Britannia"), Campbell was a fervent British patriot, and there is a strong martial and imperial strain running through his poetry. Poems like "The Mariners of England", a celebration of British naval power, ("Britannia needs no bulwark,/No towers along the steep,-/Her march is in the mountain waves,/Her home is on the deep") elicited rapturous comment from his contemporaries. "As a national strain" wrote an unknown reviewer in *Tate's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1834, "the paean of our ocean-pride, it stands alone, and will live while our language is remembered" (Vol. 1, No.5, 1834:399). Clearly, Pringle shared this admiration. His own "Verses, on the Restoration of Despotism in Spain, in 1823", first published in the *South African Journal* in 1824, recalls the rousing, patriotic strains of his fellow Scot:

Her mighty voice is on the breeze -
Her martial step is on the plain -
Her flag's afloat upon the seas
To bid the world BE FREE again.

The poem was almost certainly written as a coded complaint about the failure of Governor Somerset to embrace the liberal virtues of "Law, Freedom, Truth" protected by "Britain's guardian shield", but it leaves one in no doubt of Pringle's nationalist enthusiasms.

² For a summary of these issues and their adjudication see Carolyn A. Hamilton (ed) *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African Historiography* (1995)

³ Such discrepancies between a narrated, public self and a 'private' self are not unusual in the travel writing and other colonial literature of this era. A notorious case was John Stedman, whose *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), "ranks among the most important and influential humanitarian texts of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries" (Klarer 2005:559). During the 1770s Stedman had been a mercenary soldier in Surinam and there is a wide disparity between the journals he wrote at this time and the subsequent account in the *Narrative*. Marcus Woods comments that:

The John Stedman who wrote terse and mainly factual records covering the day to day events of his work in Surinam in the 1770s was a practical, frequently brutal, occasionally kind and charming, mercenary soldier ... The John Stedman who emerges as an authorial presence in the 1799 manuscript reconstructions of his experiences in the 1770s is a very different phenomenon. Stedman is now consciously creating a persona, he works around the events recorded in the earlier journal and uses them as a series of opportunities to fictionalize himself as ... a 'Man of Feeling' (2002:138).

While I am not suggesting that Pringle's literary persona completely overwrites his actual experience in the manner of Stedman, there is clear evidence of a judicious reconstruction of this experience (and, as the example of Stedman suggests more strongly, taking literary liberties of this sort was certainly not culturally proscribed). One can imagine a monograph (if such a work does not already exist) about the lies, large and small, by which the story of empire sustained its preferred version of itself.

4. In *Keywords* Raymond Williams remarks of sensibility that:

It was more than *sensitivity*, which can describe a physical or an emotional condition. It was, essentially, a social generalization of certain personal qualities, or, to put it another way, a personal appropriation of certain social qualities. It thus belongs in an important formation which includes TASTE ... *cultivation* and *discrimination* ... All describe very general human processes, but in such a way as to specialize them; the negative effects of the actual exclusions that are so often implied can best be kept up in *discrimination*, which has survived both as the process of fine or informed judgement and as the process of treating certain groups unfairly. *Taste* and *cultivation* make little sense unless we are able to contrast their presence with their absence, in ways that depend on generalization and indeed on CONSENSUS ... (1988:281)

As Williams's summation makes clear, sensibility is an exclusionary social or class phenomenon as much as it is a condition of consciousness. We are also reminded here of Pringle's appeal to taste as an arbiter of colonial class distinction in an earlier chapter.

⁵ Malvern van Wyk Smith, for example, comments as follows on Pringle's indebtedness to Wordsworth, which he describes as "more often alluded to than explored" (2000:23)

By way of demonstrating Wordsworth's direct influence on Pringle, one may refer to poem after poem, such as "The Coranna" or the sonnets on "The Hottentot", "The Caffer" and "The Bushman", in which Pringle attempts to depict South African indigenous rustics as Wordsworthian figures in possession of a history and inner reality misrepresented or misunderstood by the colonialists [10 lines of "The Hottentot" quoted]. This is recognizably the world of "The Female Vagrant", "The Last of the Flock" and "The Convict" (*Lyrical Ballads*) (25).

But in what sense are the Pringle sonnets "recognizably" Wordsworthian? Though it might be true that the Wordsworth poems engage with the plight of marginalized and rustic figures – hardly a

novel subject, or one particular to Wordsworth, as Robert Mayo's well known 1954 essay argued – they are all long narrative poems which explore the interiority either of their subjects (“The Female Vagrant”, “The Last of the Flock”) or of a sympathetic observer (“The Convict”). The Pringle sonnets, on the other hand, though they might also deal with figures of dispossession, offer no such extended exploration of “inner reality” and, as I have argued above, are explicitly, even bluntly, didactic in their address to the reader. Taking his cue from Pringle's epistolary remarks about condensation and simplicity of style, van Wyk Smith further argues that “The Bechuana Boy” is a “key text” in relation to the Wordsworth influence and that its “language ... its balladic measure, its seminal inspiration, its subject, and its social theme ... resonate suggestively with those of Wordsworth's “The Idiot Boy” (25). But is this the case? The central preoccupation of “The Idiot Boy” is not, in fact, the boy himself, but the disordered imagination of his mother, and it is difficult to see in what ways the “subject and social theme” of the poem “resonate suggestively” with “The Bechuana Boy”; the poems seem to me to have little in common beyond their very similar titling. Wordsworth's boy is virtually mute, Pringle's expansively articulate; Pringle's boy must negotiate capture, enslavement, the loss of his family and migration to a distant country, Wordsworth's boy an aimless nocturnal wander on the back of a docile pony before being united with his distraught mother. One could go on. When van Wyk Smith does venture into specificity, it is to claim that both poems “turn ... on [a] single hauntingly poetic utterance” (25). In the case of “The Idiot Boy” he selects the boy's lines in the final stanza “The cocks did crow to-who, to-who/And the sun did shine so cold” and offers as a parallel the Bechuana boy's “I'm in the world alone”. It is not clear to me how both poems “turn” or “are founded on” (26) these utterances. While one might argue that the lines in “The Idiot Boy” retrospectively realign our understanding of the poem by condensing its long procession of events into their perception by the boy, is the same true for the single line in “The Bechuana Boy” which, however suggestive, is strictly speaking superfluous since the reader is already aware of the boy's solitary status? The specific evidence that van Wyk Smith musters to support his contention that there is a significant Wordsworth-Pringle nexus of influence does not convince.

The most scrupulous account of the “literary allusiveness of Pringle's writing” (1991:91) has been supplied by A.E. Voss, who points out that:

Although Pringle dedicated poems to his close contemporaries Wordsworth, Scott and Campbell, allusions in the poems themselves suggest that his community is retrospective. The most frequent points of reference are the Bible and the Scottish ballad tradition. Otherwise Pringle alludes frequently to Pope, Goldsmith and Cowper. (91)

Perhaps one could add to this account that while Wordsworth influenced Pringle, the influence registered itself in a generalized way – in the taking up, for example, of tropes of interiority, of solitude, of the reciprocities between consciousness and nature, and so forth. These influences are especially evident in some of Pringle's earlier South African poetry, and, to a lesser extent, in the Scottish poetry. But once Pringle moves away from the lyrical interiority of this poetry toward a poetry strongly informed by the demands of public address, the influences tend, as Voss notes, to be retrospective rather than contemporary.

⁶ Another genre which the poem abuts is that of missionary narratives which told a tale of utter devastation in those areas affected by the displacements of the *difaqane/mfecane* in the 1820s. John and Jean Comaroff elaborate:

In Nonconformist narratives of South Africa, *difaqane* ... served much the same imaginative function as did the slave trade further north. This period of upheaval in the 1820s – usually ascribed to the rise of the Zulu state and the subsequent predations of displaced warrior peoples ... – had ostensibly “desolated the whole Bechuana country”. These predations were held to have robbed “the native population” of its moral manhood and its capacity for self-determination, and, further, to have left it “unprotected ...

without missionaries” ... Some of the peoples of the interior, it is true, *were* badly disrupted by the turmoil of the times. Nonetheless, most Southern Tswana had managed to grow some crops in temporary places of refuge, to recoup their herds, and to keep intact their political communities. But such subtleties went largely unspecified in the stark stories penned by the Christians. These told of soil strewn with blood and bones by “warlike wild tribes”, of a wake of women and children left to wander about, barely surviving on wild fruit, locusts and “garbage”; even, added the horrified evangelists, on human flesh ... Here too we detect traces of the vision of Africa-the-Fallen, the degenerate, of children as foundlings. In recalling their own travels across the backwash of *difaqane*, Broadbent ... and Hodgson ... tell how they came upon a young girl left to die without food or succor. We may guess the rest”: the Europeans “save” this stereotypic victim of South African savagery. They “adopt” and raise her. And they “(re)name her. *Orphina*” (1997:125)

The tone here is rather annoyingly knowing, but the narrative structures the Comaroffs describe resemble the story of “The Bechuana Boy” so closely that one cannot help speculating that Pringle’s poem owes something to such missionary accounts (which he is very likely to have read, in one form or another). We note also how the poem also follows the missionary account in its construction of “Africa-the-Fallen”, requiring the intervention of British Protestantism to save it from itself.

⁷ Throughout this section my references to the *History* are to Sarah Salih’s edition, published in Penguin Classics in 2000. The other contemporary publications of the *History* are those edited by Ferguson (1987) and Gates.

⁸ See for example Todorova 2001, Baumgartner 2001, Ferguson 1987, Sharpe 2003, Pacquet 1992, Midgely 1992, Whitlock 2000. I am not suggesting that these critiques are uniform in their approach but that they are, for different reasons, critical of Pringle’s editorial role.

⁹ Pringle wrote to Fairbairn in July 1834 that even at the time of the printing of *African Sketches* “I had only a couple of chapters of the prose ... & the rest was written as the printer required copy, with the exception of passages formerly printed in periodicals” (FB:I:154A). The rushed and improvised composition of what we know as the *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* should alert us to its status as a strategic intervention in colonial affairs; it should also be understood in the context of other humanitarian publications of the time. These include Philip’s *Researches in South Africa* (1828), also hurriedly assembled for the occasion, Saxe Bannister’s *Humane Policy; or, Justice to the Aborigines of the New Settlement* (1830) and *The Wrongs of the Caffre Nation* (1837) by Justus. Justus was the pen name of Beverley Mackenzie, a prominent humanitarian, as was Bannister, a former Attorney-General of New South Wales. So concerned was Pringle with the impact of *African Sketches* on public opinion that he regretted that the first part of *African Sketches* had, by necessity, to be the already completed volume of poetry – “It is a pity that the poetry stands first”, he wrote, in a sentence preceding the quote above. It is the poetry, ironically, for which Pringle is primarily remembered.

¹⁰ Pringle’s treatment of gender, both in the poem and the earlier extracts quoted from the *Account*, reflects middle class proprieties of the period. “Women, like children, represented the innocence of the natural world which active masculinity must support, protect – and oversee” write Hall and Davidoff in their authoritative account of the emergence of the middle class family (1987:28). They continue: “The Romantic imagination [they use this appellation in a general sense] indelibly fixed the image of a rose coloured cottage in a garden where womanhood waited and from which manhood ventured abroad: to work, to war, and to the Empire” (28). Pringle’s reference in the poem to “women’s tender frame” (l.158) is also in keeping with the ethos described

here. Davidoff and Hall also cite the influence of Burkean categories of the sublime and beautiful on “notions of taste and beauty” (28) and the gendered nature of this aesthetic division. See also Bunn 1994, pp. 146-148 for the “gendered distinction between domestic interiors and the public sphere that the British settlers ... carried with them” (146). For the human cost of enforced female domesticity see Mackenzie (1997) on the private correspondence of Eliza Fairbairn, husband of John Fairbairn and daughter of John Philip. Zoe Laidlaw’s account (2004) of the influential – but long unrecognized – backroom roles of Anna and Priscilla Buxton in the Aborigines Protection Society is an example of how, in humanitarian circles, the social agency of women was kept from public view.

¹¹ “Though half the convex globe intrude between”: the use of the quote from Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village” (1770) seems, in this context, slightly odd. As is well known, Goldsmith’s poem – like much of his work – laments the effects enclosure and immigration have had on a “bold peasantry, their country’s pride” who “when once destroyed, can never be supplied” (ll.55-56) The poem paints a dismal picture of colonial settlement, particularly in America (see ll. 343 –364) –the very lines from which Pringle’s quote is drawn. It is also critical of the wealth generated by colonial trade and the inequality of its distribution (“The rich man’s joys increase, the poor’s decay” l.267). Clearly, Pringle is not using “The Deserted Village” as an intertext, since in “The Emigrant’s Cabin” his own views on colonization were a good deal more sanguine in every respect. My speculation is that his use of this line from a very well known poem is both a kind of borrowing of cultural capital (quotation as adornment and embellishment) and an implicit reference to the poem’s eighteenth-century antecedents (see note 13 below). A.E.Voss sees Pringle reading the poem “sentimentally rather than radically, as had been done by the progressive writers of the 1790s” (1991:91).

¹² So Klopper writes: “Pringle endeavours by means of the dialogue to persuade Fairbairn, who in 1822 was still resident in Scotland, to emigrate to the Cape” (33). This failure to have recognized the poem’s temporally split composition leads to the assumption that “In ‘The Emigrant’s Cabin’ the information conveyed about colonial lifestyle is explicitly intended to persuade readers to regard the colony as a viable site of European enterprise. Although the poem is addressed to Fairbairn, it speaks to all prospective emigrants” (34). I am not suggesting that this error in dating entirely undermines Klopper’s argument, but that the misunderstanding of the poem’s contextual placement does limit the pertinence of his analysis. This is all the more unfortunate since Klopper later makes the point, seldom taken into full account by critics, that “many of [Pringle’s] poems on the Cape were written and revised during this period of intense involvement in the abolitionist movement and can be seen as propaganda for the abolitionist movement in particular and for the philanthropic cause in general” (48).

¹³There was of course nothing new in an anodyne and patriotic poeticizing of empire. In a fine analysis of poems of empire in the “long” eighteenth century, Suvir Kaul has argued that their “domestication of discomfort or difference” is strongly enabled by the “poetic enclosure of newness” (2000:41) accomplished by the use of conventional forms. Pringle’s poetry might have been written during a different era of colonization, and to have been strongly coloured by specific experience, but his referencing of eighteenth-century poets in “The Emigrant’s Cabin” is not merely incidental. Take the case of Cowper, whose “The Task” is quoted in line 140 (“The hermit ‘lodge in some vast wilderness’”). Pringle’s reference is far too short and oblique to make a case, as with Goldsmith, for any deliberate or sustained intertextuality. Yet both Goldsmith and Cowper wrote critically about aspects of empire, the latter, for example, reproves the “Indian Nabobs” of the East Indian Company in no uncertain terms: “thieves at home must hang; but he that puts/Into his overgorged and bloated purse/The wealth of Indian provinces, escapes”(“The Task”1.736-38).Kaul argues that towards the end of the eighteenth century the Augustan practice of poetically

rendering the British empire as an analogous update of classical, mainly Roman, models was superseded by a more direct approach:

[T]he specter of the past loosens its hold on the poetic imagination of empire and a more certain sense of the rights and wrongs of trade and colonization emerges ... [P]oets ... begin ... to argue that one way in which empire can be maintained is to cleanse it of its illegitimacies and immorality ... This argument pays systematic attention to egregious instances of public corruption and immorality in order to suggest that a British Empire cleansed of such trading or colonial practices will be an empire living up to its primary, indeed its *real*, purpose, which is the communication of British ethics and culture ... This poetic project provided poets with fine occasions in which to exercise their moral imaginations, and to do so in ways that would assert the continuing and future legitimacy and importance of the British Empire”(237/8).

I quote Kaul at some length here to underline again the point that those poems of Pringle written during his abolitionist –humanitarian phase, have a significant element of public address and draw directly on the models that Kaul outlines here.

¹⁴ In an comprehensive survey, Linda Merians has examined eighteenth-century representations of the Khoekhoe/Hottentot in Great Britain. As Merians demonstrates, accounts of the Hottentots were widespread long before the British actually occupied the Cape, and “they became a metaphorical subject in the British consciousness well before the Khoekhoe became literal subjects of the imperial crown” (1993:15). Merians further asserts that “[a]s far as I can determine, no other region not claimed by the British was so well represented in print in Britain this early in the eighteenth century; and no other people known to the British was so scrutinized” (18). Merians’s sensitive account of the development of this peculiar fascination is attentive to its projective aspects, particularly the British interest in the ambiguous skin colouring of the Hottentot which could not be coded into the available understanding of Africans as “negroes” or “blacks”, and of course the obsession with Hottentot genitalia and genital practices. There is much to comment on in Merians’s article, but for our purposes two things need to be stressed. Merians employs extensive citation from a cross-section of sources to demonstrate that eighteenth-century perceptions of the Hottentot were (i) convinced that the Hottentots were inverted noble savages, occupants of the bottom rung of human development and (ii) that generalized perceptions of the Hottentot were so pervasive in British society that the word Hottentot acquired a “secondary representation” (37) as a self-evident trope in British letters. By the 1820s and 30s, these perceptions must surely still have lingered, and the special attention given to the Kat River Settlement by the Reform Committee must have been mindful of the special status that attached to the conversion of this particular group of imperial subjects. (It must be added, though, that the original settlement consisted of “Bastaard” families and Gonaqua Khoi, as well as Hottentots (Kirk 1973:313)).

¹⁵ For accounts of the Kat River Settlement see Kirk (1973) and Elbourne 2002, Chapter 7. As we might expect, the evolution of the settlement was a complex affair, subject to the many vagaries governing the politics of the frontier. The settlement was eventually destroyed by a commando of vengeful settlers in 1851; its land was subsequently confiscated by the colonial government and the population dispersed. In assessing the importance of the Kat River Settlement, historians tend to stress its status in the context of a failed bid for Hottentot nationalism, in which the material considerations of land and supportive assistance were the significant factors, rather than a failed bid for Africa regenerated. The discursive use of the settlement still remained useful, however: in a revealing rhetorical reversal, British governor Sir Harry Smith wrote of the rebellion of the settlers :

I cannot avoid commenting, while upon the subject of this

Hottentot revolution, upon an occurrence of so unaccountable a nature, and one unprecedented, I believe, in the history of the world. A mass of civilized men, the greater part born in the Christian faith ... suddenly, and without any cause whatever, rush back, in nearly one torrent, to barbarism and savage life. (quoted in Kirk 1973:41).

In the space of a little more than twenty years (Smith's remarks were made in 1851 in an official despatch to the Colonial Office), the Kat River Settlement had undergone a startling symbolic inversion from a site which offered irrefutable proof of the advancement of an indigenous people to a site which confirmed their ineradicable "barbarism". The volatility of this rhetoric, its sheer excess – note that for Smith, as for the humanitarians quoted elsewhere, both descent and ascent are equally instantaneous – remind us again of the distance between empire as discursive construct and empire as sociomaterial reality.

¹⁶ Tshatshu's visit to London was not without a degree of rather sinister erotic comedy. Elizabeth Elbourne reports on how, during the dinner party rounds, Philip made significant efforts to downplay the Africanness of his charges. Elbourne quotes from a private letter describing such a dinner written by one Mrs. Upcher to her friend Sarah Gurney:

Enter Dr. Philip with his tail, *such* a tail! – The Caffre chief a fine personable man – handsomely dressed in a military coat blue & gold, he has a good forehead & more – I will go no lower, lest I should affront you as I have affronted myself for fancying (I will just whisper in Sarah's ear) that his mouth caricatured a Negro's! Oh! For shame to breath it especially as their champion protests there is *nothing African* in his countenance. (2002: 288)

Elbourne reads the letter as "chillingly suggest[ing] the extent to which Philip demanded the denial of African identity" (288). Other things, unremarked by Elbourne, might be read into this letter too, of course, but let us not (for shame!) go there ...

¹⁷ I must add that my survey of Pringle's poetry has not been completely exhaustive. Left out of consideration, for example, have been two accomplished poems, "The Lion Hunt" and "The Forester of the Neutral Ground". Both poems show Pringle, with considerable facility, adapting the form of the Scottish ballad to colonial life. "The Lion Hunt", clearly modeled on Scott's *Lochinvar* captures, as Lockhart put it "the old border fire" (1835:83) while "The Forester of the Neutral Ground" shows a poised use of the ballad form to describe a renegade inter-racial love affair. My omission of these, and other poems, is strategic: they do not contribute in significant ways to the arguments I am making; nor, in my view, do they in any way contradict them.

CONCLUSION

Our first passage expresses already familiar convictions. I quote it as a benchmark against which to measure the significant deviations that follow. Here is Pringle in full evangelical force in a passage that could only have been written in or around 1834:

The Native Tribes, in short, are ready to throw themselves into our arms. Let us open our arms cordially to embrace them as MEN and as BROTHERS. Let us enter upon a new and nobler career of conquest. Let us subdue savage Africa by JUSTICE, by KINDNESS, by the talisman of CHRISTIAN TRUTH. Let us *thus* go forth, in the name and under the blessing of God, gradually to extend the moral influence, and, if it be thought desirable, the territorial boundary also of our colony, until it shall become an empire –embracing Southern Africa from the Keisi and the Gareep to Mocambique and Cape Negro – and to which, peradventure, in after days, even the equator shall prove no ultimate limit. (1966:321)

The capitalization, the italics: there is even something typographically desperate in this bid to fashion empire into a “new and nobler career of conquest” which again suggests that Pringle might have been aware that these exorbitant expectations would not come to pass. Pringle’s reference to Christianity as a “talisman” (“charm, amulet, thing supposed capable of working wonders” (*OED*)) casts religion itself as an apotropaic object or spell with which to “subdue” the “savage”, as though empire proceeds by a magical fetishism which bizarrely mirrors the ‘primitivism’ of the colonized. When we add to this the envisaging of a divinely sanctioned expansion of “moral influence” and “territorial boundar[ies]” as the evangelical empire presses northward through the continent, then we are fully immersed in an imperial imaginary which seemingly knows no bounds. This triumphalist narrative is, however, intersected - even cancelled – by other narratives, which tell different stories of empire and the imperial project. Just as the evangelical fabulations of Pringle’s later poetry were on occasion interrupted by a poetry of bleak directness, so in the *Narrative* there are sections which read very differently from the evangelical allocutions quoted above. A number of such passages could be cited, but the one to which I shall turn is particularly compelling since it must confront that most intractable of colonial problems, one whose legacy still haunts the present: the extermination of

the Bushmen.

The passage to which I refer is not narrated by Pringle himself; by a curious displacement, it comes to him at a third remove and in epistolary form. These are the circumstances: an acquaintance of Pringle, whom he refers to as “a gentleman with Dutch blood in his veins ... and warmly attached to the Dutch African population – though an enlightened friend to the aboriginal race” (1966:225) writes Pringle a letter from which he quotes verbatim. We are informed that Pringle had received this letter “within these few weeks”, which suggests that this communication occurred during the time he was hastily putting together the *Narrative* - i.e. once again in or around 1834. Within the frame of this letter, acknowledged by quotation marks, is another narrative, acknowledged in the same way, delivered by a Dutch military official, a field-cornet, whose name, as well as the district over which he presides, is withheld. So too is the name of Pringle’s correspondent, on the grounds that Pringle does not wish to “expose him, as others have been exposed, to bitter colonial persecution” (225). This double anonymity is puzzling; the correspondent sounds like Andries Stockenstrom, encountered in “The Emigrant’s Cabin”, yet there is absolutely no record of any correspondence between the two men; the field-cornet is difficult to place. As for the possibility of the “bitter colonial persecution” that might ensue should this story be attributable to “my correspondent”, one is at a loss to understand why this should be so. Whatever the case may be, the story to come is already insulated by anonymity; it has neither names nor locations; it is also shifted into an exaggerated temporal distance: with an oddly antiquarian flourish, Pringle announces it to be “an anecdote of the olden times, as told by an actor in the bloody drama” (225). But these “olden times” are not so old since they are the product of living memory: “This happened when I was a boy”, the field-cornet relates, “and now I am old and grey” (226).

I dwell on the circumlocutions surrounding this as yet untold story because they indicate that Pringle is seeking to distance himself from it, as though it is something he needs to keep at

arm's length. But – the qualification is a significant one – Pringle still allows the story into his narrative, and in due course we shall have to ask why. Let us recall, though, that Pringle himself was involved in ordering raids against the Bushmen, and not once, but twice. On the first occasion he wrote to the Deputy-Landrost of Cradock in October 1821 requesting that a “party of Boers” be sent to assist the Scottish party in “hunting [the Bushmen] out”. The language here is unequivocal, but no record exists of the outcome of this raid. On the second occasion, we have more detail. Pringle wrote to Fairbairn in June 1825 that he had “written to the Landrost to attack them in their bloody dens”; in a letter written in September he described the outcome of the raid, conducted by “Captain Massey & the Field Cornet”. “I wanted them taken alive”, wrote Pringle, “but it is said they refused and defended themselves desperately. 5 men were killed”. I repeat this information from earlier chapters in order to underline again the fact that, as a frontier colonist, Pringle played his part in such activities. In fairness to Pringle, he resorted to authorising these measures only under pressing circumstances; however, it must also be recognised that, when chastised by Fairbairn for calling out the second commando, he asserted his right to defend himself, denying that there was any “damned spot” on his hands - he denied, that is, Fairbairn’s implication that for his actions he was, like Lady Macbeth, stained with an indelible guilt.

Let us return, then, to the field-cornet and his story of the “bloody drama”. The conversation between Pringle’s correspondent and his interlocutor begins when the otherwise mild-mannered field-cornet unleashes a “strain of angry invective” at the mention of the name of Dr. Philip. Pringle’s correspondent hears the field-cornet out and as soon as he “became calm”, asks the man whether “it must, nevertheless, be admitted that abominable cruelties had been committed against the natives”:

‘Who denies that?’ rejoined _____ with the same vivacity he had just displayed in inveighing against Dr. Philip. ‘God forbid that I should deny that we have much to answer for!’

“I still often shudder”, he continued, ‘when I think of one of the first scenes of

the kind which I was obliged to witness in my youth, when I commenced my burgher service. It was upon a commando under Carl Krotz. We had surprised and destroyed a considerable kraal of Bosjesmen. When the firing ceased, five women were still found living. The lives of these, after a long discussion, it was resolved to spare, because one farmer wanted a servant for this purpose, and another for that. The unfortunate wretches were ordered to march in front of the commando; but it was soon found that they impeded our progress – not being able to proceed fast enough. They were, therefore, ordered to be shot. The scene which ensued often haunts me up to the present hour. The helpless victims, perceiving what was intended, sprung to us, and clung so firmly to some of the party, that it was for some time impossible to shoot them without hazarding the lives of those they held fast. Four of them were at length despatched; but the fifth could by no means be torn from one of our comrades, whom she had grasped in her agony; and his entreaties to be allowed to take the woman home were at last complied with. She went with her preserver, served him long and faithfully, and, I believe, died in the family. – May God forgive the land! (226)

The field-cornet turns out to be a disconcertingly contemporary figure: a figure haunted by the brutal injustice of the past even “up to the present hour”; a figure who anticipates the historical spectrality of the present which demands, in Derrida’s words, that we “learn spirits” and “live *with* ghosts” (1994:xviii) if we are ever to settle our scores with a past which the “gospel of politico-economic liberalism” (62) is determined to erase. Furthermore, the field-cornet is also cognisant of the fact that the spectral revenant haunting his memory is not some idiosyncrasy of evil, incidental and individual, but a fundamental disjuncture in the social order itself, something which “disjoins the living present” and “secretly unhinges it.” (xix), something which requires absolution if its disturbing effects are to be curtailed: “May God forgive *the land!*”. The field-cornet’s story induces, as Pringle’s correspondent notes, “a chill of horror” which “held us both silent for a moment”: for the contemporary reader this “chill of horror” is also a chill of recognition, for such horrific stories were to be told over and over again in South African history; indeed, they are still being told, still haunting us “up to the present hour”.

The field-cornet’s narrative continues with a defence of the crueller deeds of his fellow Boers; this defence does not take the form of an exculpation, but of an equivalence: the British, he argues, are just as much to be abhorred for their deeds as the Boers are, especially since the latter make no profession to an ethics of human rights:

What were religion or law in those days? Moreover, there was at least some pretext for that slaughter. Those Bosjesmen had committed several murders and deprivations on our frontier. We were living in a state of bitter feud and constant warfare with the natives, and both parties were intent on mutual extermination. But what had your Ficani done when *they* were destroyed by wholesale slaughter by your British commanders? While the *boor* is threatened with the prison and the gallows if he but fires a shot in the defence of all he possesses in the world, of his life, his family, his property, - a regular army is sent by the Government hundreds of miles into unknown parts, on purpose to destroy a whole tribe of people, of who we never so much as heard before, who never did us the slightest injury, who, against our arms were utterly defenceless - and this act committed in the last few years, too, when one hears of nothing but humanity, religion, and new laws for protecting the slaves and the native tribes! Here we had massacre in all its horrors - shooting of men in cold blood - the murder and mutilation of helpless females and children, and other atrocities too horrible to describe. But all this, I hear, your English missionaries defend or wink at, because it was done by Englishmen in authority, and does not tell against us unfortunate Boors. - There is no use', he continued, 'in trying to avoid the small-pox [the two men had been in the northern areas of the frontier attempting to set up a *cordon sanitaire* to prevent an outbreak of smallpox being carried into the colony]. Come into the colony it will. Rust, locusts, drought, we have had already, and ten thousand plagues more may we expect, as punishment for the blood which lies upon this land!' (227).

Once again the field-cornet sees in colonial life an irresolvable antagonism, which cannot be disguised by an appeal to higher principles. For him, the frontier conflict was conducted in a "state of bitter feud and constant warfare", governed only by a *lex talionis* in which both sides were "intent on mutual extermination". The point here is not so much the admonitions made against British treatment of the Boers or the alleged duplicity of the missionaries, but the fact that the British are involved in a form of total, structural warfare which sends "a regular army ... hundreds of miles into unknown parts" and results in violence on a much larger and more anonymous scale than the bloody but contingent strife of the frontier Boers and their indigenous adversaries. For the field-cornet there are no narratives of progress waiting to rescue the colony from its benighted state; to the contrary, colonial history is constituted by an initiating rupture that tears open the social order and leaves a wound that will not be healed by "humanity, religion, and new laws for protecting the slaves and the native tribes"; frontier life is bare life, an infernal round of "murder and mutilation ... and atrocity", absolutely denuded of

sociality. The language of rights and justice, as the field-cornet understands it, is no barrier to this pervasive violence – in fact it encourages it by giving it judicial sanction: “one hears of nothing but” these rights, even as they are being violated.

If the field-cornet is a pessimist of the present, haunted by the past, then he is in equal measure a fatalist of the future, which he projects in biblical terms as a retributive cycle of “plagues” and “punishment for the blood which lies upon this land”. The Enlightenment and its projects have passed the field-cornet by: he invests nothing in the notion of the future as the shaping space of the present just as he sees no practical value to be had from discourse of universal human rights. His sense of historical time is locked into a fixated, violent present which blocks the advent of the future insofar as the future can only be more of the same. The field-cornet, then, is a catastrophist of history; indeed, he is not unlike Walter Benjamin’s well known angel of history, with “[h]is face turned towards the past”, where he perceives not a teleology of events but “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet” (1973:259). Who is to say that the plague-ridden future envisaged by the field-cornet is not the time that we now inhabit, in which, *mutatis mutandis*, the deep structural inequalities of the past recur in yet another cycle of exploitation, crime and violence, despite the “new laws” formulated to interdict such behaviours? At any rate, the thickened cyclical temporality imagined by the field-cornet is one in which the past is not banished into the anteriority of a vanishing history but compulsively repeats itself, drawing past, present and future into a traumatic entanglement. Once again, the field-cornet proves prescient, for this sense of historical time as ineluctably tethered to the past anticipates those contemporary notions of the temporal where the linear, future orientation of modernity and progress is repudiated in favour of a “noncontemporaneous contemporaneity” where the present is “filled with traces of different moments and temporalities, weighed with sediments” (Harootunian 2007: 475,476). At this point we need perhaps to ask ourselves exactly who this vatic figure is and what place he occupies in the text in which he makes so belated and so apparently accidental an appearance.

Before we do so, however, we need to examine how Pringle and his correspondent respond to the field-cornet's impassioned monologue.

Let us begin by observing that the field-cornet is introduced to us as something of a puzzle: he is, Pringle's correspondent asserts, "one of the most respectable inhabitants of the district, -and, withal, of a very frank and honest disposition" (225). He is, in addition, "very rational, candid, and liberal" (226). Although the field-cornet would thus seem to possess, to an eminent degree, all those qualities which go into the making of an enlightened citizen, he seems, at least in part, to relinquish this identity when his monologue reveals him as an inveterate foe of humanitarian thinking and the ameliorations that it proposes. For it is the mention of Dr. Philip, we remember, that causes the field-cornet to "immediately b[reak] forth into a strain of angry invective" (226), and it is at this point that the "rational" and the "liberal" begin to lose their purchase on his character, and a certain atavism, a certain *unenlightenment*, begins to manifest itself. That this is how we are meant to read the field-cornet is evident in the comments made by Pringle's correspondent, which Pringle himself immediately endorses. Both men patronise the field-cornet: they see him as a person in formation, a probationary figure whose remorse is commendable but whose opinions, it is implied, are not to be taken seriously. Thus for the correspondent, the field-cornet's utterances offer "evidence" of "the improved state of moral sentiment among my fellow colonists" (227); he is an 'improving' example of a more general tendency among the "frontier boors" to "deplore[] the deeds of blood, both of early and recent times, by which the colony has been polluted, evincing clearly that, through the influence of religious instruction, their ideas in regard to the treatment of the natives and the coloured races generally are undergoing a very rapid and beneficial change" (228). Pringle announces himself "well disposed to concur" in this opinion, but to the edifying influence of "religious instruction" he complacently adds "the high moral tone uniformly maintained by the *liberal* part of the press in regard to the coloured races, to humanise the sentiments of the more respectable portion of the Dutch-African colonists". It would seem, then, that the field-cornet's outburst has elicited

nothing other than a guarded approval from both men, who feel able to cite him as an instance, albeit an incomplete one, of the benefits of a an enlightened liberal and Christian colonialism. In this incompleteness, it hardly needs stating, the field-cornet shares the provisional status of the indigenous convert.

Or so it would seem. But, as is so often the case with Pringle, there is another twist to the tale, a twist that begins to turn in the second half of the last sentence quoted above, which Pringle extends as follows:

[Y]et we must not delude ourselves with the fallacious notion that the progress of light and knowledge *alone* will effect either a speedy or a complete change in the state of things. Civilisation and information must of necessity make but slow and feeble advances among a class of people so situated as the white back-settlers of the wild and thinly populated regions on the Bushman frontier. Nor is it simply the knowledge of what is just and right that will induce men to act justly, or wisely, or humanely. Look at the long and arduous struggles we have had in enlightened, humane, and religious England to obtain the abolition of the abominable slave trade, and of the not less abominable State of Slavery. Look at the depth of ungenerous and unchristian prejudice in regard to the coloured race, which pervades free and religious America, like a feculent moral fog. I do not consider the Dutch-African colonists as worse than other people would be in similar circumstances – not certainly worse than the Spaniards in America – not worse perhaps than the British in Australia. Moreover, having been myself for years resident on a frontier exposed to the incursions of the native tribes, and witness to the annoyance and damage sustained by my own relatives from their depredations, it can scarcely be supposed that I am insensible to the provocations often received by the colonists, or altogether without sympathy for *their* situation. But on that very account I am more deeply impressed with the conviction of their unfitness to be the judges and avengers of their own wrongs. Were they the most humane and enlightened people in the world, they could not safely be trusted with such perilous powers. Without strong *legal restraints*, such, alas! is human nature on the large scale, that mere humanity will always be too feeble for passion and selfishness. (229)

In effect, and without openly acknowledging it, Pringle is conceding ground to the field-cornet; he is conceding that “enlightened, humane, and religious” governance will not, in itself, temper the atrocious tendencies of colonial behaviour. A significant brake is put upon earlier assertions of the “rapid and beneficial change” in colonial attitudes; instead, the colony, or more specifically, its outer edges, its zones of hostile contact, (i.e. precisely those areas in which it

expands and consolidates) is posited as a place in which an improving modernity can take hold only within the framework of an iron law. This is a view of “human nature on the large scale” which the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, with their faith in the benign sociability of civic man, sought so assiduously to disavow: that, unrestrained by the sheer force of a higher power (“strong *legal restraints*”), the common man will seek only the satisfaction of his own desires, will “always be too feeble for passion and selfishness”. These are also the views, of course, of Thomas Hobbes, formulated in the context of the attritional civil wars of seventeenth-century England, and Pringle’s implicit endorsement of them runs counter to the very grain of thought which has hitherto informed his understanding of the world. For all that, however, it requires little effort of the understanding to appreciate why it might be Hobbes, rather than, say, Adam Smith, who deserves nomination as the thinker with the most pertinent understanding of the brutal social mechanisms of frontier society. In a passage from *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes of societies wracked by hostile violence that “[I]t is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man.” (1946:82). Pringle’s “strong *legal restraints*” and Hobbes’s “common power” with which to keep men “all in awe” amount to much the same thing; similarly, Hobbes’s observation that war is a state of unsuspended hostility as much as it is one of armed engagement, (“[S]o the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting ... but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary” (82)) strikingly resembles the frontier condition of a constant “expos[ure] to ... incursions” – an exposure, of course, not limited to one side.

There is a lot more that we could do with Hobbes and the early nineteenth-century Cape Colony; we might also find in him a philosopher for the politics of the South African present: a recent book on the alarmingly high levels of crime bears the Hobbesian title *A Country at War with Itself: South Africa’s Crisis of Crime*. For immediate purposes, though, let it be noted that Hobbes operated as something of a bad ‘other’ for Scottish Enlightenment thinking, since the

premises of his thought were so directly antithetical to their own. In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith drops his customary restraint when discussing Hobbes, and refers to his “odious ... doctrine” (318) that the measure of morality is determined by the “obedience paid to the supreme magistrate” who alone stands as the arbiter of “what ought to be regarded as the sole ultimate standards of what was just and unjust, of what was right and wrong” (318). It is particularly offensive to Smith that for thinkers like Hobbes the mind was not “naturally endowed” (318) with the ability to make distinctions of moral value, and he proceeds to confute Hobbes, not altogether convincingly, by an appeal to “immediate sense and feeling”, rather than “a conformity to reason”, as supplying the groundwork or “first perceptions” of what constitutes “the source of the general rules of morality” (320). The details of these disagreements need not detain us here. What does need emphasis is that Pringle, in his implicit turn to Hobbes rather than Smith to explain the motivations of colonial behaviour, is abandoning, or at the very least severely diluting, his faith in the progressive evolution of human society. For, as Michael Rosen observes, the stadial theories of the Scottish Enlightenment were not only about the evolution of more complex polities; they were also underpinned by the belief that “economic advance” was at the same time “a moral one” (1996:117). Pringle’s conjecture that even the “most humane and enlightened” of the colonists can be constrained into civility only by the threat of severe legal retribution may be understood as an admission that colonial society occupies a anomalous position on the stadial scale, not least because of the lack of proportion between economic and moral advance.

“But let us revert once more to facts” (239) begins the paragraph that follows on from the paragraph quoted above. We remember here the “naked deformity” of those facts that Pringle was eager to see put forward before a parliamentary committee, while in other discursive mediums, such as his major poem of colonial settlement, “The Emigrant’s Cabin”, he was far more concerned with what, following Edmund Burke, we might call the “decent drapery” (1983:171) of colonial life. But in these passages, the ‘deformity’ of colonial life is not a pawn in

the parliamentary tactics of humanitarianism, but something much more like the defining or constitutive feature of this life. Thus Pringle begins with the delayed admission that the behaviours described by the field-cornet are ongoing: “Nor need we recall the barbarous acts of ancient times”, he continues, “let us look merely at the legalised butcheries of the Bushman race, which were incessantly going on while I was myself in the colony, and of which only a small portion has been recorded in the works of Thompson and Philip” (229). Pringle then goes on to recount two incidents: one in 1821, of which he had first-hand knowledge, in which “eighty souls” were slain and women and children taken captive as labour slaves; the other an incident in 1829, in which the slaughter was particularly gratuitous, though on a lesser scale. Now though Pringle might admit, as he earlier failed to do, that “barbarous acts” toward the Bushmen cannot be back-dated into the distance of “ancient times” (a temporal notation which normally implies centuries rather than decades), but belong just as securely in the present, what he does not admit – and this is absolutely crucial – is that he too played his part in the “legalised butcheries of the Bushman race” – that he and the field-cornet are not as distinct as he would have us imagine. Pringle concludes his reflections by contemplating the possibility that the colonial enterprise may result not in a steady arc of civil achievement but in something more like an inverted millenarianism in which the strong plunder the weak and providential destiny gives way to national guilt:

Without going any further into a subject which has been already so ably discussed and so amply illustrated by my friend, Dr. Philip, I shall only, in conclusion, express my conviction of the utter futility of looking for any effectual change of system from any power *within* the colony. All that can be expected from the most benevolent governor (unless he were a statesman of an order such as our secondary dependencies are but rarely blest with) is the application of palliatives, which may perhaps mitigate the suffering, but which cannot possibly heal the sore. Unless, therefore, the subject is seriously taken up by the Home Government, and some comprehensive plan wisely devised and perseveringly carried into execution, for the protection and civilisation of the tribes that surround the colony, no other result can be rationally contemplated than the prolongation, for generations to come, of the same revolting scenes of mutual wrong and barbarity. The bitter fountain will still pour forth its bitter waters. The frontier colonists, be they Dutch or English, *must* of necessity continue to be semi-barbarians, so long as the *commando-system* – the system of hostile reprisals – shall be encouraged or connived at; and so long as the colonists are permitted to make encroachments on the

territory and the natural rights of the natives, the colony can never have a safe or a settled frontier. Mutual enmity and reciprocal outrage will proceed as heretofore. The weak will gradually melt away before the strong; tribe after tribe will be extirpated; and year after year, as we continue to *talk* of our boundless benevolence and our Christian philanthropy, fresh loads of guilt which the Almighty has denounced in awful terms – the blood-stained guilt of *oppression*, will continue to accumulate on our heads as a nation. (231-2).

While Pringle might in this passage have switched his focus from the Bushmen to the “native tribes”, we must remember that the passage occurs, or is generated within, a discussion of the Bushman which is itself the direct consequence of the field-cornet’s reported monologue. There is a distinction to be made between the Bushmen and the “native tribes” insofar as the latter are not subject to the same indiscriminate violence as the former (if for no other reason than the fact that their retaliatory powers are so much greater – that they possess, in 1834, the ability to wage war against the colony). The Bushman, on the other hand, possess only limited means of retaliation: the abduction, or the slaughter, of livestock and, very rarely, the infliction of mortal wounds with poisonous arrows. Yet it is possible to argue, as Pringle implicitly does, that the commando-raid is a form of “legalised butchery”, no matter who is being targeted. Pringle’s ‘solution’ to the violence at the core of colonialism – “the protection and the civilisation of the tribes that surround the colony” – is, as he seems almost to admit, a wishful one: territory expropriated by violence is unlikely to call forth from the expropriated a submission to the values of the expropriators; and more especially so when the loss of land leads, as it inevitably must, to a scarcity of resources. It therefore comes as no surprise that Pringle should conclude his remarks with a vision of repeated cycles of violence which make a mockery of the discourses of “philanthropy” and “benevolence”. Here he sketches out that other colonial history, the dark backing of the mirror of progress and Christianity; here he sketches out, in fact, the history that did indeed come to pass (we have only to substitute violent subjection for “extirpat[ion]”).

It should have escaped no one’s notice that Pringle’s perorating remarks resemble, with disarming exactitude, the dire futurity called up by the field-cornet: both men envisage cycles

of retributive violence, and the biblical “guilt” of “blood”. Though Pringle might see this future as an optional one, the result of a failure of imperial policy, that he even entertains such a scenario is significant in itself. Significant not only because it cuts across, and completely cancels, his frequently expressed optimism about the colonial future, or his visions of an evangelically rejuvenated empire in the wake of abolition, but significant also because the figure who inflects or mediates these darker reflections is someone complicit in colonial murder, someone, that is, just like Pringle himself. For how else are we to read the fortuitous field-cornet other than as a double or an alter-ego, one who acknowledges that there is a “damned spot” on his hands, unlike Pringle, who belligerently chased away such suggestions, but now allows them back, in this displaced, doubled form? Let us recall here that Pringle’s “correspondent”, whose opinions coincide so closely with Pringle’s own, sees the field-cornet as an improving figure because he “deplored ... the deeds of blood ... by which the colony has been polluted”. But is it not obvious that the field-cornet does more than just deplore these deeds, like a good liberal? It is not as straightforward as this, for the field-cornet is not able simply to declare his abhorrence and then move on, as Pringle and his correspondent seem able to do; he is haunted by these deeds and their “pollution”, both in his own self and, as it were, in his social self, which sees them as ineluctably consequential on a larger scale.

Let us give some consideration here as to exactly what is at stake in the decimation of the Bushmen, the taking of other human lives as though they were no more than vermin, and not only with the sanction of the law but often with its express assistance as well. Here we might recall, albeit in summary form, Giorgio Agamben’s argument that, since classical times, the legal framework of the Western state has constituted itself through the creation of “states of exception” – states in which, at the behest of the sovereign, the law is suspended, along with the rights of the subjects or citizens to whom the state of exception applies, thus rendering their life as “bare life”, life without protection. For Agamben these states of exception are not temporary or transient breaks in the operational normality of the law but its enabling condition,

“something that confirms the most inner nature of the law” (1998:26). Agamben demonstrates this hidden reciprocity or “zone of indistinction” between law and the negation of law with examples that range from the *homo sacer* of classical times, a figure of proscription who “may be killed but not sacrificed”, through various interleading prototypes before concluding with what he considers to be occidental modernity’s exemplary state of exception: the camps of the Holocaust, which then find a further exemplification in the global displacements of the refugee who inhabits suspended juridical and empirical spaces. Agamben constructs his genealogy entirely out of European examples, and has hardly anything to say about colonial states of exception (of which the examples, of course, are manifold). The only occasion when Agamben does venture closer to this other side of the European genealogy (for one might argue that the modern European state takes shape as both a domestic and as an imperial phenomenon), is when he refers to the “state of nature”. This reference occurs in the context of an extended interlocution with the work of Carl Schmitt, where Schmitt argues that “the link between localisation and ordering constitutive of the *nomos* of the earth always implies a zone that is excluded from the law and that takes the shape of a ‘free and juridically empty space’” in which the sovereign power no longer knows the limits fixed by the *nomos* as the territorial order” (36). Precisely such a “juridically empty space” was that “state of nature” allegedly inhabited by the indigenes of the New World, and within such territories the suspension of *nomos* or the law enabled the establishment of colonial sovereignty. Agamben comments on the special status ascribed to the “state of nature” as follows:

The state of nature and the state of exception are nothing but two sides of a single topological process in which what was presupposed as external (the state of nature) now reappears, as in a Mobius strip or a Leyden jar, in the inside (as state of exception), and the sovereign power is this very impossibility of distinguishing between outside and inside, nature and exception, *physis* and *nomos*. The state of exception is thus not so much a spatiotemporal suspension as a complex topological figure in which not only the exception and the rule but also the state of nature and law, outside and inside, pass through one another. It is precisely this topological zone of indistinction, which had to remain hidden from the eyes of justice, that we must try to fix under our gaze. (37)

Agamben's argument here may be compressed into the assertion that the state of nature -for which we may also substitute any colonial territory seen as void of the apparatus of civilisation – acts as the occasion for an exercise of European sovereignty in which the state of exception becomes the normative rule. Leaving aside Agamben's argument that the state of exception is not so much a suspension of the law as that which inheres in law, as in the topological intertwinement of the Mobius strip where inside and outside are indistinguishable, we may readily see how in the colonial context this "zone of indistinction" assumes a stark transparency. If we bend this argument back into a specific configuration, the early nineteenth-century Eastern Frontier, then we may think of the Bushmen, distinct as they are from other indigenous people, as occupying something like a concentric and intensified state of exception within that generalised state of exception which constitutes colonial rule. In the case of the Bushmen, the pattern of the commando raid (itself a kind of miniaturised, mobilised state of exception) seems to have been different in that it was more than an authorised attempt to recover stock, with some 'collateral' damage; invariably it was a mission to kill adult males and take captive women and children. The peculiar ferocity of these raids, in which the "indistinction between violence and the law" (32) is registered with a shocking directness, acts as a limit case for colonial sovereignty, and as such represents not an aberration or an extreme, but the undisguised epicentre of its operation which is, in the most literal sense, "hidden from the eyes of justice"; as much as the Bushmen might have occupied a stigmatised place beyond the limits of colonial law, they were also the outside that revealed the inside of this law. Under such conditions, it is little wonder that even "the most humane and civilised" of the settlers become brutalised and "grow all savage and bloody" as Pringle put in a previously quoted letter to Fairbairn. The very structure of colonial life rests on a fundamental annulment of justice and rights; in juridical terms it truly is a place in which the "death-fraught firelock" constitutes the "only law".

For Pringle the improving Scot the history of his own country was construed as an example of how the violence of the past could be mitigated and even forgotten by an agreement to accept

the internal colonialism of British rule, to commit Scotland to new forms of social and political definition. In this context stadial theory, with its sense of successive phases of development dropping off like booster rockets as historical development reached toward its highest point, provided a compelling rationalisation for the Scottish choice to elect the high road to modernity. When this theorisation moved to the Cape Colony, however, it encountered some insuperable difficulties. If Scotland was notable for its differential concentration of temporalities, its Highland and Lowland of historical development, it at least had the advantage of an urban stratum of considerable advancement. In the Cape Colony no such advantage prevailed: as we have seen, urban life, if one can call it that, was highly localised and did not set the pattern for national development. It was in the hinterlands of settlement that the shape of the future was being negotiated and in this formation modernity manifested itself not in the consolidation of civic life but in an uncompromising collision of temporalities in which the people most distant from civilisational norms were hunted like animals into near extinction, while warfare and intermittent forms of strife characterised interaction with other indigenous groupings. For the most part, Pringle remained a determined optimist of the colonial future; in his public role as an abolitionist humanitarian he unfailingly ticked the positive attributes of empire and his poetry frequently reflected these attitudes as well. Yet running through Pringle's work, often in disguised or oblique form, are altogether darker intimations of the colonial project. The passage involving the field-cornet, despite its displacement and apparent disavowal, is by far Pringle's most despairing appraisal of South African colonialism and it is perhaps for this reason that he must contrive an epistolatory person to put some distance between himself and these direr recognitions. Even so, Pringle lets the field-cornet in, when he could very easily have shut him out, and in so doing allows the splitting or bifurcation evident in his poetry to undergo a further elaboration. For not only does the field-cornet operate as Pringle's double, in the sense of someone through whom he can articulate views that are contrary, and not so contrary, to his own; the field-cornet also catalyses in Pringle a split between an understanding of colonialism as progressive modernity and an understanding of

colonialism as an event in which this same modernity stands condemned under the sign of the ceaseless abrogation of its emancipatory promises, their cyclical involution into “the same revolting scenes” that “proceed as heretofore”. Pringle’s language might veer toward the melodramatic here, but this is a remarkably premonitory understanding of western modernity’s flawed colonial legacy, a ‘postcolonialism’, if you will, *avant la lettre*.

In taking our leave of Pringle, then, we must acknowledge that he has not yet taken his leave of us. It has been over a century and a half since Pringle died, yet the tensions of his engagement with early colonial South African life and the acuteness of the contradiction which afflicted this engagement cannot be relegated to the distant past. For Pringle’s settler-heirs he too is a revenant of sorts, a reminder of a past still present in the present: our obligation is to find a way of remembering him and a way of letting him go.

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Abbreviations

FB (Fairbairn Papers)

LP (Library of Parliament, Cape Town)

NELM (National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown)

QBSAL (Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library)

SAJ (South African Journal)

SAL (South African Library, Cape Town)

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