Eliza Hamilton Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother': Romanticism, Anti Slavery, and Imperial Feminism in the Nineteenth Century

KATIE HANSORD
Deakin University

Eliza Hamilton Dunlop is beginning to be critically located within an Australian literary tradition, with her writing appearing in anthologies such as *The Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse* (1995), *The Turning Wave: Poems and Songs of Irish Australia* (2001), *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry* (2008) and the *Macquarie Pen Anthology of Australian literature* (2009). Dunlop's best-known poem, 'The Aboriginal Mother,' uses motherhood to present an emotionally charged critique of the massacre of Aboriginal people at Myall Creek. The poem was published in *The Australian* on the 13 December 1838, just five days before seven men were hanged for the crime of murdering an Aboriginal child at Myall Creek. As John O'Leary points out, the trial and retrial of these men resulted in much debate in papers at the time on whether white men should even be tried for the murder of Aboriginal people (86). Elizabeth Webby's introduction to the 1988 reproduction of Dunlop's *The Aboriginal Mother and Other poems* discusses the radicalism of Dunlop's treatment of aboriginal subjectivity, while John O'Leary positions Dunlop's aboriginal poems within a transnational discourse of 'crying mother poems'. Such attention to Dunlop's mode of sympathy has been extremely important in demonstrating an alternative colonial response to the Indigenous population. However, it is worth considering how such sympathy was shaped by Dunlop's broader, but interrelated concerns with women's franchise, radical politics and Romanticism.

To date, there is still little written about the international influences on Dunlop's writing. Developments in Romantic studies have seen a recent mapping of a vibrant cosmopolitan Romantic writing community, with writers shown to be much more aware of each other than had been previously supposed, and indeed, networked in various ways across Europe, North America, and Asia (34). Yet Tim Fulford and John Kitson note that, 'with some exceptions, Romanticism's relationship with colonialism has been little studied' (Fulford *Romanticism* 1). Until recently, Australia's literary tradition has been interpreted through a lens of either oppositionality or insularity and this has extended to the way Romanticism was thought to have related to colonial aesthetics. Paul Kane, for example, asserts that 'almost the whole of what we associate with the flowering of Romanticism took place while the settlement in Australia struggled to become a self sufficient colony…the primary concerns of the people were local – insulated, as they were, from any sense of participation in the political and cultural convulsions of Europe'(9).

Kane posits Charles Harpur as a lone Romantic poet in a country which would not adopt that tradition. However, there are marked similarities between Harpur's 'An Aboriginal Mother's lament' and Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother.' Like Dunlop's, Harpur's poem too recounts the escape of a mother and child from the Myall Creek Massacre through the voice of the mother. Written in 1838, Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother' pre-dates Harpur's lament, which appeared in *The Bushrangers: A Play in five acts and Other Poems* (1853). Kane argues that Romantic poetry is concerned with two things primarily, firstly a reverence for nature, and secondly a revolutionary impulse. He contends that these two aspects are *not* found in Australian poetry, where 'nature…no longer corresponded to *Nature*, …not only were the seasons backwards, the plants and animals strange, but the land itself was thought by many to be irredeemably ugly…'(11). Harpur's descriptions of nature in poems like 'An Aboriginal Mother's Lament,' while not Sublime, still revere Nature in 'the shining fish pools':

> No more shall his loud tomahawk
> Be plied to win our cheer,
> Or the shining fish pools darken
> Beneath his shadowing spear;
> The fading tracks of his fleet foot
> Shall guide not as before,
> And the mountain-spirits mimic
> His hunting call no more!
> O moan not! I would give this braid—
> Thy father's gift to me—
> For but a single palmful
> Of water now for thee. (370)

Significantly, Dunlop's poem offers no description of the natural environment at all. Yet if we conceive of nature not literally as the Australian landscape but rather as transcendent human nature embodied by the mother, then Dunlop's poem does still demonstrate Romantic tendencies. Indeed, it articulates a maternal nature associated with the protection and love of children that is carried across the Aboriginal Otherness. Both Webby and O'Leary have pointed out that there was no evidence of a surviving mother and child at the Myall Creek massacre, and that this poetic license on the part of Dunlop is evidently a strategic move (O'Leary 88).

As Kane points out, while 'theories of the Sublime may present nature as Other, that sublime Other is generally recuperated within an economy of human reason…the representation of nature therefore forms a system of reference …that governs thought in ways that can be seen as ideological'(11). Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother' is perhaps so explicitly political that the connection of that ideology to nature has been overshadowed:

> To flee, my babe! but whither?
> without my friend-- my guide?
> The blood that was our strength is shed!
> He is not by my side!
> Thy sire! oh! Never, never
> shall *Toon Bakra* hear our cry:
> My bold, my stately mountain-bird!

> I thought not he could die.
>
> Now, who will teach thee, dearest,
> to poise the shield, and spear,
> To wield the *koopin*, or to throw
> the *boomerring* void of fear;
> To breast the river in its might;
> the mountain tracks to tread?
> The echoes of my homeless heart
> reply- the dead, the dead!

It is clear that this conception of nature as Other does indeed inform Dunlop's ideological position. By representing the nature of motherhood through the subject of the Aboriginal Other, O'Leary argues that Dunlop was engaging in 'a deliberate, strategic contribution to the newspaper debate' which was going on at the time regarding the trial of men for the massacre at Myall Creek. Dunlop's poem was in fact designed to 'help bring about an amelioration in the treatment of Indigenous people' (O'Leary 88-89). Although O'Leary examines the poem in the historical context of the colony and Victorian values, rather than its wider relation to Romanticism, his argument demonstrates that the very 'revolutionary impulse' that Kane finds lacking in Australian poetry can be found in 'The Aboriginal Mother.' In demonstrating an impulse towards revolutionary values – those of justice and equality – in a specifically Australian context, Dunlop's poem fits even the somewhat literal and limited Romantic mould set out by Kane.

Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother's Lament' is noticeably similar to transatlantic anti-slavery poetry produced in the same period, particularly 'The Negro Mother's Appeal,' an anonymous poem, from a London anti-Slavery scrapbook, in 1829.[1] There are also similarities between Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother's Lament' and Romantic poet Felicia Hemans's 'Indian Woman's Death-Song.' Neil Gunson has described Dunlop's early verse as being 'mainly in the sentimental tradition of Mrs Hemans' (337). As Tricia Lootens has shown, Hemans' poetry is highly political rather than simply 'sentimental' (Lootens 239). O'Leary also connects Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother' to the work of Hemans, noting that the poem '… belongs to what the critic Isobel Armstrong has called 'the expressive tradition' of nineteenth-century women's poetry, exemplified by writers such as Felicia Hemans and Letitia Langdon [sic], in which the social and psychological condition of others (especially of other women) was explored with considerable sensitivity' (88).

Dunlop was not only aware of these currents and concerns in British women's poetry, but was involved in these same social circles before emigrating. Stuart Curran points out that the Romantic writing community of women, to which Dunlop belongs,

> published far into the Victorian period and it would appear more productively and influentially than any male Romantic contemporary…. In the writings of the two most famous women poets of this generation, Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon, who died respectively in 1835 and 1838, we can discern what is otherwise almost strikingly absent in the male Romantic universe, an actual transition into the characteristic preoccupations of Victorian verse. (282)

In *Two Early Colonials*, Dunlop's great grand-daughter, Margaret De Salis notes that Dunlop 'was a friend of Bulwyer Llyton [sic]; as evidenced by two books in our library autographed by him' (11). It is known that Landon was 'romantically linked with the novelist, Edward Bulwer Lytton, who …was to feature in one of L.E.L's novels, *Romance and Reality* (1831)' (Armstrong, Bristow et al 241). Certainly Dunlop's poetry reflects an involvement with the same literary styles and concerns as can be found in British Romantic women's poetry. De Salis also notes that 'a complete dinner service and …teaset were given to her by the Lord Mayor of London on her departure for Australia' (11). This friendship between Dunlop and W.T. Copeland provides clues to Dunlop's own political leanings, as Copeland was a Whig candidate elected in Coleraine in 1831 before becoming Lord Mayor of London in 1835 (Smith 220). De Salis points out that '[t]here are many letters from Alderman Copeland, who represented the borough of Coleraine for several terms. In 1833 he writes to Eliza, who is just as active in politics as her husband' (De Salis 30). This friendship, then, suggests the Whig political leanings of Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, as do the anti slavery and women's suffrage themes suggested by the content of her poetry.

Women's use of dramatic monologue and its feminist implications has been noted by critics such as Isobel Armstrong, in *Victorian Poetry, Poetry Poetics and Politics*, Glennis Byron in *Victorian Women Poets*, and Cornelia Pearsall in *the Cambridge companion to Victorian Poetry*. As Armstrong points out, 'the adoption of the mask appears to involve a displacement of feminine subjectivity, almost a travestying of femininity, in order that it can be made an object of investigation' (Armstrong 325). The concern with the cultural Other in women's poetry has in fact a double edged significance to early feminist strategies. On the one hand, the dramatic monologue allowed women poets a 'protection against self-exposure and the exposure of feminine subjectivity' (Armstrong 325), and on the other hand, identifying with the colonised slave was a common metaphor for women's oppression in the west. Clare Midgley describes a 'triple discourse' in which 'engagement with the radical intellectual and political currents of the period' was intertwined with 'attempting to bring questions of women's subordination from their margins to centrestage' (Lake, Holmes et al 5).

Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother' certainly seems to be operating on this level, and as such, should be read not only as an early example of sympathetic engagement with Indigenous Australians, but as a part of an international early feminist discourse. Midgley rightly points out that the early feminist discourses on women's rights and anti slavery began a long and problematic relationship between feminism and imperialist attitudes. Colonialism, Christian evangelism, Western civilization or progress and Enlightenment values are often interrelated in nineteenth century political developments generally, but also in the development of feminist discourse (Rendall 3). As Midgley argues, by modeling its discourse on those of Imperialist progress, women's rights came to be tied up with highly questionable assumptions of Western superiority. Midgley argues that there are important contemporary implications '…resulting from western imperialism, and the associated problems of racism and Eurocentrism in white western feminist thought and practice' (4).

This connection to imperialist values is, I think, what Tanya Dalziell means to suggest when she calls the figure of the 'sympathetic white woman' in colonial literature 'unsettling' (74). This imperialist genealogy of feminism is further unsettling as it remains unresolved. While the

analogous 'sympathy' of Christian missionaries towards Indigenous colonised peoples is now recognised as often having been informed by the belief that their way of life was inferior to that of their Christian Western colonisers, women's sympathy has been bound up in essentialist discourses of female superiority which remain highly contested today. In 1839 Dunlop's husband, David Dunlop, 'was appointed police magistrate and protector of Aborigines at Wollombi and Macdonald River,' and Webby adds that it was through this contact with the Wollombi tribe that 'she was able to extend her knowledge of Aboriginal language and culture although, as a woman, certain secrets could not be revealed to her' (i). That her husband had this role can be seen as reinforcing an image of Dunlop as the 'unsettling' and 'sympathetic white woman,' yet she does not present any critique of gender relations among Aboriginal people, as Harriet Taylor Mill did in 'The Enfranchisement of Women,' in which she asserts that 'The Australian savage is idle, while women painfully dig up the roots on which he lives' (Mill 302).

Rather, Dunlop's early feminist agenda in 'The Aboriginal Mother' lies in its emphasis on the notion of woman's natural maternal impulse as a feature transcending cultural difference:

> Oh, hush thee-- hush, my baby,
> I may not tend thee yet.
> Our forest-home is distant far,
> and midnight's star is set.
> Now, hush thee-- or the pale-faced men
> will hear thy piercing wail,
> And what would then thy mother's tears
> Or feeble strength avail!
> (Dunlop 1981)

'The Negro Mother's Appeal', which calls on the 'white lady, happy, proud and free,' to 'plead the cause' with 'thy gentle voice'(Garrisson 160), very much like Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother,' is a dramatic monologue in the voice of the mother. 'The Negro Mother's Appeal' is more direct in its appeal to a white female audience: 'By thy pure maternal joy/ bid him spare my helpless boy/ and thus a blessing on his own / seek from his Makers righteous throne' (Garrisson 160). Indeed, it is this trope of the mother which stands out as the main similarity between Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother' and the anonymous 'Negro Mother's Appeal.' Another similarity is the use of Christian language to support anti slavery arguments.

Both the maternal and the Christian arguments are apparent in poems like Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother,' and transatlantic examples such as Hannah More's 'The Sorrows of Yamba' and the anonymous 'The Negro Mother's Appeal,' and these themes are significant to the development of feminism. Indeed, Jane Rendall points out that early feminists 'had to challenge the view that citizenship was possible only for male heads of households… that challenge came, eventually, from two sources: from the republican notion of the increasing and moralizing domestic power of motherhood, and from the feminised language of evangelicalism' (3). 'The Sorrows of Yamba,' as Alan Richardson notes, is another example of the anti slavery poem, in which the mother and Christian language figure. Attributed to Hannah More, 'The Sorrows of Yamba' 'makes use of common antislavery tropes – for example, the reversal of the "civilized/savage" dichotomy, a reversal that casts the British slavers, not their African victims, as "savage" – that More also deploys in Slavery' (Richardson). Eliza Hamilton Dunlop's 'The

Aboriginal Mother,' although in an Australian setting, is very much keyed into transatlantic abolitionist literary conventions, utilising anti-slavery tropes.

Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother' uses both the reversal of the 'civilised/savage' dichotomy, and the figure of 'the slave Mother bereft of her children' described by Mary Loeffelholz as 'the staple of abolitionist literature' (Loeffelholz 198). Obviously Dunlop transfers these abolitionist tropes to an Australian context in which rather than enslavement, a massacre of Indigenous people had occurred. The poem was criticised in the *Sydney Herald* at the time as being calculated for 'the high southern latitudes' (Dunlop *Letter* 2), which Dunlop disputed, but which outlines the connection to abolitionist literary tropes. The Aboriginal father and child having been 'struck down by English / steel,' the mother speaks to the surviving child:

> Yes, o'er the stars that guide us, he leads my slaughter'd
> boy,
> To show their God how treacherously these stranger men
> destroy ; (Dunlop)

Indeed, Dunlop's inclusion of 'their God' in her argument recalls the Christian lines of 'The sorrows of Yamba':

> Cease, ye British Sons of murder!
> Cease from forging Afric's Chain;
> Mock your Saviour's name no further,
> Cease your savage lust of gain. (More)

Notably, Hemans's 'Indian Woman's Death Song,' published in *Records of Women* (1828) ten years prior to Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother,' was also written from the perspective of a cultural Other, the (American) Indian woman.

Felicia Hemans' influence is apparent in Dunlop's model of approaching the political through the domestic. As Tricia Lootens has argued, Felicia Hemans' poetry was deeply concerned with nationalist agendas (Lootens 239). Midgley goes further to argue that it was this period, from the 1790s to 1850s, in which imperialist and feminist discourses ran parallel (Lake, Holmes et al. 4). The work of precursors like Hemans was frequently based on specific actual events, just as Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother' was a response to the massacre of Aboriginals at Myall Creek. Hemans wrote the 'Indian Woman's Death Song' based on '[t]he tale…related in Long's "Expedition to the Source of St.Peter's River"' (Ferguson, Salter et al 828). Tim Fulford describes Hemans' 'The American Forest Girl' as a poem rich with a 'sentimental and proper Romanticism in which pity overcomes cultural difference and women save men from their masculine violence by appealing to their feminine better natures' (*Mission* 201), and certainly this kind of reading applies just as well to Dunlop's the 'The Aboriginal Mother.'

Although she is not widely known today, 'Felicia Dorothea Browne (later Hemans) was the best–selling poet of the nineteenth century' (Armstrong, Bristow et al 167). Indeed, the first line of 'The Aboriginal Mother,' which reads 'Oh! hush thee-hush my baby,' (Dunlop) clearly recalls, along with Sir Walter Scott's 'Lullaby of an Infant Chief'(1815), the line in Hemans's 'The Bride of the Greek Isle,' 'Oh! hush the song, and let her tears/ flow to the dream of her early years'

(Hemans 170). Dunlop included an epigraph, 'O'er that foresaken sepulchre banner and plumes might wave,' from Hemans's 'The Siege of Valencia,' in her poem 'To the memory of E.B. Kennedy,' published in the *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*, Wednesday 8 August 1849, page 4. Hemans was also published in the Australian newspapers, such as *The Sydney Gazette* and *New South Wales Advertiser* during the 1830s and 40s, although it is generally her popularity in America which is cited in relation to her international popularity. It is known that from 1826 Hemans was published in Boston, and this certainly indicates her international popularity at the time.

Despite representations of Australia at this time as isolated, some of Dunlop's Australian newspaper poetry was also published in London and Dublin. 'The Aboriginal Father' as well as other verses of Dunlop's were included in Isaac Nathan's *Southern Euphrosyne* (1849), which was published in London and Sydney, and 'The Irish Mother' was published in Sir Charles Gavan Duffy's popular *The Ballad Poetry of Ireland* (1845) anonymously under the title 'The Emigrant Mother.' A note in *Irish Minstrelsy Being a Selection of Irish Songs, Lyrics and Balads* (1887) explains that 'Sir C. Gavan Duffy found this touching little ballad in an Australian newspaper, and was charmed with its fresh feeling and grace, but was not able to discover the writer's name' (Sparling 270). It is likely that Dunlop was unaware of this inclusion in *The Ballad Poetry of Ireland*. It should be remembered that in its original publication, 'The Aboriginal Mother' was the fourth poem in the series 'Songs of an Exile' which Dunlop published in *The Australian* from October of 1838.

These poems are thematically interrelated and personal accounts, exploring among other topics, emigration, motherhood, and nationalism. 'The Irish Mother' was the poem which followed 'The Aboriginal Mother,' and Dunlop notes in the manuscript for *The Vase* that it is for a foster child. In 'The Irish Mother,' Dunlop writes in Gaelic, in parts, and a footnote explains:

> The last line is the Irish cry of a broken heart, of which there can be no adequate translation. The name Varia, is MARY. The other Irish words are expressions of fondness for which the English tongue offers no sounds half so tender. (*Australian* 4)

Dunlop clearly intended this poem to be read alongside 'The Aboriginal Mother,' suggesting her personal experience as a factor weighing heavily in her ability to empathise.

Dunlop had travelled widely, having been to London, Scotland, and India before emigrating to Australia. Certainly no stranger to colonialism, her father Solomon Hamilton was a 'sometime Judge of the Supreme Court in India' (Gunson 337), where Dunlop visited in 1820, arriving upon his death (De Salis 19). In a poem published in the *Dublin Penny Journal* in 1835, 'Morning on Rostrevor Mountains,' Dunlop describes 'other waters' in romantic tones, where 'scenes more fair than earth-/ The sea- the sea and heav'n!/ Yes! And where the Gunga's mighty streams /their sacred waters spread/I've seen beneath thy worshipped beams/ Ten thousands bow the head' (Dunlop *Dublin* 42). This poem juxtaposes landscapes of Ireland, India and South Africa. Dunlop reiterates the line 'In solitude I stand' in the three locations, Rostrevor Mountains in Ireland, 'beside cloch-mhor,' India and South Africa, giving a sense of the speaker as a traveler feeling culturally isolated, 'A stranger on my natal shore/ And this, my father-land' (42).

As Armstrong notes, the heightened interest in cultural otherness was particularly prominent in much of the women's poetry in this period. Armstrong points out that

> as a child Letitia Landon invented a fantasy country located in Africa…very much as the Brontës were to do when they constructed Gondal and Angria…This need to move beyond cultural boundaries manifests itself in the work of the earlier poets as a form of historical and cultural syncretism which both juxtaposes different cultures and reshapes relationships between them…Felicia Hemans brings together British, French, Indian, German, American and Greek narratives from different historical periods in her *Records of Woman* (1828). (324)

Dunlop likewise over the course of her poetic output references place repeatedly, through iconography specific to Ireland, India, Africa and Australia.

Another interesting aspect to the early feminist discourse of anti slavery, as Midgley suggests, was the representation of the oppression of British women, particularly through the institution of marriage, as equal to slavery, such as that in the West Indian colonies. Midgley further points out that '[t]he most important of the Imperially focused campaigns were for the abolition of colonial slavery and for the eradication of *sati,* or widow burning, in India' (Lake, Holmes et al 8). It is interesting then that there are also suggestions of *sati* (sometimes anglicized to suttee) in Dunlop's 'Morning on Rostrevor Mountain,' as this further suggests that she was writing with significant awareness of international political and early feminist discourses. Dunlop describes the location of the temple of Jagannath, or Juggernaut, in Puri, Orissa, a Hindu temple where *sati* took place, as 'Where the dark domes of Juggernaut's/ Profane pagoda's stand' (42).

Although she never directly mentions *sati* or widows in the poem, Dunlop's descriptions of the 'the tainted air' of 'Calcutta's graveyard gloom,' evoke the negative representations of *sati* in women's rights circles. Dunlop's experience in India in 1820 was overshadowed by the death of her father, and this would, from a biographical position, explain the use of phrases such as 'graveyard gloom' (42). Nonetheless, Dunlop's poem was produced amid many other women's poems which were addressing *sati,* or Indian culture more generally, such as Letitia Landon's 'Hurdwar, a place of Hindoo Pilgrimage' (1832), and Maria Jane Jewsbury's 'Song of the Hindoo Women, While Accompanying a Widow to the funeral pile of Her Husband' (Armstrong, Bristow et al 218).

So Dunlop's 'Morning on Rostrevor Mountain' perhaps reflects the interest of early western feminists in India. Dale Spender also notes that Dunlop's journey to India in 1820 resulted in her discovery of her 'two Indian half-sisters whom her brothers refused to acknowledge. Helen Heney suggests it could have been this experience which set Eliza Dunlop thinking about "racism" and the suffering and injustice that it generated' (Spender 61). Indeed, with Indian half-sisters, the issue of *sati* would have been closer to Dunlop than many other women poets writing on the topic. Máire Ní Flahthúin points out that Landon's 'versions of India were written at second hand, drawing on contemporary travel writing and on the engravings published in books such as *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*, in which many of her poems on "Indian" topics appeared' (1). The speaker in Dunlop's 'Morning on Rostrevor Mountain' is, by contrast, quick to assert genuine experience in India, as in the line 'I've seen…/ ten thousands bow the head.'

The poem addresses the sun's 'sick'ning rays' which echo 'the Brahmin's funeral pile / in that far hemisphere, / Sunrise, alas! I've met thy smile, / Mocking the burning bier!' (42).

Dunlop's 'Morning on Rostrevor Mountain' was later altered to contain an additional Australian stanza, 'where the wild Emu leads her brood,' and was republished in *The Atlas* in 1845, ten years after its initial publication in Ireland:

> Where the wild Emu leads her brood
> Across the trackless plains
> And lord of nature's solitude-
> The stately cedar, reigns;
> Even there, through exile's cheerless hours,
> Lighted by Austral skies,
> I've lingered amid orange flowers,
> To catch thy scented sighs. (*Atlas* 257)

This new verse fits in fairly seamlessly because the poem was already shifting through geographical boundaries and juxtaposing different cultures.

Furthermore, Dunlop was already representing specific places which were under British colonial expansion, including her own 'fatherland' of Ireland. In this case, by declaring herself as Irish in the repeated line, 'I stand beside Cloch-mhor' (42), Dunlop distances herself from the English coloniser. This line reflects Irish nationalist feelings of 'being neither British nor Irish,' as Stephen Behrendt notes, stemming from colonisation and increasing hardship for the Irish following the Act of Union (246). As much as it is possible to contextualise Dunlop in the British Women's tradition, about which there is currently much more scholarship, her poetry is best understood in the transnational contexts of Irish Romantic Women's poetry, British Romantic poetry, and colonial Romanticism.

While Kane argues in *Australian Poetry Romanticism and Negativity* that there was no Romantic movement in Australian poetry, clearly Dunlop was writing Romantic poetry and applying the tropes of Romantic women's poetry from Britain, particularly that of Hemans and Landon, to an Australian context. Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother' is valuable as one of the early examples of writing against racist and violent attitudes towards Aboriginal people. 'The Aboriginal Mother' was critiqued in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, as failing to reflect the real character of the natives, who were subjected to the predominantly racist views of the day. The editors wrote, in response to Dunlop's rebuttal of their criticism, that '[w]e complained of her having, by means of poetical talent…given an entirely false idea of the native character; and that opinion we see no cause to alter' (Dunlop, *Letter* 2). The right to equality for both the Australian Aboriginal people and women is suggested by Dunlop's poem at a period in history where the notion of equality was predominantly understood to refer to white men and their wealth. What we might dismiss as colonialist cultural appropriation, may be suggestive rather of an impulse to appropriate these cultural accounts in a highly personal manner. This personal, artistic response should also be recognised as an act of opening up a dialogue in Aboriginal cultural awareness, as O'Leary suggests. Dunlop's colonial poetry reflects a transnational early feminist discourse, and a transposition of Romantic women's poetry to a specifically Australian context.

NOTE

[1] See John O'Leary's ' "Unlocking the fountains of the heart" – settler verse and the politics of sympathy' for a discussion of Dunlop's poetry, the sentimental tradition and Abolitionist American settler poetry.

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