

AUSTRALIAN NARRATIVES AND CHARLES DICKENS – RETELLING THE HISTORY
OF THE TRANSPORT CONVICT NETWORK

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ABSTRACT

The practice of exile reached its zenith in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the British Empire utilized transportation to remove criminal offenders elsewhere. From late 1787 to early 1788, the First Fleet sailed with more than 1,000 men, women, and children from England to Botany Bay in New South Wales. The transport convict network was romanticized in Dickens's *Great Expectations*; however, untold stories mostly absent from view fill in the gaps that are missing from Dickensian work. Using first-hand research obtained at The British Library and the State Library Victoria, this paper analyzes both convict narratives as well as Dickens's shift from portraying transportation as a necessary evil to his glowing reports from Australia in "Household Words."

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Expulsion and forced exile have been judicial punishments since at least the fifth century B.C. when ancient Greeks and Romans exercised castigations against political foes and the morally reprehensible. However, as Robert Hughes argues in his seminal book *The Fatal Shore*, the practice of exile reached its height in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the British Empire utilized transportation to remove criminal offenders, debtors, and military prisoners to establish them in British colonies elsewhere. To higher-class Britons and the landed, educated gentry, Australia represented a deviant, exiled society that began on the afternoon of January 26, 1788, when the first fleet of eleven ships carrying more than 1,000 men, women, and children entered Port Jackson and Botany Bay in New South Wales. It was believed that, by sending the criminal class out of the country and into this foreign, and what they believed to be a savage place, Britons could save property, decrease homicides and violent crimes, and protect the English from the criminal within and especially around London. The transport convict network was born.

At the time, these perilous journeys and harsh conditions were chronicled in the mostly absent diaries and journals of convicts and criminals who were exiled and the sailors who ferried them there. Since I first read *Great Expectations* in elementary school, I have been fascinated by Abel Magwitch's narrative and how—even offstage for the bulk of the novel—he is able to control the actions of the protagonist, Pip, from his exile in Australia. Imagine the thrill I would experience when I found out I'd be able to conduct primary research at the other end of the transport convict network! In November 2018, I was fortunate enough to travel to Australia where I spent a day at the State

Library Victoria in Melbourne. There I was able to view a transcribed version of John Ward's first-person convict narrative, a convict banished to Botany Bay and beyond, as well as an uncredited log of the *Guildford*, a convict ship headed for the Antipodes, and how these mostly rosy retellings contributed to the restyling of Australia's history by their suppression of the cruelties of transportation.

But the adventure didn't stop there. In May 2019, I had the great fortune of traveling to England where I spent a day in The British Library in London. There, I was able to research another journal kept by a surgeon on board the *Lady Penrhyn*, a two-deck ship originally commissioned in 1786 for use in the Atlantic slave trade. Originally built to carry two hundred seventy-five slaves, she was instead enlisted to carry convicts for transportation to Australia. These narratives and ship logs, which have mostly fallen into obscurity, are where we can start to fill in the gaps of consciousness that were missing from Australian and British accounts at the time. It was clear that they told contemporary Victorian stories, just not to their contemporaries.

To apply a cultural perspective and to truly analyze how the web of stories that are both absent and present influenced society during the time of transportation, it's necessary to consider elements of both canonical works and the unpublished accounts that have spent most of their time in private collections or at state libraries. Turning back to the preeminent Charles Dickens, arguably one of the most popular and influential writers of the Victorian age, we see that he made his objections to transportation known through several editorials and letters he published that blatantly show his disdain for capital punishment and transportation in the 1840s. Between 1850 and 1859, Dickens served as the Editor-in-Chief of *Household Words* where he supervised and wrote many

of the more than 100 articles, stories, and poems pertaining to the settling of Australia. Ranging from sailor's tales to immigrant stories, to convict redemption narratives, these exotic, engaging, deeply edited tales were his way of presenting his views and helping shape the narrative that was forming around the settling of Australia. Here, his views take a remarkable shift towards support and acceptance of the transport convict network. Then comes *Great Expectations*.

Dickens's novel, first published as a serial in *All the Year Round* from December 1860 to August 1861, Dickens continued his nearly twenty-year conversation around transportation and its effects on Victorian British society with his thirteenth and penultimate completed novel. Set in Kent and London in the early nineteenth century, the novel is narrated through the vivid storytelling of Philip "Pip" Pirrip, an orphan who lives with his hot-headed sister, "Mrs. Joe," and her patient blacksmith husband, Joe Gargery. On Christmas Eve, Pip visits the graves of his parents and siblings, and it is in the graveyard on these misty, foggy marshes where Pip encounters Abel Magwitch, a convict sentenced to fourteen years of transportation after passing forged bank notes. Magwitch has escaped from the prison hulk anchored by the marshes and forces Pip to not only steal food but also provide the tools needed to break his chains and shackles. Following Pip's theft of his sister's holiday trimmings and sharing of those with Magwitch (along with a blacksmith's file that Magwitch uses to pry off his leg irons), the convict is caught on Christmas Day, is again tried, and is sentenced to transportation for life in Australia where he spends a good portion of the novel offstage.

When Magwitch later returns from Australia after escaping unexpectedly, he relates the story of his time there and his escape in a romanticized, hazy way. Dickens's

telling of the story is also punctuated by Magwitch's good fortune, which he shares with Pip becoming the benefactor of his "great expectations," and his emergence as an almost fairytale-like stepfather to Pip. Magwitch's wistful story about the loneliness of being a shepherd belies the fact that shepherding in the Australian outback was extremely dangerous and harsh. Here, Dickens's treatment of Magwitch's story seems to lighten and almost snuff out the incredibly hard life he was sure to have led there.

Robert Hughes has argued that in the mid-1830s (roughly when *Great Expectations* was set), Victorian Australians were also working to sublimate and cleanse their history and the origins of the country's irregular founding. He states that "the obsessive cultural enterprise of Australians a hundred years ago was to forget [their convict history] entirely, to sublimate it, to drive it down into unconsulted recesses" (596). As transportation was winding down in the 1860s, the inhabitants of Australia had solidified themselves as true contributing colonists of the British Empire and had moved well beyond the stigma that accompanied their founding as a penal colony. Dickens's romanticization of various exile plots in *Household Words* and *Great Expectations*, and the apparent sublimation of the history of transportation Hughes writes of, is inherently tied to the influence Dickens wielded as a celebrated author. They are also in direct opposition to the positions Dickens had taken squarely against transportation in the past. As the network was winding down, the author made an about-face, contributing to Victorian historical amnesia by glossing over and essentially participating in the erasure of the role convicts had in the founding of Australia.

CHAPTER 2 – SETTING THE COURSE

Background and History of the Transport Convict Network

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were marked by two very different Londons—one of noble, educated, English men and women, who read Blake and listened to Baroque, the other, those who could not read nor scarcely find food or work. There was no well-established or settled “working class,” and the population growth of workers and tradesmen, women, and often children outpaced the jobs and wages they needed to survive. Moreover, while Georgian Londoners of the same trade might share some loyalties, the working class wouldn’t take shape as a congruent whole until the early twentieth century. In the 1700s, West London grew at a reasonable, controlled pace where property was leased and building was planned; however, East London, where the city’s poorest were cast, was a labyrinth of shacks and shanties where they scarcely had “room to bury the dead” (Hughes 20). “Around St. Martin’s, St. James’s, and St. Giles-in-the-Fields, there were large open pits filled with the rotting cadavers of paupers whose friend could get them no better burial,” these “poor holes” remained in London until the 1790s (Hughes 20). With no working class to speak of and poverty rampant, crime would almost become a trade of its own.

It was easier to commit crimes in metropolitan London than in provincial towns where a criminal’s neighbors might know them. Adding to the lawlessness, London officials, eager to create budgetary savings for the expanding metropolis, prided themselves on the savings they could realize due to the lack of police. The prevailing opinion was that other major cities, like Paris, were overpriced and engineered for the purpose of keeping their inhabitants under control. “According to the *Morning*

Chronicle, ‘the police in Paris is most dexterously contrived for the purposes of tyranny, but that is so very efficacious in preventing the blackest crimes that deform and afflict human nature, we much question’ (qtd in Shaw 39-40). These attitudes and approaches to creating tax savings would also lead to an interminable rise in crime—those who had the most to gain from a well-organized and proper police force were the ones who were the most diametrically opposed to it. Yet, despite these attitudes, there were some haphazard and disorganized efforts to address the problem of the criminal.

Constables, such as those in the City of Westminster, were mostly unpaid by the state, yet still part of an unofficial policing system. Some were hired locally as backfill, often working for a shilling a night and bringing their corrupt and felonious ways with them—rather than enforcing the law, they were most likely aiding and abetting the crimes. Adding to the lawlessness, older, poorer, and often decrepit men who were unable to work elsewhere (and therefore cheaper) were hired to serve as constables and guards to secure buildings and property in the West End. These elderly law enforcement officials were more likely to be confronted by younger criminals and were almost always overtaken. What would emerge from these early police organization efforts would become the Bow Street Runners, a group of law enforcement officers attached to the Bow Street Magistrate’s Court in Westminster. Founded in 1749 by former magistrate Henry Fielding, the Bow Street Runners are considered the first organized British police force and would remain as a formalized unit until they disbanded in 1839—which puts the Runners squarely in the path of the rise and fall of transportation. Indeed, the Runners, whose state financial support only continued to rise, helped shift the focus of transportation from America to Australia. The loss to the Colonies meant that convicts

and felons, who would have been transported to America, were now piling up in English jails and prisons. Additionally, following the American Revolution, soldiers and fighters returned to England and London only to find a lack of jobs and real employment. Often, these returning veterans would turn to petty crime and burglary to survive. As crime rose the Runners responded and increased convictions were made, other accommodations and solutions had to be found, in this case, those newly created penal colonies more than 14,000 miles away in the Antipodes would be crucial to the rise of transportation to Australia.

The Runners, or Bow Street Men, make an appearance in *Great Expectations*, their smart, red waistcoats a signature reference in Pip's narrative following Orlick's attack on Mrs. Joe. In Volume One, Chapter Sixteen, Pip is torn and guilty that the weapon used to attack his sister—the very same leg iron that he helped Magwitch file off years earlier—is implemented in the attack. Pip's secrets and sins abound and although he feels regret, he's not quite sure he can muster the will to admit his connection to the attack, instead relying on the "Constables, and the Bow-street men from London – for this happened in the days of the extinct red waistcoated police," to deliver him from his guilty conscience (154). Pip continues that the detectives were:

About the house for a week or two, and did pretty much what I have heard and read of like authorities doing in other such cases. They took up several obviously wrong people, and ran their heads very hard against wrong ideas, and persisted in trying to fit the circumstances to their ideas, instead of trying to extract ideas from circumstances. Also, they stood about the door of the Jolly Bargeman, with knowing and reserved looks

that filled the whole neighbourhood with admiration; and they had a mysterious manner of taking their drink, that was almost as good as taking the culprit. But not quite, for they never did it. (155)

Here, Dickens is using the Bow Street Runners to do double duty. First, he mentions their absence to further highlight that Pip is telling his story as an adult well after the Runners had disbanded and, subtly, towards the end of transportation. To Dickens, the Runners are a pop culture reference, their red waistcoats grounding the narrative squarely in the past. Dickens also invokes the Runners to relate Pip's reluctance to step in and incriminate himself, instead relying on the reputations of the Runners's dodgy police work and their "taking up several wrong people" and "wrong ideas" to work the case. But Mrs. Joe's crime wouldn't have been the only one occupying the Runners's time.

Crime was booming and pickpockets made a reasonable living. In 1790, London visitors were warned to "never stop in a crowd or look at the windows of a print-shop, if you would not have your pocket picked," and it was suggested that Londoners secure valuables and portable property within the linings of their coats (Shaw 40). Likewise, those traveling to London by stage or on foot were accosted by vagrants and criminals, and as Patrick Colquhoun, the metropolitan police magistrate, noted, travelers were robbed, assaulted, wounded, and even murdered along the way. He wrote that "we cannot lie down to rest in our habitations, without the dread of a burglary being committed, our property invaded, and our lives exposed to immense danger before morning" (qtd in Shaw 40). In 1797, Colquhoun argued that there were "105,000 criminals in the metropolis (nearly one-eighth, or twelve percent of the population of London at that time), though his estimate seems a guess, even if an inspired one.

Although the police force at the end of the eighteenth century was lacking, Colquhoun still counted “2,000 professed thieves, 10,500 thieves and pilferers, 3,000 coiners, 4,000 receivers of stolen goods and 12,000 recently released from the goal” (qtd in Shaw 39). The remainder of the felons and criminals Colquhoun estimated included 50,000 prostitutes, 3,000 spendthrifts, “profligate, loose and dissolute characters,” 7,500 swindlers and cheats, 3,000 beggars and 10,000 servants ‘out of place from ill-behaviour and loss of character,’ who were surely not all necessarily felons” a good bit of which were likely later sentenced to transportation (qtd in Shaw 39).

The criminal system continued to flounder and flail, and inequities in sentencing and punishment were often influenced by the criminal justice system itself. By the early nineteenth century, given the scarcity of organized police and law enforcement systems, perjurious juries who were reluctant to pass a death sentence often would acquit more hardened crimes even if the evidence led them towards a conviction. For example, in 1805, more than 4,600 convicts “were committed for trial, 2,783 were convicted, of whom 350 were sentenced to death, and 68 executed,” and in 1810, 5,146 were committed, 3,158 convicted, 476 sentenced to death, and 67 executed” (Cross 547). For those jurors and judges who were less inclined to commit convicts to the gallows, there was a penal code loophole called “benefit of clergy” or *privilegium clericale*. Rooted in Medieval law, this “get out of jail free” clause, modified throughout English history, allowed criminals to declare they were members of the clergy, thereby receiving special pardons or dispensation. Benefit of clergy had its origins in the twelfth century in the Stephens Charter of 1136 and was originally meant to save clerks and monks, whereby convicts of the cloth were remanded from secular courts to church courts and tried there.

Elizabeth I blurred the lines between the sacred and the secular when she declared that clergy could be subject to secular verdicts and could be imprisoned “for any period not exceeding a year,” and William and Mary extended the benefit of clergy to women (Cross 554).

The English justice system, nevertheless, wised up and finally buried the benefit of clergy loophole, creating short-term detention and transportation “beyond the seas” as the two major forms of punishment for criminal offenses. Transportation was established by an Act of Parliament in 1717 and subsequently amended in later acts. Penal transportation sentences would see criminals flung to all corners of the globe with Parliament driving its many codifications. For example, in 1750, a House of Commons subcommittee assessing criminal law and its punishments further refined transportation’s definitions by codifying that it would involve at the extremes a permanent banishment from one’s home country involving hard labor in foreign lands and countries. For many criminals and offenders, that involved being sent to the Americas to toil on plantations. L. L. Robson writes in his book *The Convict Settlers of Australia* (1965) that during these early stages of the system, more than 30,000 convicts who had committed certain felonies were sent to work off their crimes in America; however, those routes and channels disappeared at the beginning of the Revolutionary War. Now, Parliament was faced with a new dilemma—where to send its hardened criminals.

India was out because there was already a built-in indentured slave population on the subcontinent who were being forced by the imperialistic system to send their resources, spices, and exotic wares back to Great Britain. Administered by the East India Company for nearly two hundred years by this time, the system was so well-ingrained

that transportation might have mucked up the works. Established in the 1600s by a royal charter following Francis Drake's circumnavigation exploits, by the mid-1700s, the East India Company held control over all trade routes east of South Africa and had amassed great wealth for its government and trustees. After establishing its trade monopoly, the East India Company also brandished its own military force and had built-in human resources, thus wielding unsurpassed power in the region. If its leaders declared they were going to pass on British convicts, then they did.

Africa was considered too dangerous because native peoples often destroyed English forts and settlements and these often-deadly confrontations would have surely stalled the establishment of transportation on the African continent. With options running out, in 1776 Parliament agreed that a temporary, short-term fix was needed. Due to the lack of prison space, Parliament decreed that hulks, or former ships that had been modified to detain criminals, would be moored along the Thames. The first hulk was moored in Barking Creek in July 1776 and housed convicts who were forced to perform hard labor on the banks during daylight hours. Although the hulks were only authorized by Parliament for two years, they lasted eighty-two. The length and protraction of transportation eventually led to ideological pushback and protests by Britain's gentry and upper class.

To counteract the narrative, Parliament falsely announced that the hulks had been made more airy, healthy, and open—in fact, they were overcrowded, disease-ridden, and cramped. Originally meant to hold up to 380 convicts while docked along the Thames, they frequently held nearly a thousand felons and criminals who often were bound

together in leg irons and forced to perform hard labor before eventually being shipped to stations, penal colonies, and plantations around the world.

Parliament reexamined the use of hulks as early as 1779, and again the question of what remote and far-flung destinations Britain should send its most hardened criminals to was reassessed. In the House of Commons, Sir Joseph Banks, a companion of Captain James Cook, suggested Botany Bay as a reasonable solution. Cook, the British navigator who made three famous voyages to New Zealand and Australia between 1768 and 1779, found that escape from Australia would be highly difficult, and ensured Parliamentarians that the remote island had a mild climate, gentle and compliant natives who would likely comply with British customs, and, most interestingly, almost unlimited natural resources that would be advantageous to Britain. Although these arguments were compelling, lawmakers who were convinced that criminals and convicts might not have it hard enough balked until provisions were made to build penitentiaries for the most hardened of criminals where they would be ordered to hard labor and imprisonment. Plans were made to use criminals to build penal colonies along Botany Bay and those seeking harsher judicial reforms were overjoyed and agreed to the system. The scene was set; Britain charted its course for the Antipodes.

“The Fatal Shore”

“Never had a colony been founded so far from its parent state, or in such ignorance of the land it occupied” (Robson 1). Captain James Cook explored Botany Bay in 1770, but no other contact had been made, and, Hughes states, this colonial experiment of establishing a continental jail in a relatively unknown and vast space had never been tried nor would ever be repeated. Australia had the ultimate, impenetrable

fence and stronghold, an area of about 14,000 miles between it and Britain, and the Crown naturally used the threat of inaccessibility to home, friends, and family as a deterrent for crime. The first convicts began their sentences on January 26, 1788, a date now celebrated as Australia Day. Convicted of relatively low crimes, such as stealing to feed their starving families—a necessity given the collapsing economy—offenses often included the theft of food, blankets, or clothes, as well as valuables that could be sold for food or money. Two out of every three convicts were tried in England, Ireland, and Scotland, and, using commutation precedents set by statute, convicts were transported to penal colonies in Australia (Robson 9).

Often, before beginning the long journey to Australia, convicts were “staged” in floating hulks where they were marched on and off the ship each day and forced into hard labor while they awaited their passage. Tasks could include unloading ships, dredging channels, and moving cables in the shipyards—all while wearing fourteen-pound chains and leg irons. They were marched to and from the hulk for meals, with breakfast consisting mostly of dry bread and cocoa. In the evenings, they were treated to “6 ounces of meat, 1 pound of potatoes, and 9 ounces of bread,” and after dinner, they were expected to conduct evening prayers and continue their schoolwork (Mayhew 215). But the threat of transportation, which included the inevitable separation from friends and families, would loom large. Convicts would wait out their time, often in despair, before being sent away.

The ships commonly landed in what is now Sydney Harbor in New South Wales. Convicts were then expected to “serve the Crown, or on the Crown’s behalf, some private person, for a given span of years” (Hughes 282). Convicts were either assigned to the

government and were guarded by military forces, or they were assigned to free settlers and landowners to work off their sentences as farmers, shepherds, carpenters, and other tradesmen, often in very harsh and severe conditions. The master was allowed to charge his servants with insubordination, but discipline was carried out by magistrates and others who decided the punishment could include floggings up to hanging.

Hughes discusses the story of a refractory convict on Norfolk Island who was tortured and mutilated. Joseph Mansbury “had been flogged so often—some 2,000 lashes in three years—that his back appeared ‘quite bare of flesh, and his collar bones were exposed looking very much like two ivory polished horns’ (qtd in Hughes 115). Following the lashing, transport convicts were only given a bucket of seawater to wash up a process nicknamed “getting salty back” (Hughes 115). Other atrocities were directed by the Commandant of Norfolk Island, Major Joseph Foveaux, whose regime included intentionally setting prison fires with convicts inside. Because fledgling Australian civil and criminal laws were hazy and imprecise at best, many of the guards and judge-advocates were free to create their own sentences.

In 1840, the probation system was introduced whereby convicts were assigned to probation stations housed throughout the island. In these jails, convicts were sent through their paces and were permitted more freedom according to their behavior. After working off their sentences, they were pardoned or given a ticket-of-leave at which time they were allowed to sell their labor and choose their place of work. According to Hughes, towards the end of transportation, reformists argued that the system of indentured servitude led to a peasant class that most were unlikely to escape. This

became one of the arguments that activists against transportation used to help bring about the demise of the system.

Although the passage was arduous and grueling at an average of three to six months or more, the success rate of transporting convicts to Australia was relatively good and the transfer conditions continued to improve. Overall, between 1787 and 1852, only 1.8 percent of the men and women transported to New South Wales were lost (Robson 5). All in all, the transportation system would last a little more than eighty years, effectively ending by 1868 and some 166,000 men, women, and children would find their way to “the land of the southern cross” as transport convicts (Hughes 2). By the time it was to meet its demise, transportation was well established as integral to imperialist England and its dominance in the economy and culture of the Industrial Age. Indeed, Dickens would use transportation to propel both his novels, such as *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield* forward, and he often came back to the topic in his weeklies, including *Household Words*.

CHAPTER 3 – ALTERING COURSE

“A remarkably fine day. Wind NE. A fine breeze.” – Arthur Bowes-Smyth

The transport convict system was not new when, in 1787, the first ships of convicts bound for Australia set sail. Known as the First Fleet, the expedition consisted of eleven ships under the command of Captain Arthur Philip. In all, more than 1,400 people including the convicts, sailors, and free settlers bound for Australia who became the makings of the first penal colony to inhabit the new colony; and the expedition had quite the media following back home. In an edition of the Whitehall Evening Post on the eve of the First Fleet’s inaugural sailing, a lyricist pointed to the more favorable and positive aspects of the sailing. Indeed, despite the hardships, the poet referred to the voyage with notable frivolity:

*Of those precious souls who for nobody care,
It seems a large cargo the Kingdom can spare;
To ship off a gross or two may not delay,
They cannot too soon go to Botany Bay.*

*They go to an island to take special charge
Much warmer than Britain, and ten times as large;
No custom-house duty, no freightage to pay,
And tax-free they’ll live when at Botany Bay (Shaw 50-51).*

Although the sing-song nature of the verse published at the time of sailing belies it, the more than 14,000-mile passage from Portsmouth, England, to Australia was a grueling one of sickness and death. Often, older prison ships were drafty and wet, with water sloshing about inside during the 250 days or so that it took to finally arrive in port. Prisoners, hungry from lack of food or suffering severe seasickness, were cold and wet with little to no access to hygiene. Vermin and rats, as well as lice and bedbugs, plagued the convicts and sailors alike. The convicts' quarters had no portholes, and candles and

lanterns weren't allowed because of the fear of fire. During storms when the ship was battened down, there was little to no fresh air below deck. One of these ships, the *Lady Penrhyn*, was one of the initial transport ships in the First Fleet, which made the round-trip journey from March 20, 1787, to August 13, 1789, sailing from Portsmouth to Botany Bay, Tahiti, and China, later returning to London. Built on the Thames in 1786 with a capacity of two hundred seventy-five, it served first as a slave ship used in the Atlantic slave trade; however, it would become one of the first ships used in transporting convicts to what would become New South Wales. Owned by William Compton Sever, who served as her first captain, the *Penrhyn* would become a formidable workhorse in the First Fleet responsible for transporting men, women, and children to the Australian colony. Arthur Bowes-Smyth served as the surgeon on board the transport ship during its first passage and, although his medical qualifications are a bit sketchy because no evidence of them can be ascertained, he was responsible for the general care of the females on board. Bowes-Smyth is also credited with documenting the trip through his detailed journals. No regulations existed at the time for keeping duplicate journals (those requirements would come later), yet Bowes-Smyth did. Although it remains unpublished in print (there are now PDF versions and translations available online), the version I accessed from the British Library archives in London is believed to be the copy, with the original in the Mitchell Library in New South Wales, Sydney. In it, Bowes-Smyth records his comprehensive account of weather observations and the rather long route the ships took on their journey including major stops in Rio de Janeiro and the Cape of Good Hope, which means they crossed the Atlantic twice. He also includes various observations about life at sea and the conditions on board. The journal contains twenty-

five drawings in watercolor and ink and his eyewitness accounts of the first weeks in Botany Bay and the new Australian settlement. While in Port Jackson, he recorded some of the earliest accounts of the first weeks of the settlement. He also notes that along with the *Scarborough*, and the *Charlotte*, all three ships were chartered by the East India Company to drop off their cargo and convicts in Australia before sailing to China for tea.

The British Library copy of Bowes-Smyth's journal contains lists of the officers, diagrams, and sketches of flora and fauna, as well as detailed journal entries of everyday life on the *Penrhyn*. It also includes a fascinating list of the female convicts on board, their ages, crimes, sentences, and even a list of their children and families who traveled with them. All told, Bowes-Smyth reports, there were one hundred nine female convicts on board the *Lady Penrhyn*, each of which had recorded various crimes from misdemeanors to "lamb stealing," as well as forgery, pickpocketing, and shoplifting, which all carried various sentences from seven years to life, proving that sentencing in the days of rampant metropolitan crime and felonious judges was quite arbitrary. Ages ranged from just thirteen years old in the case of Elizabeth Haward, to eighty-two-year-old Dorothy Handlyn (Grey). A clog maker, Haward was sentenced to seven years for stealing while Handlyn, a rags and old clothes dealer, was sentenced to seven years of transportation for perjury. In 1789, Elizabeth Beckford hung herself in a fit of despair in Sydney Cove, and since written records were scarce, she would become Australia's first recorded suicide. Beckford, the second oldest woman on board at seventy, was sentenced to seven years of transportation for stealing twelve pounds of Gloucester Cheese. Below is a sampling of some of the female convicts, their ages, occupations, crimes, and sentences I noted during my research in London:

Names	Age	Trades	Crimes	Term (years)
Mary Adams	22	Service	Privately Stealing	7
Elizabeth Beckford	70	Do.	Shoplifting	7
Margaret Bourn	25	Service	Picking Pockets	7
Mary Carroll	36	Mantua Maker	Privately Stealing	7
Mary Cockran	32	Dealer	Receiving Stolen Goods	14
Elizabeth Colley	22	Do.	Housebreaking	7
Mary Dicks	29	Stay Maker	Picking Pockets	7
Elizabeth Fowles	22	Do.	Housebreaking	7
Ann George	22	Shoe Binder	Picking Pockets	7
Dorothy Handlyn alias Grey	82	Dealer	Perjury	7
Mary Harrison	34	Silk Winder	Misdemeanor	7
Elizabeth Haward	13	Clogmaker	Stealing	7
Esther Howard	29	Service	Privately Stealing	7
Mary Jackson	31	Hawker	Picking Pockets	7
Mary Lawrence	30	Service	Privately Stealing	7
Sophia Lewis	29	Service	Shoplifting	7
Mary Love	60	Service	Lamb Stealing	14
Mary Marshall	19	Do.	Do.	For Life.
Ann Morton	20	Do.	Do.	7
Hanah Mullins	20	Do.	Forgery	For Life.
Mary Parker	28	Do.	Do.	7
Sarah Parry	28	Milliner	Felony	For Life.
Sarah Partridge	22	Mantua Maker	Shoplifting	7
Ann Powell	35	Do.	Privately Stealing	7
Ann Read	22	Service	Street Robbery	For Life.
Ann Thornton	32	Service	Do.	7
Susan Trippett	22	Artificial Flower Maker	Picking Pockets	7
Mary Williams	39	Needlework	Privately Stealing	7

Table 1 – Selected female convicts on board the Lady Penrhyn, their crimes and sentences, as reported in Arthur Bowes-Smyth’s journal, pages 7-14. NOTE: “Do.” Is nineteenth-century shorthand for “ditto.”

In the First Fleet's initial voyage, nearly a dozen children traveled with the men and women on board the *Lady Penrhyn* and Bowes-Smyth was careful to note their names and ages. While at sea, Bowes-Smyth recorded the thirteen births on board, all males, with three dying before the ship landed. In all, there were twenty-eight recorded births during the first passage on board the various ships, but not every birth went to plan. The harsh conditions and cruel passage would take the life of Hugh Sandlyn, on April 24, and on July 4, 1787, Bowes-Smyth writes that this "day delivered Elizabeth Colley, one of the convicts, of a dead boy," (31).

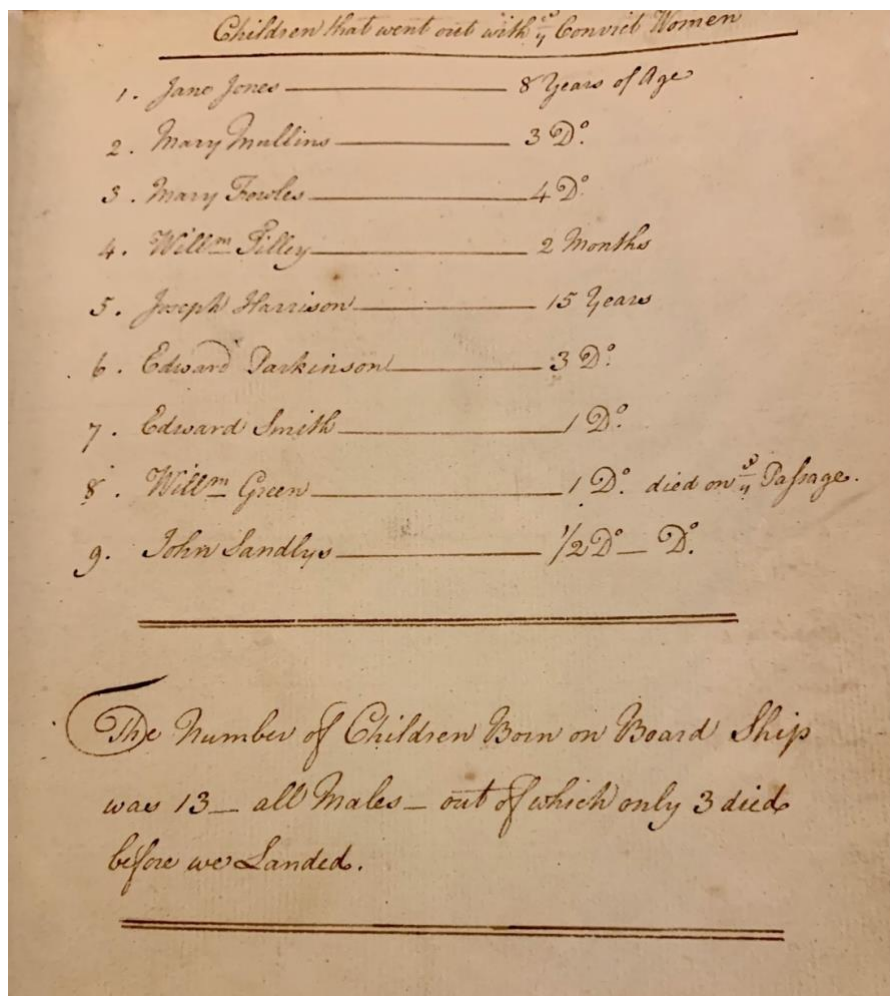


Figure 1 – List of children and notes on births from Bowes-Smyth's journal, page 14.

Even though their names, ages, crimes, and sentences are fastidiously recorded, few of these women were educated and would have been unable to read or write. Most came from families and situations where this might be the only recorded documentation indicating that they even existed, so Bowes-Smyth's journals are remarkable in that the two hundred fifty-two days he recorded make these women immortal. Hughes relates that the women were brought on board the *Penrhyn* in January of 1787. Through a series of blunders and bureaucratic delays, it would be May before the ship set sail. As described, conditions on board the *Lady Penrhyn* were treacherous and dodgy with slick decks often leading to broken bones and fractures, even while still in port. On April 13, Bowes-Smyth notes that "Elizabeth Bruce, one of the convicts on board *Penrhyn*, fell from the forecastle [a forward part of the ship just below the deck] and broke her right leg just at the articulation of the ankle." Surprisingly (or not surprisingly, as is the case in the bulk of Bowes-Smyth's treatment of women in his journal) little else is mentioned about Bruce's no doubt painful treatment or how the bone was set, which should have been a rudimentary entry for a ship's surgeon. But more on Bowes-Smyth's misogyny later.

On April 19, 1787, Bowes-Smyth writes that he "attended on the woman with the fractured leg, removed bandage & dressed it up again," and that "before the bandage was removed the woman was in excruciating pain." Interestingly, he quickly changes the subject, instead focusing on a crewmember who died on board describing the corpse of a man "sewed up in a hammock floated along side our ship" (18). These death hammocks were the first steps towards burial at sea. They started with a dead shipmate being sewn into his hammock; the last stitch was threaded through the decedent's nose as a last test for life. Because the ship was anchored and had not truly set to sea, perhaps the crew

allowed the sewn-up hammock to float outside the ship fearing a communicable disease. Still, it didn't keep Bowes-Smyth from taking over the dead crewmember's cabin "lately occupied by Third Mate Jenkinson, who died of a putrid fever the night before I came on board & was buried at Ryde, was fresh painted & fumigated for me to sleep in," showing that, on these voyages, both men and rooms turned over quickly (19).

Once they set sail in May 1787, the convict ships and their occupants dealt with very rough seas and gale-force winds, which led to more injuries and deaths from heavy deck items, as well as people being thrown overboard. People sentenced to transportation, as well as those ferrying them, routinely died, whether they were convicts or those who booked passage as freemen and women. Be it by accident or disease (or both), the British Navy at one point estimated that one in thirty would die at sea. In fact, the voyage of the Second Fleet, which sailed in the 1790s, turned out to be the worst sailing of the whole System, where "out of 254 convicts on board *Surprize*, 36 died at sea; out of 499 on *Neptune*, 158 died; and on *Scarborough*, which had finished her voyage in the First Fleet without losing a single life, 73 people perished" (Hughes 145). In all, the Second Fleet lost two hundred sixty-seven people out of one thousand six prisoners. As Hughes points out, the British were building the system as they went, and, according to Hughes, it was 1815 before the system was working smoothly. According to Hughes, at the "peak of the System, the average death rate from illness on board was slightly more than 1 percent" (145).

Back on board the *Lady Penrhyn*, in August 1787, the fleet would anchor in Rio de Janeiro, and as the crew of the *Scarborough* was going about their duties, Bowes-Smyth notes that a sailor fell from the yard arm striking his head on some part of the ship,

cracking his skull. He also learned about five more male convicts who had died on the *Alexander*. Bowes-Smyth describes Rio as “exquisitely beautiful” just before launching into his prejudicial descriptions of the “four naked negroes” canoeing past the ship (38). He writes about “naked negroes” again, this time as they bring “great quantities of very fine oranges which they sold,” as well as “cassada root, powdered, with which they make bread, but the slaves eat the dry powder” (38). Captain Sever, he relates later, would go ashore to be treated to dinner and hospitality by the viceroy and the crew would load vegetables, fruits, plantains, turnips, radishes, and beef for the trip back across the Atlantic. On Friday, August 10, 1787, Bowes-Smyth would take shore leave, noting the beauty of the area. He described the town and geography noting the town’s “very good houses,” and market places” (40). Among his purchases were preserved native birds and papaya.

Strikingly, as his mundane and picturesque descriptions of the town continue, he nonchalantly mentions amongst his purchases and sightseeing that he saw “many black slaves leading about the streets to be sold” (42). Immediately afterwards, he changes the subject remarking that he “went into several churches, which were very elegantly ornamented,” (42). This connection to the slave trade, and seeing it firsthand, is noteworthy given that the *Lady Penrhyn* was originally outfitted as a slave ship. It is the following day’s account of a slave ship from Guinea, where Bowes-Smyth’s indifference to the slaves is on full display. He writes that in the afternoon the ship moored with “some hundreds of black slaves for the slave market at Rio,” and that the next morning as the sun rose, he “awoke with their singing, as is their custom previous to their being sold or executed,” and that they “were all naked” (43). Again, immediately following his

rather indifferent mention of slavery, he again turns to describing the large monastery that is lit up later that night “in honour of some one of their saints” (43). Interesting that, in both cases, his journal entries turn from describing slaves to describing churches as if mentioning slavery and religion in the same breath will somehow absolve him of his prejudices.

The fleet would remain in Rio for the remainder of August, sailing on September 4. On September 24, 1787, the Fleet hit a storm and Bowes-Smyth once again relates the treacheries of the journey:

A heavy gale and a great swell. Many albatrosses and pintado birds astern. In the night there were many heavy squalls. The ship rolled so very much that everything in the cabin gave way. Much lightning and thunder and hail. Mr. Watts hurt himself by being thrown over the chairs. Many of the women also received hurts and bruises from falls. I could get no sleep all night, the roll of the ship was so great. (51)

His description of the storm continues for several days, and he relates that on September 27, the ship would lose the boom of the forestay sail as it was carried by the wind. She finally anchored at the Cape of Good Hope in October 1787. While there, Bowes-Smyth reports that the ship made anchor to resupply and writes that “the country appears beautiful,” and that the “town is pretty large and appears to have many exceedingly good houses in it” (54). Juxtaposed against these kind and matter-of-fact descriptions of the shore and architecture are Bowes-Smyth’s descriptions of the town and residents, where his narrative turns to a triggering description of the ways the town deals with its criminals:

There are many gallows and other implements of punishment erected along the shore and in front of the town. There were also wheels for breaking felons upon, several of which were at this time occupied by the mangled bodies of the unhappy wretches who suffered upon them. The right hand was cut off and fixed by a large nail to the side of the wheel, the wheel itself elevated upon a post about 9 or 10 feet high, upon which the body lies to perish. (54)



Figure 2 – View of the Cape of Good Hope, on board the Lady Penrhyn, page 27

This unembellished description of the judicial system in the Cape of Good Hope is a stark contrast to the “fine day” narratives that Bowes-Smyth generally portrays. It is in these unsympathetic depictions of punishment and prejudice where Bowes-Smyth’s true biases play out, and more of that narrow-mindedness can be seen later in his journal

entries. After restocking, it should be noted, the *Lady Penrhyn* also brought on board the first horses that would settle in Australia: a stallion, a colt, and three mares.

Bowes-Smyth's bigotries not only apply to Black and Brown people but also to women, especially the convicts on board the *Penrhyn*. Other of his accounts describe the horrible conditions the women and even animals faced. On December 31, 1787, Bowes-Smyth writes that this "day many of the women were washed out of their berths by the seas we shipped," and that the "sea was so very outrageous' that the fore topsail was also split from top to bottom" (74). But slippery decks and rough seas weren't the only dangerous conditions on board the *Penrhyn*. There *were* convicts and criminals traveling above and below decks, who were quite adept in corruption, lawlessness, and misdeeds as Bowes-Smyth takes time to point out in his journal. He relates that while traveling, there was so little to do and so few resources, that the women whom he implies are immoral, often reverted to their felonious ways, stealing clothes, drinking, and bartering sex for favors and alcohol. In fact, the men were often encouraged and allowed to ply the women with rum. Even though the double standard was blatant, Bowes-Smyth remarks that on some of those "remarkably fine days," the female convicts moved about the ship and reverted to their old, felonious ways. Even at the outset and before the ship set sail, Bowes-Smyth, the surgeon who was later assigned for the care and wellbeing of the women on board, instead sided with the men on board. "Lieutenant Johnson, the senior Lieutenant on board," he wrote, "issued orders to keep the women from the sailors," and even just a month into the passage, Bowes-Smyth indicates that shipmates "went down into the women's berths and called over the names of the convicts," finding five missing and "four with the sailors and one with Squires, the 2nd mate" (16). In response to this,

what he implies is licentious behavior, they ordered all five women shackled in irons and the shipmates reprimanded for disobeying orders (18).

Despite the rough conditions, and although Bowes-Smyth seemed to disregard the health of the women in his charge, remarkably, only two women died on the journey. On January 18, 1788, the *Lady Penrhyn* arrived at Botany Bay and following the long passage, the crew was ready to disembark and explore their new surroundings. That evening, Bowes-Smyth accompanied the crew on shore, and it is in his subsequent narratives and accounts that we get one of the clearest pictures of life in what would become one of Europe's first settlements in Australia. In his journal entries for January 18-26, Bowes-Smyth recounts some of the most detailed of his eyewitness accounts of vegetation and wildlife, often with competing ideas. To Bowes-Smyth, the shore was both beautiful and wild. Even in his first recollections, he juxtaposes terms like "most fertile spots," and a land where fish and food are abundant, with grass that is "long and coarse," and with wood that's "fit for no purposes of building or anything but fire" (82). His straightforward, narrative goes on to describe grass that "in the shade appears green and flourishing," with ground covered with "black and red ants of a most enormous size," which were all reflected in the comprehensive sketches that he used to accompany his descriptions.

Then he turns his thoughts and biases towards the people occupying the space as well as their living conditions. He describes the aboriginal natives as "perfectly naked, rather slender, made of a dark black colour, their hair not wooly but short and curly," and goes on to depict their jewelry and appearances:

Every one had the tooth next the fore tooth in his upper jaw knocked out, and many of them had a piece of stick about the size of a tobacco pipe and 6 or 8 inches in length, run through the septum of the nostrils, to which, from its great similitude, we ludicrously gave the name of a spritsail yard. They all cut their backs, bodies and arms which heal up in large ridges and scars. They live in miserable wigwams near the water, which are nothing more than 2 or 3 pieces of the bark of a tree, set up sideways against a ridge pole fastened to two upright sticks at each end. They are about 2 or 3 feet high, and few amongst them are to be found which are weather proof.

(83)



Figure 3 - Grass tree, or 'A View of the Tree at Botany Bay,' which yields the yellow balsam; and of a wigwam from Bowes-Smyth's journal, page 101

He continues:

Their principal food consists of fish, which they in general eat raw. Sometimes they feast upon the kangaroo, but I believe them to be too stupid and indolent a set of people to be able often to catch them. From the appearance of many of the lofty trees we saw, some way up the country, having regular steps chopped at about 2 foot asunder in the bark of the tree quite up to the top, where the tree begins to branch out, there is reason to suppose they mount these with large stones, where they lie in ambush till some kangaroos come under to graze, when they heave the stone upon them and kill them. There are great numbers of kangaroos but so extremely shy that it is no easy matter to get near enough to them even to shoot them, and very few in comparison of the great numbers there are, were shot during our stay at New Holland. (83)



Figure 4 – The Kangaroo, from Bowes-Smyth’s journal, page 101

Although Dickens and his contemporaries would likely not have been exposed to Bowes-Smyth’s mostly obscure journals, their historical significance would grow in the years and centuries following his death, especially now that they have been digitized and are readily accessible. In fact, since I accessed them in person, Bowes-Smyth’s journals have been translated and can be easily searched online. His artistic depictions of the peculiar flora and fauna, including plants, birds, and kangaroos would add to the growing collections of tales and narratives from the Antipodes to become a part of the larger web and social discourse that cultural criticism uses to examine the ideologies of the time. While in Port Jackson, Bowes-Smyth collected curios and may have been one of the first white men to see an emu and to illustrate the now-extinct white gallinule. Still, a closer reading reveals his racist and misogynistic depictions of natives and women are what plague and taint his narrative today. Bowes-Smyth left Sydney in the *Penrhyn* on April 20th, 1789, when the ship left for China and other points abroad. Although unpublished, the essence of these tales of high adventure on the open seas would filter down. The more favorable and glossed-over narratives become a larger part of the travel narratives that Dickens would use to help encourage free transportation and immigration to Australia, as we can see in the next journal I accessed.

“A fine sunshiny day...” – Revisionist Narrative on board *The Guildford*

The *Guildford* made eight voyages to Sydney between 1812 and 1829. In total, she transported more than 1,500 male convicts along the same path the First Fleet took nearly forty years before. It is in an unspecified officer’s logs of his journey on board the *Guildford* in 1827 that shows how the officer inadvertently contributed to the narrative techniques that helped suppress Australia’s troubling origins as a penal outpost. These

uncredited journals kept in sunken archives in the State Library are meticulously stored, yet somehow, not as fastidiously researched, as if their secrets and stories are just good enough to keep, but not as necessary to the history of transportation as the more celebrated and widely read journals and novels of Dickens and other Victorian authors. The unnamed officer's journal and records are a part of the permanent collections at the State Library Victoria in Melbourne, Australia. In them, he describes the convict trip in a highly nostalgic way in which he almost romanticizes the trek as well as the crew and convicts on board. Reading through the transcripts, the idyllic way the journey is described certainly helps disguise the severity and bleakness of the transport convict system. These swashbuckling tales and narratives were already starting to creep into the consciousness of British Victorians and the passage, which falls somewhere towards the start of *Great Expectations*, puts the log directly in line with Pip's story and Magwitch's transportation to Australia.

The officer's log states that the ship weighed anchor on her seventh convict passage from Plymouth on Sunday, March 31st, 1827. His descriptions describe an almost picturesque passage as he and 190 convicts and crew undertook the more than 14,000-mile trek with all the creature comforts afforded a higher class of living on board. For example, on April 6th, 1827, he indicates that his servant, Hamilton, was feeling under the weather and laments that he had to make his own bed (10). The sailor continues by describing the high quality of his meals and those of the convicts, the fantastic weather, and his extracurricular pursuits like shooting and fishing while on board. Here, we see the influence of the travel genre on his writing style and his efforts to "sell" the journey to those back home in England. Moreover, around mid-century in

the 1840s and 1850s, travel was changing and becoming much easier due to the introduction of steamers, which shortened the time it took to make the journey. Additionally, the Australian Gold Rush was taking hold around Melbourne and more educated immigrants began to brave the travel halfway around the globe. They took with them cultural traditions and literature, which often included novels, weekly journals, poetry, and travel books. Once there, these educated travelers often sent letters, correspondence, and yes, literature, back to the motherland. The officer was there feeding this system of travel writing about Australia.

Continuing on, the sailor's entry for Saturday, May 5th describes it as "A fine sunshiny day" and he adds to his travel narrative with descriptions of shark sightings and the sports the crew engage in to catch them. The author recounts the smaller "sucker fish" that attach themselves to the sharks and, going into detail, describes the shark's rows of teeth and the way the teeth are arranged. His leisurely pursuits continued where he states he "wasted a great deal of powder on the birds again," and he goes into detail to describe his recipe for grog, a mixture of lime juice, water, and rum that is distributed to members of his crew before they go on watch (30). Again, these rosy depictions of sports and the weather seem marvelously out of place on board a convict ship headed to a penal colony.

Perhaps he realized that he might be selling the travel a little too convincingly because his later accounts begin to describe the tasks his crew are engaged in during the journey, his review of the crew during inspections and those outcomes, and the ways in which they treat convicts' infractions. One entry, recorded on Saturday, May 12, includes a convict calling one of his men a "bloody soldier" (22). Provoked or

unprovoked, the convict pleads not guilty and following a “trial” that is hardly covered in the narrative, and after an act of recrimination from the convict, the officer indicates that the case against the convict was dropped “*tant mieux*,” or, favorably, with not much more related (22). On Thursday, July 19, the crewmember states that the crew took the time to celebrate the anniversary of “His Most Gracious Majesty,” George IV, by dressing in their finest and parading on board and he declares the “men very clean,” (22). Perhaps he was busy with the rest of the sailing, or tasked with getting the ship ready to dock, because without much fanfare, he relates that ship docks in Sydney Harbor the following Tuesday, July 24.

The scenes the officer presents in his log are almost peaceful, tranquil, serene, and in keeping with the travel books and trends of the time—belying and contradicting the reasons and causes the ship is sailing in the first place; however, not everything about this journey was rosy. The officer’s account only briefly mentions the number of convicts on board the *Guildford*, as well as those who fell ill during the journey and their care. But later, in an addendum to the copy I found in the library in Melbourne, historical records and archives were appended to the journal that reconstructs the list of convicts on board the *Guildford*’s documented journey. While the average age of transport convicts was twenty-six years, a closer analysis of the addendum in the State Library reports that Hiam Aarons, an eighteen-year-old cap maker from London, was sentenced to life for being a pickpocket; Peter Macullum, an errand boy in Ireland, was sentenced to seven years for stealing; Peter McAdam, a sixteen-year-old farmer from Glasgow, was sentenced to life for horse stealing; and George Melville, a fifteen-year-old blacksmith’s boy from Perth, was sentenced to fourteen years for shop burglary (57-64). In total, 191 convicts were on

board this passage, ranging from fifteen to fifty-nine years of age and with various sentences and crimes.

The officer discusses the creature comforts of having servants, sport fishing and target practice, and parades. His accounts paint a very encouraging picture of how the crew treats convict insubordination while on board, a far cry from the accounts of beatings and floggings that dot the history of transportation. In his record-keeping, the officer is adding to the narratives and accounts that others are using to remake the history of the founding of Australia. His official records of the journey contribute to “forgetting” the role that dark and dank ships played in Australia’s history.

John Ward: “I still persisted in this awful state of drunkenness and debauchery...”

First-person accounts are often how history is recorded, and one such narrative I was able to access in Melbourne, could be playing a role in contributing to the amnesia and deliberate sublimation of the history of the transport convict system that Hughes discusses. John Ward, a native of Yorkshire born in 1814, was an indoor servant who was convicted of theft at Northampton Borough Sessions in England, on February 26th, 1838. He was subsequently sentenced to transportation to Australia for ten years. His diary, dating from 1841, is held at the National Library of Australia in Sydney and describes the events starting in 1831, which led to his conviction, imprisonment at Portsmouth on the hulk *York*, and his transportation on board the *Mangles* to Norfolk Island.

Ward’s narrative is remarkably in line with explanations of why the transport convict system became so successful—that young men were forced into robbery and

larceny because of the declining economy. His story is a decidedly redemptive one that outlines in detail the path he took towards crime, and the atonement he relates that he found in his religion and the transport convict system. Even though he couldn't have been certain of how his story would be distributed through publication or otherwise, his stated motivation for keeping the diary was to be a service to "those that may come after me" so that they could avoid "the miseries such a course of life that I then led is most certain to produce" (1-2). Without any assurances that his story will be read later, interestingly, he refers to his own story's immortality by relating it as a "warning to the world after me" to "prevent some wayward unconscious youth from falling a prey to sin and wickedness as I did" (3-4). Now, nearly two hundred years later, we are examining his narrative and words.

Ward begins that in 1833 and 1834 when he was 19 or 20 years old, he "persisted in this awful state of drunkenness and debauchery" (Ward, 1). He describes an incident where he ran drunk through a neighbor's yard and house "tore up and stamped produce, bed, glass and frame all together – then took a spade which I found in the garden and mixed them all up into a sort of mortar so as to entirely prevent any use being made of them afterwards" (Ward 4). A few nights after this incident, Ward describes breaking gas lamps down five different streets, and afterward he "let loose fourteen coal vessels" along the river.

Although he was in a relationship with a woman from his town, Rosamond, Ward's accounts from 1835 continue by including a trip to London with his master in which he spends the evening with prostitutes, an "abominable adulterous connection" he

had with another man's wife he met at the Surrey Theater, and an encounter with a maid when his master and he visited a castle in Cumberland.

Ward fell victim to worsening economic conditions, took on debts and subsequently "began to plunder (or rob as I have just mentioned), taking everything I could lay my hands on," (11). He describes that he began 1838 "in a dejected state, no money and but little to eat," and that he "sought for employment but in vain," On Saturday, February 3, 1838, Ward relates that he got "three sheets in the wind," and robbed a house. He goes into incredible detail describing the "inventory," that he garnered on his "first batch," which included "9£, five shillings and eleven pence... all the silver which consisted of 2 doz. table spoons, 25 silver forks, 5 and one half dozen of tea spoons and two old fashioned cream jugs," (14). He took furniture, cigars and clothes on the next batch and taking his last drink of brandy, took off for his own house. Ward was caught later that day, tried on February 26, 1838, and sentenced to transportation for ten years.

Ward spent his twenty-fourth birthday in the harbor on board the hulk *York*, where he is unsurprisingly melancholic. He describes how he and his fellow convicts are fitted with leg irons, forced to cut their hair, the meager sleeping conditions on board, and how the convicts are made to row in the cold. He also describes his fellow passengers, some of whom are indoor servants as he is, and the camaraderie they strike while on board.

In November 1839, the *Mangles* set sail for New South Wales with Ward on board. He describes a relatively incident-free passage, and he arrived in Sydney in April of 1840. In 1841, he describes a letter he received from Rosamond, where she

encouraged him to read his bible that he had “long neglected” (Ward 33). Thus begins his narrative of redemption where “God’s assistance awakened me to a sense of the danger I was in and if I did not repent and forsake my sins I should perish,” (Ward 33). Later, he even argues that he “could hear enlarge greatly respecting our treatment of this as a Penal settlement,” but he chose to “pass it over” (Ward 33). John Ward’s motivation for recording his story might have been as a testament to his finding a higher power, but by “passing it over,” he is unconsciously participating in the amnesia surrounding Australia’s history and founding. He spends most of his diary on the crimes he committed and his trial and conviction, but surprisingly very little on the difficult passage and what occurred once he landed in the very unfamiliar place. His story, while inspiring to his intended audience, inadvertently adds to the glossing over of history. Ward, a product of the system, is helping to reshape the ways in which transportation is interpreted.

Admittedly, Ward’s diary is obscure and unpublished, so perhaps he didn’t have a very wide audience. However, a semi-autobiographical novel by Henry Savery entitled *Quintus Servinton: A Tale Founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence*, the first novel published in Australia and the first novel to deal with transportation, was published in Tasmania in 1831. The novel, written as a morality tale, tells the story of Servinton, whose life decisions lead him to Australia by way of transportation. It is a rare look at an educated man’s account of the transport convict network and its effects on those who were forced to settle in Sydney. The book was published in both Australia and later in England in 1832, but because of Savery’s reputation, it was published anonymously. Although his interests in Australia wouldn’t peak until sometime later, Dickens, who was

twenty years old at the first publication in Britain, was gainfully employed as a news reporter for *Monthly Magazine* and might have been familiar with the novel.

Savery was the son of a prominent banker and a member of the upper class. Following his education, his two attempts at business failed. His third attempt in 1822 led to his over-extending himself financially and he turned to forging bills of credit. In desperation, Savery attempted to escape to America and was arrested after throwing himself overboard to elude the authorities. In 1824, he was tried, found guilty, and subsequently received the death penalty, which was commuted to transportation.

Although those who were freely immigrating to Australia were generally more educated, an educated *convict* was a rarity in Australia and Savery's skills were put to good use when, in 1825, he arrived in Hobart. He was consequently assigned to the Colonial Secretary's Office, which enraged the community. It was felt that convicts should not hold governmental roles. The news bounced back to England, and the Lieutenant Governor was forced to sell off Savery's possessions. His wife and son who traveled to be with him, found him penniless and without standing. They returned to England in 1829 and he never saw them again.

Savery befriended a publisher with a printing press and *Quintus Servinton* was published in 1831. The book, a thinly veiled account of his own life, mirrors Savery's story by focusing on his education, his failed businesses, his forgeries, and his conviction. Although it is an uncommon, firsthand account of life as a transport convict, it is told from a privileged perspective. Quintus's first encounter in the prison hulk is one of opportunity and he is automatically treated with an advantage over his fellow convicts. A crewmember notices Quintus's dress, which identifies him as a gentleman. The

crewmember then escorts Quintus to the private quarters, “I told you to cheer up – see how much better you be off than the rest of ‘em,” the old man remarks (Law 617).

Quintus inhabits this berth on his trip to Hobart, and the rest of the tale is of a privileged gentleman who builds his status and standing in his new country.

Here again, while not intentional, the narrative reinforces the reshaping and retelling of the history of the transport convict system. Alongside the countless narratives depicting a severe and unforgiving system, we have the almost cheery depictions of Ward and Savery who both present transportation in decidedly rosy ways. Additionally, Ward and Savery became Australian ex-patriots who used the system to their advantage. Taken together and in a modern light, they are both contributing to what Hughes called the “forgetting” of their convict history and the ways in which the system contributed to the history, and good fortunes, of the inhabitants of the island.

CHAPTER 4 – ARRIVING IN HOMEPORT

Narratives such as *Guildford's* officer's log, and Ward and Savery's retelling of their own histories undoubtedly contributed to the suppression of Australia's origins; however, back in England, Dickens's own efforts and intentions to suppress and gloss over the continent's origins were meeting with critical aplomb and popularity. The author, who tried his hand at editing weeklies and journals, wanted to affect change through the written word and often that meant appealing to the middle class. His efforts often involved broad, sweeping character development he used to subversively influence this growing segment of society through fiction and nonfiction alike. Without sermonizing, Dickens was first a storyteller, interested in using his high profile to promote his ideas of reform in a decidedly rapidly growing and industrialized age.

In 1846, Dickens began penning a series of editorials he submitted to *The Daily News*. According to the notes on the Charles Dickens Letters Project, he had been the inaugural editor of *The News*, prior to his resignation earlier that month, and he wasted no time making his thoughts known on crime and punishment. He titled the series "Letters on Social Questions. Capital Punishment," and it was this series of letters where we see Dickens's views on criminal sentencing and especially transportation. Dickens also supported the new Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, so he was keen to make his views known. In the letter dated February 28, 1846, Dickens writes:

We read of the trials of persons who have rendered themselves liable to transportation for life, and we read of their sentences, and, in some few notorious instances, of their departure from this country, and arrival beyond sea; but they are never followed into their cells, and tracked from

day to day, and night to night; they are never reproduced in their false letters, flippant conversations, theological disquisitions with visitors, lay and clerical: or served up in their whole biography and adventures—so many live romances with a bloody ending. Their portraits are not rife in the print-shops, nor are their autographs stuck up in shop-windows, nor are their snuff-boxes handed affably to gentlemen in court, nor do they inquire of other spectators with eye-glasses why they look at them so steadfastly, nor are their breakfasts, dinners, and luncheons, elaborately described, nor are their waxen images in Baker-street (unless they were in immediate danger, at one time, of the gallows), nor are high prices offered for their clothes at Newgate, nor do turnpike trusts grow rich upon the tolls that people going to see their houses, or the scenes of their offences, pay. They are tried found guilty, punished; and there an end. (Dickens Letters Project, Feb. 28)

As discussed earlier, transportation for life was considered one of the harshest sentences short of death that a criminal could face, a point that Dickens continues to drive home. In a fascinating argument, Dickens lays out some of the most notorious convicts of the time as well as their crimes and establishes that Victorians, enthralled with these infamous felonies and murders, were buying into the hype that was intensified in the media. No matter that a bit of the hype in local daily and weekly newspapers were the very articles he was creating and editing. Running through a litany of famous convicts, as well as the spectacle of their public executions, he refers to their crimes while establishing his argument:

Is it contended that the fascination may surround the crime, and not the punishment? Let us consider whether other crimes, which have now no sort of fascination for the general public, had or had not precisely the gross kind of interest which now attaches to Murder alone, when they were visited with the same penalty. Was Forgery interesting, when Forgers were hanged? and is it less interesting now, when they are transported for life? Compare the case of Dr. Dodd, or Fauntleroy, or the Reverend Peter Fenn, or Montgomery, or Hunton, or any other generally known, with that of the Exchequer-Bill forgery in later times, which: with every attendant circumstance but death, or danger of death, to give it a false attraction, soon dwindled down into a mere item in a Sessions' Calendar. Coining, when the coiner was dragged (as I have seen one) on a hurdle to the place of execution; or Burglary, or Highway Robbery – did these crimes ever wear an aspect of adventure and mystery, and did the perpetrators of them ever become the town talk, when their offences were visited with death? Now, they are mean, degraded, miserable criminals; and nothing more.

(Dickens Letters Project, Feb. 28)

Later, he questions whether he, as a juror, would be able to sentence forgers and murderers to death, or would, instead, rule they were mad or mentally incapacitated, eventually landing on the supposition that he, like most, would “go over it again on this ground; and if I could, by any reasonable special pleading with myself, find him mad rather than hang him – I think I would,” (Dickens Letters Project, Feb. 28). In his subsequent letters to *The Daily News*, Dickens's

arguments would intertwine with transported criminals as he continued to list their crimes and punishments. On March 16, 1846, he mentions John Tawell, who was executed the year before for the murder of his mistress, Sarah Hart. Tawell had been transported earlier to Australia for forgery. These instances and almost encyclopedic knowledge of criminals and the dispositions of their cases put Dickens squarely in the popular conversations around convicts and transportation, a place where, given his predisposition to shape the discourse of the time, he would develop further.

Four years following his letters to the editor and after a couple of failed attempts as an editor at other outlets, Dickens found he needed financial security to support his large family. In all, he and his first wife Catherine had 10 children before he famously abandoned her for a younger woman. As Margaret Mendelawitz writes in her book series *Charles Dickens' Australia*, in 1850, he took the helm of *Household Words*, a weekly journal with Dickens's stated purpose to raise "up of those that are down, and the general improvement of our social condition," a mission he would keep as editor until a spat with his financiers and shareholders in 1859 (Introduction x). In all, more than 3,000 articles, stories, and poems would be published under the heavy hand and editing of Dickens, where his interest in Australia was evident in the more than 100 articles that directly dealt with Australia. Even when the journal was reporting what was seemingly mundane and ordinary, like Parliamentary procedures, Dickens was influencing public thought on transportation. In the March 30, 1850, edition, the news reports that Lord Campbell introduced a bill in Parliament that was moving into its third reading. The legislation argued that for Australia to be viable, transportation must be "placed on a new footing

altogether,” and that if free emigration was to prevail, the colony “must be made acceptable to the colonists themselves,” and that includes free institutions in the colony (74). The article continues that as arguments were raised and discussion continued in Parliament, it was decided that the “system of labour-gangs at so great a distance has proved a failure,” and that the “frightful evils alleged against transportation,” were again discouraging hard-working Britons from emigrating to Australia (74). Through their reporting, Dickens’s goals were twofold: to establish a direct correlation between the crumbling transport convict system and its failures while projecting the promise of a new land.

In the same edition is an article that goes to the heart of the argument selling the idea of the evils of the old ways of transportation and the promise of the new land. The article describes a land of plenty laying out the ways that industrious, hard-working Britons who are “wearing away life hopelessly in this island,” can find hope and their fortunes and “vast tracts of country where no man who is willing to work hard (but that he must be, or he had best not go there), can ever know want (20). These “rational men” can go abroad and bound together by their love of their former country, establish themselves “amid the wild solitudes of Australia,” (20). Hard work, coupled with the opportunities available abroad, would prove successful to those who basically “self-transported” themselves. Later, the article goes on to speak of the history of transportation and the conditions that early convicts who were subject to “flogging, pillorying, starving, and hanging administered without stint and with great celerity,” and how it “could have reformed the cargoes of criminals who were poured forth, often in a dying state, on the shores of Sydney Cove,” and how discipline, religion, education, and

“classification,” saved them and put them on the righteous path. Here, in the very accessible and “present” weekly journal, Dickens’s readers are exposed to the same themes that John Ward had written about in his journal that wasn’t as widely circulated. Somehow, these same themes of redemption and how hard work can pay off, taken from both absent and present narratives, are adding to the rich cultural fabric of transportation.

In her book, *Transported to Botany Bay*, Dorice Williams Elliot writes that the motivation for Dickens and his writers on *Household Words* may not have been entirely altruistic. Although Dickens’s shift towards voluntary transportation might seem a contradiction to his profound opposition to the established convict transport network and its atrocities, his swing does feed into his very strong beliefs against industrialization and urbanization. To Dickens, mid-nineteenth-century London is overcrowded, sooty, dark, and dank. Transportation would help rid the city and country of its bad elements—the poor and needy—*before* they committed felonies. Therefore, he and his contributors needed to help force a concerted turn in thinking, and *Household Words* was just the platform he needed to direct that shift. In their missives and articles from abroad, Australian settlers represented a promised land where England’s poor, who were fortunate enough to book their passage by paying for it or through transportation, could make a new start for themselves, and he wanted to convey that to his readers. To that end, he embedded two writers in Australia, Richard Horne and William Howitt, who were directed to send back articles of interest to their weekly readers. Subjects might include the Australian Gold Rush that promised untold riches to those brave enough to immigrate there. Other stories were related to the outback, the explorers, shepherds, cattle drivers, and other aspects of everyday life in the bush. Some were factual, but most

were decidedly embellished, these stories of literature and not exactly history, often guiding the perceptions of Australia back home in England. The result, they were demonstrating “to their reading audience that Australia was safe for free English people of all classes,” and in 1855 and 1856, Australians were making the case that they should be able to set up their own legislative processes (Elliot 40).

Magwitch: “I lived rough, that you should live smooth...”

In the 1860s, Dickens’s star as a novelist was on the decline. Two of his novels that had preceded *Great Expectations*—*Bleak House* (1853), and *Hard Times* (1854)—were reviewed harshly by his contemporaries on what they claimed showed a downturn in the quality of his prose. In an anonymous review of *Bleak House*, one critic wrote of Dickens that “the extraordinary character of his early performances,” had diminished, and George Brimley wrote in *The Spectator*, that Dickens’s attempts at commenting on society’s ills seemed to “depart in proportion as the author rises in the scale of society depicted,” (Anon. 247, Brimley 924). To his contemporaries, Dickens’s penchant for realism and negative commentary on the deplorable conditions of metropolitan London and the Industrial Age turned off his reviewers who were more inclined to think that industry was establishing the Empire’s world dominance. Dickens needed a hit and he found it in *Great Expectations*.

Dickens’s thirteenth completed novel, *Great Expectations*, first published as a serial from December 1860 to August 1861 in his weekly periodical *All the Year Round*, is a bildungsroman that details Pip’s protagonist transformation from a blacksmith’s apprentice to a London gentleman. Set in Kent and London in the early nineteenth century, is narrated through the vivid storytelling of Philip “Pip” Pirrip, an orphan who

lives with his hot-headed sister, “Mrs. Joe,” and her patient blacksmith husband, Joe Gargery. On Christmas Eve, Pip visits the graves of his parents and family. It is in the graveyard on these misty, foggy marshes where Pip encounters Abel Magwitch, who he describes as:

A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water and smothered in mud, lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped, and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin. (Dickens 40)

Magwitch, a convict sentenced to fourteen years of transportation after passing forged bank notes, escapes from the prison hulk anchored by the marshes and forces Pip to not only steal food but also provide the tools needed to break his chains and shackles. Following Pip’s theft of his sister’s holiday trimmings and sharing those with Magwitch (along with a blacksmith’s file that Magwitch uses to pry off his leg irons), the convict is caught on Christmas Day, is again tried, and is given a transportation for life sentence in Australia where he spends a good portion of the novel offstage.

In these initial scenes, Dickens employs vivid, rich, realistic imagery to portray the fantastic and incongruous: poverty and hunger, prison hulks, chains and files, and the dead juxtaposed against Christmas dinner and the warmth of the hearth. While normally Dickens uses realistic principles and, in the case of *Great Expectations* an element of the gothic in Miss Havisham and Estella, in Magwitch’s case he tends to take a fabulist approach. When Magwitch later returns unexpectedly, he relates his story (as told

through Pip) in a romanticized, hazy way. Magwitch's wistful story about the loneliness of being a shepherd belies the fact that shepherding in the Australian outback was extremely dangerous and harsh.

Dickens's telling of Magwitch's story (again, through Pip) is also punctuated by Magwitch's good fortune. Farm work was hard in Victorian Australia and, as Hughes relates in *The Fatal Shore*, "probably the toughest of all jobs, in terms of the psychic tolls it could exact on a man, was a shepherd's" (318). Merino crossbreeds, which are highly adaptable and are excellent foragers, provide prized wool used in clothing and even carpets. Australia's prosperity would come on the backs and through the prized wool of merino sheep that was exported back to the British Isles. Shepherds were consigned to the bush and in the Australian Outback where they led a lonely life and had a higher chance of encountering the revenge of Aborigines who were evicted from their own lands. Aborigines also had a taste for mutton, so they might attack the flock for food, so shepherds were constantly afraid of attack.

A shepherd's life was further isolated by the need to keep flocks separated due to disease, and it is this isolation to which Magwitch refers in his recounting of his transport convict experience:

When I was a hired-out shepherd in a solitary hut, not seeing no faces but faces of sheep till I Half forgot wot men's and women's faces wos like, I see youn. I drops my knife many a time in that hut when I was eating my dinner or my supper, and I says, 'Here's the boy again, a looking at me whiles I eats and drinks!' I see you there a many times as plain as ever I see you on them misty marshes. 'Lord strike me dead!' I says each time . .

. 'but wot, if I gets liberty and money, I'll make that boy a gentleman!

(346)

While Magwitch eats his meal in solitude, he is reminded of the barbaric way he ate the scraps Pip had stolen for him on the marshes all those years before, and his mention of only seeing the faces of the sheep in his care gives his story a fabulist quality. This nostalgic turn forms most of Magwitch's recollection of transportation and his sentence in Australia. While lonely and in his hut, Magwitch fondly remembers his brief encounter with Pip, who at the time was terrified and panicked. Yet, Magwitch looks on the scene nostalgically and risks his fate by returning to his ward. He conveys to Pip that he has "come to the old country fur to see my gentleman spend his money *like* a gentleman... *My* pleasure 'ull be fur to see him do it. And blast you all!" (356).

Magwitch's nostalgia is not tied to Australia but to his idealized version of his long-ago encounters with a young Pip.

Upon his master's death, Magwitch inherits a small sum that he "spec'lates" after striking out on his own, and his luck affords him the opportunity to become Pip's benefactor, becoming an almost fairytale figure, a stepfather to Pip who is clearly bound to Magwitch in inextricable ways. By using Pip as the narrator, Dickens brings an air of melancholy and romanticism to the final acts of the book. This narrative approach also allows Dickens to set the book more than twenty years before its publication—during the height of the transport convict system and to use these fairytale tropes in presenting Magwitch as a convict who's seen the light and changed his errant ways. *Great Expectations* was published as transportation was winding down, so Dickens's approach and use of fabulism, especially in the case of Magwitch, gives the novel a fairytale

quality that is anachronistic to the cruelties and the grim austerity that Magwitch surely experienced abroad. His fuzzy recollections and almost nonexistent descriptions of Australia lend themselves to mystery. Dickens's romanticization of the plot and the apparent sublimation of the history of transportation is inherently tied to the timeframe he creates in Pip and the methods he uses as a novelist.

Magwitch's return and ultimate penance is yet another way that Dickens is projecting his beliefs as well as the potential and promise of free emigration to Australia onto his readers. *Great Expectations*, of course, was wildly successful and would fuel several of Dickens's future endeavors, including his direct dealings with Australia. Its gothic tropes and characters appealed to his readers much like the famous murders and criminals Dickens cited in his earlier editorials concerning transportation. Because it was so widely received, Dickens had built yet another platform to make his case to his audience. Magwitch, arguably, is the most successful character in the book; however, he is also one of the least connected socially. He is a convict from the working class, the class Dickens was targeting directly. Convinced that transportation would solve many of London and Britain's ills, including poverty and overcrowding, he created a story that, however fictitious, proved that even the lower classes could be successful if they put their minds to it. The catch, though, was that you had to *stay* abroad and not come back. Magwitch's fatal mistake was that he was just curious enough to see what he had encouraged in Pip, and that proved to be his end, a point that Dickens was making to his readers. By romanticizing Magwitch's surroundings and hard work, Dickens was creating the narrative he needed to sell the *idea* of Australia.

Although Dickens would never visit Australia, he would learn much about the continent from books and friends who had traveled there. He counted among his friends and would financially support the efforts of Caroline Chisholm, a humanitarian who helped working-class families and women who emigrated to Australia. He would write about her in *Household Words* and would put such stock in the promise of Australia that he would support the decision of his sons Alfred and Edward to emigrate there in 1865 and 1868, respectively. Edward, whom Dickens nicknamed “Plorn,” was only seventeen years old when he was sent to Australia to seek his fortune. Dickens, by that time in his waning years, was so visibly overcome by his youngest son’s departure and the incredible distance that would ultimately be between him that he broke down in Paddington Station.

Dickens, like the narratives directly emanating from the transportation network, strikes a nostalgic tone towards transportation and participates in the reshaping of the history of the transport convict system. Dickens, whose incredible celebrity, contributions to well-known journals, and widely read novels, would ultimately influence how his readers related to transportation through his ever-present prose. Bowes-Smyth, Ward, and Savery, are, in effect, living up to the obligations that society places on them to not only present reality, but to “touch them up” as Hughes argues in their mostly absent works. Taken together, we see a larger picture of the “forgetting” of Australia’s history—a history with aspects that perhaps should not be neglected or abandoned.

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