

# ***THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB:* LOCATING STATUS ANXIETY WITHIN THE ‘COLONIAL WARE’**

**HELEN MACHALIAS**  
University of Sydney

The Melbourne of Fergus Hume’s *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886) enjoyed prosperity following the gold rushes, and was the east coast destination for ships travelling from Europe (Pollak and MacNabb 14). The city also represented the realisation of the dreams of the literary men who had emigrated to Melbourne in the 1850s hoping for an ‘educated “literary minded” populace, who would appreciate Shakespeare and “learn his mind’ (Stewart 132). In describing nineteenth-century Melbourne, Ken Stewart has asserted that ‘[a]lthough aware of their colonial remoteness, the Melbourne literati developed a confident belief in their own cultural identity’ (129), and this consciousness of both distance from the centre and an awareness of a burgeoning national culture define Hume’s novel.

*The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* reveals colonial anxieties about Australia’s relation to established literary traditions through the novel’s densely citational style. The novel’s allusions to popular genre fiction, Victorian novelists and mythical, biblical and classical references result in the impression that Melbourne is not only a peripheral city, but lacks any discernable sense of identity. Literary and cultural allusions simultaneously situate *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* within a crime fiction genealogy, are an appropriation of literary histories in an attempt to add depth and resonance, and provide a commentary on the cultural life of colonial Melbourne. Hume initially attempts to link Melbourne to London, which he appears to regard as not only the imperial centre, but also the origin of culture and the crime fiction genre itself. As the novel continues, this imitation becomes increasingly self-conscious, and the creation of Melbourne as a cosmopolitan metropolis undertaken by Hume is ultimately denigrated by admissions that the colony appears to be resistant to high culture.

*The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* garnered both local success and international acclaim, selling more than 750,000 copies overseas (Caterson v). Hume’s awareness of the novel’s colonial (and by implication, parochial) nature is apparent in his claim that ‘[t]he story was written only to attract local attention and no one was more astonished than I when it passed beyond the narrow circles for which it had originally been intended’ (Caterson vii). The title of this article, with its description of the novel as a colonial ware, is a reference to Miles Franklin’s assessment of the novel in *The Bulletin* in 1952 as one of the few Australian works ‘to make the grade in the universality sternly demanded of colonial wares’ (Pollak and MacNabb 15). This both highlights the shrewd assessment of the needs of the mass literary market that influences *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* as well as its inclusion of anticipated culture markers for readers both at home and abroad, and the allusions in the novel are central to both these aspects.

Andrew McCann's analysis of Marcus Clarke's *Bohemia* is of particular interest in following this line of enquiry. McCann interprets Clarke's representation of Melbourne as a mirror image of the cities of Europe as symptomatic of an urban society which '[marks] its claims to cultural capital through a necessarily belated rehearsal of trends and styles that signified the modernity of London or Paris' (33). Like Hume, Clarke modelled his work in accordance with metropolitan literary conventions and production in an attempt to locate himself within a discernable literary tradition and appeal to a potential readership (McCann 33):

[Clarke's] work tried to conjure Melbourne as if it were Dickens's London or Hugo's Paris, the better to exploit a colonial appetite for the metropolitan. . . Yet this also meant that the specific identity of colonial Melbourne became nebulous, lost in translation. (McCann 2004, p. 23)

The allusions in *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* produce a similar effect, as insistently recalling classic and popular texts results in a borrowed identity, which culminates in the ending of the novel where Madge and Brian leave for England, in a complete rejection of the largely inauthentic cultural milieu that Australia offers them.

The forms that these allusions take, as well as the works to which they refer, are significant, as the novel's quotations go beyond the expected form of allusions, which rely on a shared (albeit unstated) cultural knowledge (Pucci 4). Rather, Hume determinedly draws attention to the citations that dominate the text, frequently not only making an allusion, but also referencing both the work and author, often adding that it is a 'famous' or 'well-known' example. The laboured nature of the novel's citation is well suited to both its commercial and cultural purposes, as an identical technique was utilised by Clarke to link his work to European antecedents, producing the effect of a colonial 'literariness which aspired to the cultural distinction of European writing' (McCann 29). Such an approach is also a reflection of the status of both these texts as commodities, as this technique both 'foregrounds the textual effects and narrative dynamics on which its own marketability might hinge' (McCann 12).

Like Clarke, Hume constructs a vision of Melbourne as a modern European metropolis, comparing Collins Street to 'New York's Broadway, London's Regent Street and Rotten Row' (75), but even more grandiosely, the Appian Way of Imperial Rome (75). Hume also attempts to inscribe the cityscape of Melbourne with a sense of connection to mythology and classical literature. In one passage, Gorby and Brian Fitzgerald take a walk through the Treasury Gardens where there are contrived references to the effigies of ancient gods and goddesses. Hume further describes the streets of Melbourne as reminiscent of 'Bunyan's famous allegory, what with the semi-darkness, the wild lights and the shadows, and the vague, undefinable forms of men and women' (133). Alluding to the famous Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Hume here connects *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* to a large body of canonical literature that has also referenced the iconic narrative, such as *Vanity Fair* (1848), *Little Women* (1868) and *Jane Eyre* (1847) (Newey 4).

When Hume's narrative moves from the fashionable Collins Street to the slums of Little

Bourke Street, the novel takes a considered approach, so that the depiction of the squalor of Madam Guttersnipe's abode and surrounds does not undermine the self-conscious portrayal of Melbourne as a metropolitan centre. Hume legitimates the representation by associating these sections with Dickens, Dante and Virgil when describing lawyer Calton's initial engagement with the proletarian class:

. . .the neighbourhood through which they were passing was so like that of the Seven Dials in London, that he kept as closely to the side of his guide as did Dante to that of Virgil in the Infernal Regions. (132)

During the nineteenth century, the Seven Dials became one of the most notorious slums of London following Dickens's description of them in his collection *Sketches by Boz* (1836) (Smith 62). Hume was naturally aware of Dickens's immense popularity and that works dealing with the reality of urban poverty were now in vogue in the crime fiction genre (Pykett 30 -31). However, Hume uses the allusion to Dickens to emphasise the affinity between the colony and empire's two major cities, while his reference to Dante's *Divine Comedy* may be an attempt to add depth and resonance by alluding both to one of the central epic poems of the English tradition, as well as to the Romantics (particularly Blake), who were instrumental in reviving the work in the nineteenth century (Ascoli 5).

Despite these high culture allusions, Hume's anxieties about the effect of descriptions of slum life on the largely positive representation of colonial Melbourne are not ameliorated. Other passages in the novel aim to affirm Melbourne's similarity to the centre, as in the contrived mention of Calton, who hears classical music in the city on his way to the Little Bourke Street slums. Not only are the streets of Melbourne alive with European culture, they have an appreciate audience, as Calton notices 'with what deep interest the crowd listened to the rhythmic strains of Strauss and the sparkling melodies of Offenbach' (131).

Hume is not only concerned to present Melbourne as a modern, sophisticated city, but also to situate himself in a crime fiction genealogy, which, despite there being colonial crime fiction novels which pre-dated *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (Pollak and MacNabb 10), Hume obviously still understands as a genre belonging to London and Paris. This attitude appears to have been the prevailing one, as in 1902, G.K Chesterton argued that 'the first essential value of the detective story lies in . . . [the expression] . . . of the poetry of modern life (4); that is, London's poetry, 'an urban text of histories and meanings waiting to be read' (Kayman 43). The legend surrounding the creation of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* is that on enquiring at a bookseller's and being informed that Gaboriau's detective stories were the shop's bestsellers (Pollak and MacNab 10), Hume sought to imitate them, deciding he needed to create a story 'containing a mystery, a murder, and a description of low-life in Melbourne' (Caterson vii). Other aspects of the creation of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* allude to the novel's derivative nature, as his assertion that he 'passed a great many nights' in the city's slums, 'gathering material' is reminiscent of an insomniac Dickens's nocturnal strolls through the streets of London, which it has been suggested influenced his depiction of the city's urban slums (Smith 53). Rather than mask his literary borrowings, Hume announces them from the first page as a way to gain credibility:

Indeed, from the nature of the crime itself, the place where it was committed, and the fact that the assassin has escaped without leaving a trace behind him, it would seem as though the case itself had been taken bodily out of one of Gaboriau's novels, and that his famous detective Lecoq only would be able to unravel it. (1)

This initial citation indicates the extent of Hume's commercial ambitions in his aligning *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* with a tradition that includes Gaboriau. Beyond referencing the author and his celebrated literary creation Lecoq, he explicitly draws attention to the textual features of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*—plot, setting, and nature of the crime, as particularly reminiscent of Gaboriau's fiction and plausible within the crime fiction world created by him.

Five pages later, Hume is again attempting to establish his place in the genre, as *The Argus* specifically lists one of Fortuné du Boisgobey's stories, 'An Omnibus Mystery' (6), but this time Hume suggests his innovation supersedes one of the acknowledged masters of the genre at the time. Du Boisgobey wrote a vast amount of detective fiction that brought the genre to the attention of a mass French readership, and also influenced Arthur Conan Doyle (Schutt 59). Du Boisgobey published from the 1870s until the late 1880s, and was therefore a contemporary of Hume's (Schutt 59). This allusion is one of the rare instances where a hint of a concern at the possibility of being perceived as imitative is present, as the mock newspaper article acknowledges that in du Boisgobey's novels 'a murder closely resembling this tragedy takes place in an omnibus'. However, the originality of Hume's plotting is immediately emphasised, when the article proclaims that 'we question if even that author would have been daring enough to have written about a crime being committed in such an unlikely place as a hansom cab' (6).

De Quincey is mentioned almost obsessively throughout the novel, and with good reason. A popular writer and intimate friend of Coleridge and Wordsworth's (Morrison iv), De Quincey represented both literary credibility and popular acclaim, with Leslie Stephen in 1874 noting that De Quincey's essays entitled 'On Murder' were the most popular of his writings (Morrison xxv). De Quincey's comic treatise played a formative role in the rapidly evolving crime fiction genre (Morrison iix), and the citation of the work represents an opportunity for Hume to connect Melburnians and Londoners, as he did previously with his allusion to Dickens:

The present feeling of all classes, in Melbourne, must be one of terror, that such a man should be at large, and must, in a great measure, resemble the fear which filled everyone's heart in London when the Marr murders were committed, and it was known that the murderer had escaped. Anyone who has read De Quincey's graphic description of the crime perpetrated by Williams must tremble to think that such another devil incarnate is in our midst. (183)

This assumes that a fictional Melbourne newspaper readership could be expected to be

conversant in the popular English fiction of the day. It also takes for granted that the novel's readers will be appreciative of literary allusions, and that they will successfully evoke something of the terror experienced by the public depicted in *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*. In addition, De Quincey is associated with some of the most intelligent and educated characters in the novel—Calton, Mark Frettlby and Brian Fitzgerald. De Quincey is invoked as an authority by wily, learned lawyer Calton, who explains to Felix Rolleston that '[y]ou read De Quincey's account of the Marr murders in London, and you will see that the more public the place, the less risk there is of detection' (49). Mark Frettlby says of his distaste for talkative men, that if he met them he 'would be inclined to agree with De Quincey's essay on murder, as one of the fine arts' (80). Beyond citation, Hume also mimics aspects of De Quincey's literary style. De Quincey was famous for using the historical past as a rich source for intriguing cases of murder, drawing upon examples of Caligula, Nero and Judaeen King Herod (Morrison ix). Hume adopts this technique wholesale, also using the example of Nero, saying '[t]here are no doubt many people who think that Nero was a pleasant young man' (99) and it is suggested by a clergyman that good looks and crime are closely connected as 'both Judas Iscariot and Nero were beauty-men' (171).

Allusions to the work of writers not from the European crime fiction tradition work quite differently. Rather than being invoked to give credibility to Hume's use of crime fiction conventions, they are frequently dismissed. Felix Rolleston and his wife Doris Featherweight are used throughout the novel as a gauge of low-culture and bourgeois pretension, and it is Felix who is a reader of American writer Anna Katherine Green's *The Leavenworth Case* (1878). Felix compares the 'real life' hansom cab murder to the novel, thereby demeaning Green's work, as Felix's 'reading was of the lightest description' (48). In this manner, Hume not only characterises colonial Melburnians through their cultural tastes (this will be explored in greater depth in the forthcoming analysis), but also takes the opportunity to comment unfavourably on additions to the crime fiction genre. The disparagement of Green's work may have a gendered dimension to it (Hume's novel is notable for the dearth of literary allusions to women, though he does make reference to George Eliot), but it is also suggestive of the suspicion with which Hume appears to regard popular American crime fiction.

*The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* also has an ambivalent relationship with American horror writer Edgar Allan Poe, who was also inspired by Gaboriau (Scaggs 22-23) and made use of De Quincey's precepts to create his famous detective Auguste Dupin (Morrison xxvi). Perhaps for this reason Hume is slightly threatened by him, recognising in Poe another colonial writer who is also indebted to a tradition from which both nineteenth-century America and Australia were so distant, and as a result associates Poe's work with the debased and lower class characters of the novel. Brian Fitzgerald's dried-up old housekeeper Mrs Sampson is described as having a 'Poe-like appreciation' for 'charnel-house horrors' (66), from whom Brian is eager to escape. Hume even goes so far as to suggest that Poe is out of keeping with Australian culture, with Brian describing a location as looking like a haunted house 'thinking of Poe's weird poem', before deciding that 'such a thing is impossible out here' (210). These responses indicate Hume's absolute preference for European culture, and disparagement of other 'colonial wares'.

Beyond the crime fiction genre, the novel's allusions comment on a number of key authors and texts of the nineteenth century, offering an interesting insight into a colonial writer's

perspective on world literary culture. Hume appears to have a particularly strong affinity with Balzac, as a writer who both represented a Paris as Hume would like Melbourne to appear, and also a contributor to the crime fiction genre who drew on the same sources as Hume to create his character of Vautrin in *Le Pere Goriot* (1834), *Illusions Perdues* (1843) and *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes* (1847) (Schutt 61). In *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, Balzac is represented as offering sage advice in regard to male-female relations: 'I quite agree with Balzac's saying that no wonder men couldn't understand woman, seeing that God who created her failed to do so' (103). George Eliot, 'one of the most revered figures in late Victorian England' (Langland 397) earns the distinction of being the sole female literary figure to whom Hume refers, and her opinions are privileged as having the authority of a precept: '[a]fter all, the true religion of Fate has been preached by George Eliot, when she says that our lives are the outcome of our actions' (265).

As one gains a fuller sense of Hume's literary loyalties and tastes, it is unsurprising that popular French writer Emile Zola is treated with contempt. The murder victim, the raffish and feckless Oliver Whyte, is portrayed as even more disreputable through the mention that he owns pictures of burlesque girls and is a reader of Zola. Gorby says 'I've heard of him; if his novels are as bad as his reputation I shouldn't care to read them' (33). Sita Schutt notes that during this period there was a great deal of English hostility towards French policing methods and French culture which frequently expressed itself in crime fiction (61). Zola was seen as characteristic of all that was worst about Gallic culture<sup>1</sup>, and his work was described as 'poisonous stuff' in the late nineteenth century (Brantlinger 119). Michael Pollak and Margaret MacNabb have read this exchange as 'a shot at bourgeois morality' (20), but it may instead be a reflection of Hume's adoption of prevailing English attitudes to Zola at the time.

However, other allusions of Hume's are grounded in the actual cultural life of the city he was portraying. In 1886, Melburnians enjoyed productions of *Henry V* at the Opera House and an Offenbach operetta in February, while *Iolanthe* appeared at the Theatre Royal in May, followed by a stage adaptation of Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* at the same venue in June (*Theatre in Melbourne 1886*, 2013). *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* bears traces of the influence of these productions in a very literal way, as Hume alludes to all of these works in his novel. This indicates the extent to which the novel is reflective of the cultural milieu of the time, and the mention of these productions would have appealed to a contemporary audience, as well as offering Hume the ability to comment on the artistic preferences of the country.

As Gorby's comment on Oliver Whyte's literary taste suggests, Hume frequently uses characters' literary tastes to define them, but also to establish the national character, and this is particularly apparent in the characterisation of Brian Fitzgerald and his fiancée Madge Frettlby. Through the cultural references made by the couple, Hume makes it clear that the pair embody the cultural aspirations that Hume is articulating in his idealised vision of a sophisticated nation that is not on the periphery of high culture. The following exchange, with its disproportionate number of cultural references, is typical of the couple's discussions:

Left to themselves, Madge began playing Waldteufel's last new valse. . . then she

sang a gay little French song about love and a butterfly, with a mocking refrain which made Brian laugh.

'A memory of Offenbach,' he said, rising and coming over to the piano. 'We certainly can't touch the French in writing these airy trifles.'

'They're unsatisfactory, I think,' said Madge, running her fingers over the keys, 'they mean nothing.'

'Of course not,' he replied, 'but don't you remember that De Quincey says there is no moral either big nor little in the Iliad, so the light chansons are something similar'. (253)

In this instance, Hume uses the pair to articulate a colonial commentary on both classical and popular music and key ideas in the European literary tradition. Interestingly, Irishman Brian appears to fully identify with his adopted homeland, including himself in the Australians referred to in '[w]e certainly can't touch the French in writing these airy trifles', one of the few unambiguous admissions in the novel of 'colonophobia'.<sup>2</sup>

Hume uses Madge's cultural knowledge on other occasions as a way of expressing opinions on 'world literary space' (Casanova *passim*). These incursions are noticeable due to their frequent irrelevance to the novel's narrative; however, they reveal much about colonial Australia's relationship to world culture (as mediated through Hume's subjective opinion). Madge cites Edward Bulwer-Lytton when discussing Brian's previous flirtations: '[b]ut you know what Lytton says, "There are many counterfeits, but only one Eros", so I can afford to forget these things' (116). Bulwer was an immensely popular and versatile writer of the time who also had admirers in Macaulay, Poe and Dickens (figures to whom, as noted above, Hume himself pays tribute through the allusions in *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*) (Christensen x). However, Bulwer-Lytton's significance extends beyond his popularity in England, as Bulwer-Lytton was greatly influenced by Samuel Sidney's representation of Australia as a 'blessed land' where '[h]ard work enabled the prodigal there to earn back the squandered patrimony, and as a new and successful man he might even hope to return to England' (Christensen 228)—an exact description of the journey undertaken by Brian Fitzgerald in Hume's work. Bulwer-Lytton's Australian novel *The Caxtons* (1848-49) inspired other English representations of Australia, including Henry Kingsley's *Geoffrey Hamlyn* (1859), but also came to 'profoundly affect the Australian consciousness of identity' (Christensen 229), making Hume's citation of the writer another example of a dependence on literature from the 'centre' as an approach to representing the nation.

Indeed, there is a notable absence of any references to Australian literature in the conversations between Brian and Madge, and this has serious implications if one pursues the idea that they are representative of Hume's colonial ideal. It would appear that for Hume, true sophistication lies in the knowledge and appreciation of old world culture from a distant literary centre, most frequently England. As the novel concludes with the couple sailing to England (as indeed Hume himself did in 1888) (Cateron vi) 'towards the old world and the new life' (309), the ending embodies the belief that literary people must be closer to what Pascale Casanova describes as the 'Greenwich meridian', the illusory centre of culture (87). In other words, 'the old world' is the imagined literary centre located in Europe. Paradoxically, because of its very 'newness', Australia has nothing to offer the couple, which accords with Casanova's conception of world literary space, where the great national literary

spaces are the oldest ones, and therefore the newer literary spaces are poor by comparison (83).

Brian and Madge personify Hume's stated belief that in the future a typical Australian citizen will be 'a cultured, indolent individual, with an intense appreciation of the arts and sciences, and a dislike to hard work and utilitarian principles' (131). Their acquaintances Dora Featherweight and Felix Rolleston (who marry midway through the novel) are conversely representative of everything that Hume perceives as unsophisticated about colonial culture. Just as Brian and Madge are distinguished by their refined appreciation of classical music and literature, Dora is ridiculed for her piano performances of lightweight popular music, arranged by her master Thumpanini. Her lowbrow taste is perfectly matched by the cultural inclinations of her husband, who says 'I don't care myself about "Op. 84" and all that classical humbug. Give me something light; "Belle Helene", with Emelie Melville, and all that sort of thing' (201). Emelie Melville was a famous singer who performed in July in *Falka* at the Opera House and again in September in *Les Cloches de Corneville* (*Theatre in Melbourne 1886*, 2013). This mention of a popular figure in Melbourne is an example of the novel's apparent success in capturing Melbourne life for local readers, but aligning this with the musical tastes of the bourgeois upper class is also indicative that Hume was willing to confront what he considered the embarrassing aspects of Australia's cultural tastes.

The Rollestons' understanding of politics is also derived from mass-market entertainment that was popular in Melbourne at the time. Dora is lampooned throughout the novel as an uncultured social climber, and her romanticised reading of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe* seems to confirm this, when she decides that 'Felix, like Strephon, in *Iolanthe*, should go into Parliament' (170). Felix's wife is not astute enough to recognise that many aspects of British government and law are satirised in the musical, with the House of Lords being presented as full of incompetent wealthy idiots. Felix appears equally brainless, as when pressed for his political knowledge he feels 'somewhat at sea' and says '[o]h, you see, I've read the Parliamentary reports and Constitutional history, and *Vivian Grey*' (205). Disraeli's novels were regarded as lowbrow in his day (Wordsworth described them as 'trashy') (Stewart xi), and in 1870 Richard Grant White called *Vivian Grey* 'an unprincipled novel sold by unscrupulous advertising methods' (Stewart xi). Returning to the notion that in the novel Australia is a place defined by its cultural lack, the fact that the Rollestons, who are philistines, thrive in this colonial environment (Felix does indeed become a member of Parliament as his wife had hoped) seems to confirm that the novel reluctantly perceives Australia as inimical to high culture.

In this figuration, Australia is not only devoid of original culture, but it appears that culture that is transplanted here is also unable to thrive. This notion is stated by characters in the text, but is also self-evident in the awkwardness and artificiality when characters self-consciously quote Shakespeare or speak in Latin. Mark Frettlby, in describing the Australian climate, says 'I can't say I care about playing the parts of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace of a hot Melbourne day' (79). This biblical reference (one among many, the majority of which refer to Adam and Eve) seems to be a forced attempt to appeal to a wider audience who, during this period could be safely assumed to have knowledge of the Bible, but is also a way to associate the novel with the source text of much classic literature. Other instances of what amounts to literary name-dropping abound in the text, such as Brian's landlady Mrs

Sampson being compared to Ananias and Sapphura (63) or Mr Gorby's exhaustion described in terms of his being 'fat and scant of breath' like Hamlet (61).

Hume tends to confine his Shakespearean references to well-known plays, namely *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (82), *Hamlet* (61) and *Macbeth* (136). In one instance, when Brian misses an allusion to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Madge chides him with not being a student of the play, Brian answers:

Midsummer out here is so hot that one gets no sleep, and, consequently, no dreams; depend upon it, if the four lovers whom Puck treated so badly had lived in Australia, they wouldn't have been able to sleep for the mosquitos'. (82)

Statements such as these seem an admission that European culture is almost incongruous in Australia, and the same contradictory attitude appears in relation to the quoting of Latin, illuminating the novel's conflicting impulses between a realisation of the unsuitability of much of world culture in the Australian context and the desire to be part of the imperial centre. When Brian quotes Latin, Madge objects to it, responding with 'I agree with Heine's remark, that if the Romans had had to learn it, they would not have found time to conquer the world' (82). At a tennis party, Latin is literally lost in translation when Felix jokingly translates *sub tegmine fagi* as 'onlookers see most of the game' (221). When Detective Gorby takes a walk through the Treasury Gardens, he is uncomprehending of the significance of some statues, and in his 'happy ignorance of heathen mythology' mistakes Venus Victrix for Eve, and Diana, Bacchus and Ariadne for the Babes in the Word; '[h]e knew that each of the statues had queer names, but thought they were merely allegorical' (60).

This cultural dislocation is confirmed in the discussion of other aspects of Australian culture that extend beyond the literary. There is a distinct note of pride that runs throughout the passage where Hume describes the earth 'clothed in all the beauty of summer garments' (185) and the black swans that are comparable to the mythical phoenix in this 'great continent' (185). However, there is also an acknowledgement of the perceived strangeness of the country that forbids a reading of the description as an unequivocally positive representation of Australia. Hume describes pumice stone floating and ironwood sinking as 'a queer freak on the part of Dame Nature', and the emphasis on the 'contraries' of the country as a 'realm of topsey-turveydom' (185) only reinforces colonial notions of the antipodes as upside-down. Significantly, in discussing the opposite climates as one goes north between England and Australia, it is England that the narrator labels 'home' (186). Despite this attachment, the narrator seems to recognise the futility of attempting to replicate England at home. The novel's musings on expatriates and their attachment to tradition are satiric, with 'John Bull—Paddy—and Sandy—all being of a conservative turn of mind, and with strong opinions as to the keeping of old customs' (186).

Interestingly, the most resonant symbolism in *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* does not come from Dickens or the Bible, but Hume himself. Madge and Brian's discussion of household ghosts as an aristocratic tradition, which Madge explains 'is the reason we colonials have none' (210), is the perfect summation of the status anxiety that characterises colonial

Australian culture as it is presented in the novel. The idea of a ghost (or lack thereof in a colonial setting) is an obvious figurative expression for the sense of a literary history that *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* is so desperate to establish. Australia's lack of a 'ghost' recalls the trope of belatedness, highlighting the nineteenth-century concern that Australia had no history, and consequently lacked civilisation and literature (Carter 8). While Brian suggests that 'democratic' ghosts may also exist, he immediately dismisses the notion as 'nonsense' (210). This is indicative of the tentative claims to a burgeoning national culture that Hume makes occasionally in the novel, which are immediately overwhelmed by a colonial insecurity that a nationalistic pride is unfounded.

Though there are elements of the reality of colonial life in the references to the popular figures and performances of 1886, the novel is not, as the first English edition described it, a 'realistic story of Melbourne social life' (Caterson v) because of the superfluous allusions added by Hume, who apparently feels obliged to add a veneer of culture imported from Europe. Rather than recording an emerging Australian colonial identity, Hume's novel initially attempts to claim that Melbourne is as 'culturally robust' as older cities, allowing his readers to engage in 'pleasurable identifications with metropolitan bourgeois life' (McCann 32). Though clearly sharing different views of what constituted the Australian identity, Clarke and Hume's dependence on established cultural tropes and conventions are remarkably similar. Both have a commercial and cultural investment in portraying Melbourne as a second London or Paris, as it gives their works literary credibility while 'catering to the demands of a local readership increasingly interested in the cultural and social specificity of an Australian city' (McCann 33). It was a formula that bred success, with the novel translated into eleven languages (Caterson v). Fergus Hume's ability to transcend the classification of 'colonial' is also apparent in his inclusion in crime fiction anthologies as a British writer (for example, *Twelve English Detective Stories* [ed. Michael Cox] 1998).

Mark Kipperman suggests that in relation to the crime depicted, the 'colonial dilemma' of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* is the realisation that 'modern Melbourne is becoming both like and unlike London' (131). This growing comprehension of colonial culture is a fitting conception of the novel's simultaneous dependence on and rejection of European culture. The continuous attempts to promote Melbourne as another London or Paris undermine the thriving cultural life of an emergent, successful city documented elsewhere, leaving the reader with an impression of a barren Australia that both the novel's central characters and Hume himself were only too willing to leave behind.

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, D. R. Jarvis has noted that there was praise of Zola's realism in the *Bulletin*. ('The Development of an Egalitarian Poetics in the Bulletin, 1880-1890', *Australian Literary Studies* 10, 1 (May 1981), 25).

<sup>2</sup> Ken Stewart describes colonophobia as 'a term designating attitudes similar to those associated with "cultural cringe"' ('Colonial Literati', *Authority and Influence*, 129).