Stretching a "Slender Purse" in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Ontario: Mary Gordon Copleston's Narrative

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In 1861 Mary Gordon Copleston published Canada: Why We Live in it, and Why We Like it *as a gentlewoman's guide for new emigrants.Unravelling Copleston's life-history and the narrative behind her book illustrates how the British middle class could make effective use of an imperial framework to maintain a standard of living. While Mary Copleston presented herself as a cultivated and adventurous Englishwoman, the story was more complex, and Copleston was both determined and ambitious in her effort to use the resources of an empire to furnish the life she sought.*

En 1861, Mary Gordon Copleston publiait Canada: Why We Live in it, and Why We Like it*, ouvrage qui constituait le guide d'une femme distinguée à l'intention des nouveaux émigrants. La reconstitution de la vie de l'auteure et du discours derrière son livre montre comment la classe moyenne britannique parvenait à se servir efficacement d'un cadre impérial pour maintenir son niveau de vie. Mary Copleston se présentait certes comme une Anglaise cultivée et aventureuse, mais l'histoire était plus complexe, et Copleston était déterminée, et son souci d'utiliser les ressources d'un empire pour meubler la vie qu'elle tentait d'avoir témoignait de son ambition.*

IN 1861 MARY Gordon Copleston published *Canada: Why We Live in it, and Why We Like it*.[1] While promoted in England as a gentlewoman's guide for new emigrants, it was also a very personal memoir of Copleston's then four years' residence in Canada West.[2] She intended her book to resemble closely Susanna

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1 Mrs. Edward Copleston, *Canada: Why We Live in it, and Why We Like it* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861). The expression "gentlewoman" needs definition. Barbara Williams, writing about Anne Langton, used as her title *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada: The Journals, Letters and Art of Anne Langton*. The usage is pertinent as Langton was an educated woman from the middle ranks of British society who was both sensitive and of good character. Such characteristics are implied by the title "gentlewoman." See Barbara Williams, ed., *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada: The Journals, Letters, and Art of Anne Langton* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

2 Copleston states that her "picture of North America was principally drawn from that charmingly written book *The Backwoods of Canada*" (*Canada*, p. 5). Canada West was the former colony of Upper Canada

Moodie's and Catharine Parr Traill's pioneering works on cultivating the Canadian wilderness, but from a later and more sanguine perspective. In addition to her impressions of colonial life, she also included factual information about running a rented farm along the banks of the St. Lawrence River in the Brockville area. The narrative behind her little book shows how she, and presumably other British middle-class people, could make effective use of an imperial framework to maintain position and a modest level of affluence. Mary Copleston's life-history makes absorbing reading.

While Copleston's published work was a moderate success at the time, modern historians and literary scholars continue to find it compelling. The volume featured significantly in Michael Redhill's novel *Consolation*, long-listed for the Man Booker Prize and winner of the City of Toronto Book Award in 2007. In spite of the renewed interest in *Canada: Why We Live in it, and Why We Like it*, almost nothing was known about the author. Even her first name was lost to most scholars, as she chose to write under the name of "Mrs. Edward Copleston." Family documents, now available electronically, reveal a tangled story. Mary Gordon Copleston was born in India and spent likely 20 years in Canada before returning to Britain. The legacy of colonialism within a consolidating British Empire and her peripatetic life-history heavily influenced her writing.

Copleston has attracted a following of interest in her work.[3] Historians such as David Gagan, Alison Norman, Julia Roberts, and Donna E. Williams have mined her account, particularly for documenting domestic life in mid-nineteenth-century Canada West. Some literary scholars such as Michelle Gadpaille have found in Copleston's writing a contrasting voice to that of Susanna Moodie, citing how both explored the gothic nature of the Canadian landscape and the dislocation of emigration.[4] Patricia Jasen, in her volume on Ontario tourism in the nineteenth century, cites Copleston's reactions to the picturesque scenery on the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario.[5] Novelist Michael Redhill used her text to underpin his

after being united with Canada East to form the Province of Canada. It became the Province of Ontario after Confederation in 1867.

3 David Gagan, "'The Prose of Life': Literary Reflections of the Family, Individual Experience and Social Structure in Nineteenth-Century Canada," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 9, no. 3 (Spring 1976), pp. 367-381, and "Geographical and Social Mobility in Nineteenth-century Ontario: A Microstudy," *Canadian Review of Sociology*, vol. 13, no. 2 (May 1976), pp. 152-164; Anne Innis Dagg, *The Feminine Gaze: A Canadian Compendium of Non-Fiction Women Authors and Their Books, 1836-1945* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001); Donna E. Williams, *Hardscrabble: The High Cost of Free Land* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2013); Julia Roberts, "Race and Tavern Space in Upper Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 83, no. 1 (March 2002), pp.1-28; Alison Norman, "'Fit for the Table of the Most Fastidious Epicure': Culinary Colonialism in the Upper Canadian Contact Zone" in Franca Iacovetta, Marlene Epp, and Valerie Korinek, eds., *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 38-69; Suzanne James, "Gathering up the Threads: Generic and Discursive Patterns in Catharine Parr Traill's *Backwoods of Canada*" (PhD dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 2003); Melissa Walker, "On Their Own: The Single Woman, Feminism, and Self-Help in British Women's Print Culture (1850-1900)" (PhD dissertation, University of Guelph, 2012); Michelle Gadpaille, "Emigration Gothic: A Scotswoman's Contribution to the New World," *Elope*, vol. 3, no. 1/2 (2007), pp. 169-182; Michael Redhill, *Consolation* (Toronto: Random House, 2007).

4 Gadpaille, "Emigration Gothic," pp. 176-179.

5 Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 29, 60, 67.

description of Toronto in the 1850s**.** While employing Copleston’s prose to provide authenticity for his nineteenth- century portrait of Toronto life, his present-day protagonist responds to the question of how he liked Mary Copleston’s book: “I got out of it that not much has changed.”[6] Redhill also drew on Copleston’s depiction of Toronto as a boom town undergoing rapid industrialization and urbanization with inflated prices and adulterated milk.[7] Finally, in a nostalgic article about Toronto’s early history, *The Globe and Mail* reported on December 25, 1951, that Copleston was the first to describe Toronto as the “Queen City.”

Copleston’s writing was vivid and deeply personal, with a self-conscious but pronounced charm.[8] The book’s preface cited its origin as a series of letters to the Copleston family, and much of the text provided droll anecdotes about the rusticated population then resident in Canada West. To heighten the irony of the metropolitan confronting the frontier, Copleston represented herself as a nineteenth-century British sophisticate encountering a series of country rubes, or the refined meeting the crude. In contrast to Susanna Moodie’s deep ambivalence about her Canadian experiences, Copleston’s book was deliberately positive, as evident in her title. While never diminishing the complexities of dealing with a “new and very strange land,” Copleston chose to laugh at many of the challenges confronting her.[9] At one point her text recorded that “at last I could do nothing but laugh. I could not help it. I laughed immoderately….”[10] While conflicted in her notions of class superiority, Copleston was open to the personal changes required by her emigration. There was, however, a back story. Her slight volume offered more than a description of the Copleston family experiences in the united province of Canada and reflected a complex personal history. Unravelling the skeins of her story provides some insight into how the middle class might manipulate a colonial world ruled by a strengthing Empire to generate a comfortable living.

India

In many ways Copleston’s story and her simple account of her early years in Canada were interwoven with the more complex interplay of empire and race. Mary Copleston had some deep secrets: she was of Anglo-Indian descent (people in India did not formally use the term “mixed race” until the 1911 Indian census).[11] She was born on March 11, 1825, in Nagpur, India, probably out-of-wedlock to Major William Gordon of the East India Company and “a native woman,” only called “Mary Anne” in Gordon’s will.[12] The East India Company had a history of

6 Redhill, *Consolation*, p. 175.

7 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 73.

8 Copleston received a few laudatory references to her work in the press of her time. The *Examiner* (London) described the book as “unpretending, ladylike” (January 25, 1862). Her publisher also advertised the book reasonably widely. See *The Athenaeum* (London), no. 1780 (1861), p. 777.

9 Copleton, *Canada*, p.13.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 38.

11 By the time of the 1911 Indian census, the term Anglo-Indian was widely used to denote mixed race—usually with the British parent or ancestry being on the paternal side. See Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 1-3.

12 National Archives, Public Record Office (United Kingdom), Perogative Court of Cantbury, Catalogue

offering opportunity for promotion and reward to sons of genteel but impoverished Scottish families; one of three officers in the company's private armies was drawn from the Scottish gentry, and the commissions were free.[13] Service in India proved lucrative for the three sons of the Gordon family: William, James, and Alexander. From 1807 to 1826 the Gordons and a handful of others were employed under the supervision of their close friend, the Company's Resident Richard Jenkins, who ran the Indian princely state of Nagpur.[14] This small group administered the Nagpur region of up to 2.5 million residents while the rajah, or head of state, was under age.[15] Their activities figured significantly in the records of the period: Alexander was notable in his collection of local information on revenue, trade, and native justice;[16] James heroically spiked "two large brass cannon" belonging to the enemy at the battle of Sitabaldi on November 26, 1817,[17] as well as reforming the rajah's mint;[18] in 1818 William became superintendent of Nagpur, rending justice and collecting revenue. William seemed particularly skilful at gathering population and caste data and proved himself by his capture of the rebel Chimna Potail, also in 1818.[19] The Gordons' tenure in Nagpur offered them scope for perks and allowances significantly beyond their pay as officers in the East India Company's native infantry. They were likely knowledgeable about Indian culture, as one or more of the brothers spoke various local languages, and Alexander translated from Persian the well-known book Khafi Khan's *History of the House of Timur*.[20] However, only William Gordon, Mary's father, become involved with a "native woman" (the term used in Gordon's will) and had two children, Thomas and Mary.

Whatever the Gordons accumulated in terms of personal fortune, they gained more from forging bonds of friendship and patronage. Their close friend and former superior Richard Jenkins named one of his sons Gordon and made William the child's godfather.[21] Jenkins also sponsored William's mixed-race son Thomas Wilkinson Gordon—named for yet another fellow officer—for a cadetship in the East India Company. While the Company's ban on the employment of those of mixed race was rescinded in 1833, by means of the Charter Act of that date, strong

reference: Prob 11/1948 and image reference: 647, "Will of Major William Gordon of Brixton." I must thank Guylaine Petrin for her invaluable assistance in finding this key document and encouraging the detailed family research that allowed me to reconstruct Mary Copleston's history.

13 G. J. Bryant, "Scots in India in the Eighteenth Century," *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 64, no. 1 (April 1985), pp. 23, 29.

14 During this period this city was commonly spelt Nagpore.

15 Ram Mohan Sinha, *Bhonslas of Nagpur: The Last Phase, 1818-1854* (Delhi: S. Chand, 1967), p. 42.

16 Richard Jenkins, *Report on the Territories of the Rajah of Nagpore* (Calcutta: G. H. Huttmann, 1827), Foreword, p. 2.

17 James Gordon Elliott, *A Roll of Honour: The Story of the Indian Army, 1939-1945* (London: Cassell, 1965), p. 6.

18 Sinha, *Bhonslas of Nagpur*, pp. 72, 134, 139.

19 Jenkins, *Report on the Territories of the Rajah of Nagpore*, p. 13; Constance Oliver Skelton and John Malcolm Bulloch, *Gordons under Arms: A Biographical Muster Roll…* (Aberdeen: New Spalding Club, 1912), pp. 342-343.

20 Henry Miers Elliot, *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period,* vol. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1871), p. 210.

21 "Will of Major William Gordon of Brixton."

prejudice against Anglo-Indians persisted.[22] Jenkins was well-situated to be useful to William Gordon as he became chairman of the East India Company in 1839, just after he had sponsored young Thomas Wilkinson Gordon for a commission.[23]

The Gordons’ tenure in India might be regarded in different ways. Nineteenth-century imperialists reading the 1854 obituaries of the then knighted Richard Jenkins would have considered the Jenkins’ residence in Nagpur a highly successful experiment that imposed British standards on a lawless and impoverished population.[24] On the other hand, the Jenkins and the Gordons were eager empire-builders and willing agents in the subjugation of colonial peoples, participating in quelling a native revolt with significant loss of life.The East India Company’s system of indirect rule in the princely states offered great scope for private gain, and an outraged writer to the *Oriental Herald and Colonial Review* denounced all three brothers for syphoning off state funds as plural allowances and other perks.[25]

A Child of the Raj

Mary Copleston’s early history in India illustrates the complexities and contradictions of colonialism; her background instilled a sense of “permanent impermanence.” Scholar Elizabeth Buettner, in her book *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India,* described this personality trait as common for many children of the Raj.[26] At some point Copleston was separated from her mother for education in England, possibly Brighton.[27] If Mary was to have a place in English middle-class society, William Gordon had few alternatives but to remove his daughter from her childhood world. His decision was replicated many times over by fellow officers as a means of overcoming the stigma of miscegenation and illegitimacy. British education offered entry into society, obscuring colour, refining accent, and removing any cultural legacies from a native mother. Mary’s loneliness must have been extreme, possibly mitigated by her relationship with the widow of her uncle James, Mary Louisa Stannus, then-influential wife of the governor of the East India Company’s college at Addiscombe. The families were close enough that Lady Stannus and her daughter figured in William Gordon’s will. However, Mary’s transference from an Indian world to Britain was the beginning of a peripatetic future.

22 Coralie Younger, *Anglo-Indians: Neglected Children of the Raj* (New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corp., 1987), p. 13.

23 Skelton and Bulloch, *Gordons under Arms,* p. 320.

24 *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Review*, vol. 195 (January-June 1854), pp. 197-198.

25 *Oriental Herald and Colonial Review,* August 6, 1825, pp. 309, 474. The letters are variously signed “the Detector” or just “Q.”

26 Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1.

27 A Mary Gordon can be found in the 1841 England Census [online database through Ancestry.com], s.v. “Mary Gordon,” Brighthelmstone, Sussex, UK (accessed July 20, 2013). Elizabeth Buettner, writing about British families returning from India to England in a later time period, cites that many chose Brighton for children’s education or retirement (*Empire Families,* pp. 19, 208, 227). Copleston also mentioned Brighton on three occasions in *Canada: Why We Live in it, and Why We Like it*, pp. 45, 49, and 51.

While India filled the Gordon family coffers, Mary had experienced repeated emotional blows by the end of her childhood. In April 1841 she lost her father, and in the same year her brother was killed in action at Kabul early in the first Afghan war. Thomas did not die in complete obscurity; his loss was noted in Lady Sale's national best-seller of her wartime experiences.[28] In 1845, her inheritance secured by her father's will and resourceful trustees, Mary Gordon married a younger son of the Copleston family of Offwell, Devon, thereby allying herself with a respectable, affluent, and well-connected family. Her husband's uncle was a notable public intellectual and the Bishop of Llandaff.[29] Mary's financial resources may have overcome hesitations about her background, and it is possible that she concealed her mixed race origins. In contrast to almost all the males in his family, Mary's husband, Edward Arthur Copleston, chose not to enter the Church, but practised law. Both the Gordon and Copleston families were skilled at maintaining patronage networks, supplying advantage or information, and exploiting the opportunities inherent in empire.

Canada

Copleston's record of her experiences in 1850s British North America reveals a view of Canada's colonial environment through the eyes of an educated middle-class female. Advances in industrial paper-making encouraged the book trade, and writing emigrant guides was a flourishing business in the mid-nineteenth century.[30] In an article on Upper Canadian travel and immigration texts, John Thurston finds that upward of 200 such handbooks or testimonies were published in the first half of the nineteenth century.[31] Such guide books reinforced the colonial experience, interpreting the New World as a space to be developed and controlled. Mary Copleston herself referred to such "descriptions of Canada" in the first line of her text "as plentiful as blackberries in autumn."[32] In writing her modest tract, Copleton was in essence selling a formula for success, a practical manual for the British middle class considering emigration. Many of her potential readers seemed eager to stretch their existing resources, either from small incomes or inheritances, and to maintain a hard-won, and often recent, social status. Numerous second sons, superannuated army officers, and children of failed businessmen had the difficult choice of emigration or a precipitous slide into genteel poverty. As Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidson observed in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, in the first half of the nineteenth century the English middle ranks had many fears: new entrepreneurs and merchants had been rocked by an unstable market system, natural disasters,

28 Lady Sale, *A Journal of the Disasters in Afghanistan, 1841-2* (London: John Murray, 1843), p. 12; Shane Malhotra, "'If She Escapes She Will Publish Everything': Lady Sale and the Media Frenzy of the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–1842)," *Book History*, vol. 17 (2014), pp. 272-297.

29 W. H. Wilken, "Copleston of Offwell," *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and the Arts*, vol. LXIII (1931), pp. 241-254.

30 Robert D. Grant, *Representations of British Emigration, Colonisation and Settlement: Imagining Empire, 1800-1860* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. xiii.

31 John Thurston, "'The Dust of Toryism': Monarchism and Republicanism in Upper Canadian Travel and Immigration Texts," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4 (Winter 1995/1996) p. 86, note 4.

32 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 1.

failing banks, and a restive working class.[33] While not as ambitious in her goals as the Strickland sisters (Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill), who embraced broad pioneering themes for the British reading public, Mary Gordon Copleston set her narrative in a slightly later period, after much of the back-breaking work of early settlement in the more populous areas of the colony had occurred.[34] She said the crux of her book was to prove that “Canada offers a home where all of conveniences of life may be enjoyed at far less cost than they can be obtained in Old England,”[35] explaining how her family suffered neither bush life, examined so vividly by the Stricklands, nor the expenses of city life.[36] She and her husband found reasonable success by renting a developed farm, adjacent to the railway and commercial markets with access to a post office and a church.[37]

In creating this model for emulation, Copleston’s central premise appeared to contradict the main theme of Susanna Moodie’s popular work *Roughing it in the Bush* (1853). Moodie explicitly warned her middle-class British readers and potential emigrants of the “vicissitudes of emigration to Canada.”[38] The Coplestons were precisely the type of emigrants that Moodie had branded as “a class perfectly unfitted” for life on the periphery.[39] Françoise Le Jeune, in her article “Representations of Canada’s Social Prospects to British Middle-class Emigrants in Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852),” labels Copleston’s text as an open challenge to Moodie.[40] While Copleston’s title, lauding the couple’s satisfaction in Canada West, does imply a happy story in contrast to Moodie’s unhappy one, Le Jeune failed to note that Copleston’s position was that the British middle class could be prosperous in Canada if they chose developed farms and avoided the bush. Moodie herself would likely have agreed to this fine distinction and even softened her tone in the 1871 Canadian edition of her book, where she admits she had focussed on the hardship of life in the forest wilderness, rather than the experience of those British settlers who chose to live in or near established settlements.

Copleston’s text is put in some perspective by examining the physical evidence of her sojourn in Canada. The present structure of Burnside House in Brockville and the early photographs of Sidney Cottage in Belleville—both rented by the Coplestons—provide evidence that the Coplestons had the money

33 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 18-21.

34 Elizabeth Hopkins, “A Prison-House for Prosperity: The Immigrant Experience of the Nineteenth-Century Upper Class British Women” in Jean Burnet, ed., *Looking into My Sister’s Eyes* (Toronto: Multi-Cultural History Society of Ontario, 1986), pp. 7-19. Strickland was the maiden name of both Moodie and Traill.

35 Copleston, *Canada*, p.1.

36 By the time that Mary Copleston’s book was published, her family was living in close proximity to Susanna Moodie in Belleville, where Susanna’s husband, Dunbar Moodie, was the sheriff before resigning in 1863. See Gerald Boyce, *Belleville: A Popular History* (Toronto: Natural Heritage, 2009), p. 82.

37 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 96.

38 Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush; or, Life in Canada*, ed. Carl Ballstadt (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1988), p. xxvi.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

40 Françoise LeJeune, “Representations of Canada’s Social Prospects to the British Middle-class Emigrants in Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852),” *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 18, no.1 (2005), p. 148.

and taste to rent attractive accommodation in impressive settings (see Figure 1).[41] Sidney Cottage was large enough that, according to its owner and the Coplestons' landlord William Hutton, it could accommodate 50 to 60 guests comfortably in its parlour (see Figures 2 and 3).[42]

Figure 1: Burnside House, near Brockville, Ontario.
Source: The Journal of Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, vol. VI, nº. 8 (August, 1929), p. 273 (accessed September 20, 2016).

Figure 2: Ponton Residence, Belleville, Ontario. The Pontons were descendants of William Hutton, who rented the Coplestons his house and farm.
Source: Photo by Colborne Powell Meredith, August 1925, C.P. Powell Collection, Library and Archives Canada, PA-026864.

41 Copleston, in the text of *Canada: Why We Live in it, and why We Like it*, described settling in a house on the St. Lawrence River from the autumn of 1857 to about 1860. The Coplestons leased in total 100 acres from the owner. A Brockville housed named "Burnside" has the location and the necessary history, both as a family home and a rental property, to permit this identification. More recently the house was used as a bed and breakfast guest house. See "Bed and Breakfasts for Sale," http://www.bbcanada.com/bb_forsale/burnsidehouse (accessed May 12, 2014); for Sidney Cottage, see blog "Nobody Waved Goodbye," blog *Ancestral Roofs,* http://ancestralroofs.blogspot.com/2011/12/nobody-waved-goodbye.html (accessed May 12, 2014).

42 Gerald E. Boyce, *Hutton of Hastings: The Life and Letters of William Hutton, 1801-1861* (Belleville: Hastings County Council, 1972), p. 214.

Figure 3: Ponton Residence, Belleville, Ontario.
Source: Photo by Colborne Powell Meredith, August 1925, C.P. Powell Collection, Library and Archives Canada, PA-026865.

Making a Living

During their early years in Canada, the Coplestons decided to capitalize on their combined literary skills and educations by producing handy guide-books as a money-making enterprise. Mary appeared to enjoy writing her modest literary work, and slightly before its publication Edward Arthur Copleston produced under his name several gazetteers. It is unclear whether Edward Copleston was working on his own or in collaboration with his wife. Certainly the gazetteers stopped after Edward's death. In general the Copleston volumes were reflective of Victorian interest in the geographic characters of a particular country, region, or continent. The works emphasized social statistics and physical features such as mountains, waterways, and roads. For example, one listed current residents, post offices, and hotels. In addition to *Canada: Why We Live in it, and Why We Like it,* other Canadian books include *Key to Canada*: *Every Place in Canada and how to get to it; a key to the Post Offices, Railway and Steamboat station* **...**.[43] and *Leeds, Grenville, Lanark, & Renfrew county directory, with the names of the principal inhabitants of upwards of seventy towns and villages, including the recent settlements on the crown lands, and a variety of useful local information, for the year 1859 ; together with a farmer's almanack and diary with hints a receipts adapted to the exigencies of the Canadian settler*.[44] The only British volume, completed in 1878 after apparently the couple had returned to England, was *Where's Where? ... Part I ... A concise gazetteer of the County of Somerset ... Part*

43 W. R. Brown and E. A. Copleston, *Key to Canada*: *Every Place in Canada and how to get to it; a key to the Post Offices, Railway and Steamboat stations,...* (Toronto: Brown,1857).

44 Edward Arthur Copleston, *Leeds, Grenville, Lanark, & Renfrew county directory, with the names of the principal inhabitants of upwards of seventy towns...* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1859).

II ... Statistical, educational, parliamentary, and practical information, including list of House of Lords and House of Commons.[45] This study was conceivably intended as one of a series, as Edward Copleston advertised for subscribers to a gazetteer for the whole of England and Wales. His relatively early death in 1879 made further works impossible, or effectively discouraged Mary from similar compilations on her own.

Edward Copleston's literary efforts were not unique, and many Victorians exhibited an appetite for compiling information on the physical universe. William Hutton, the Coplestons' landlord at Sidney Cottage, had a comparable interest in statistical material—similar to that assembled by Edward—on weather, geography, and local prices. Such enthusiasms may have been intended to impress colonial officials with a view to future employment in an expanding civil service. This approach was effective for William Hutton, who secured a government position and pioneered early efforts in sociological analysis in the united province of Canada. While Edward Copleston was never publicly employed, it does not mean that he had not considered it when compiling his volumes of facts and figures.[46]

As the gazetteers that related to Canada may have been a joint effort, so the first book, under Mary's name, may also have contained elements written by Edward. It is unclear where Mary's writing began and Edward's ended. It is likely that the first part of *Canada: Why We Live in it* was based on letters Mary wrote to English relatives. This portion was designed to be light-hearted, humorous, and anecdotal, while the cost-benefit analysis of farm incomes in the last third of the book suggests a different voice and likely Edward's hand. Edward compounded this confusion by claiming authorship of *Canada: Why We Live in it* in the frontispiece of his gazetteer on Somerset after his return to Britain. Owing to the popularity of the Stricklands' books, common wisdom held that books about the colonial experience from the gentlewoman's point of view sold well, and for this reason the couple might have used Mary's name for their first literary attempt.[47] She made a clear reference to Catharine Parr Traill's work early in her own book, creating the impression that she was exploring the themes of the earlier book from a fresh vantage point.

The casual fluidity of authorship between Mary and Edward was also prefigured by production of Susanna Moodie's volume *Roughing it in the Bush*. This work was not written exclusively by Susanna, as some editions contained poems and sketches by her husband, Dunbar Moodie, and a poem and partial chapter by her brother, Samuel Strickland.[48] The book's patchwork form was largely composed of numerous sketches from several hands, composed over a

45 Edward Arthur Copleston, *Where's Where? ... Part I ... A concise gazetteer of the County of Somerset ... Part II ... Statistical, educational, parliamentary, and practical information, including list of House of Lords and House of Commons* (London: Griffith & Farran, 1878).

46 Boyce, *Hutton of Hastings*; Bruce Curtis, "The Canada 'Blue Books' and the Administrative Capacity of the Canadian State, 1822-67," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 74, no. 4 (1993), pp. 533-565.

47 Robert MacDougall, *The Emigrant's Guide to North America*, ed. Elizabeth Thompson (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 1998), p. vii. The Stricklands' books sold well both in Britain and the United States.

48 John Thurston, *The Work of Words: The Writings of Susanna Strickland Moodie* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp. 134, 138-139, 164.

range of years. The ultimate compilation of material finally included in *Roughing it in the Bush* depended both on the receipt of the requisite chapters in London and the editor’s judgment.[49] The book was revised for various editions, significantly in the final 1871 edition, intended for a Canadian public, to whom Susanna addressed much of her perceived criticism of Canadian life.[50]

Roughing it in the Bush’s history conveys the amorphous process that book publishing could take in the nineteenth century. Writing and reporting in this period had more diverse motivations than may be immediately apparent. The editors of a volume of women’s letters—written in Canada from 1700 to 1920 to readers in Britain—state that “journal letters” were intended both to record personal experience and to be circulated among a variety of audiences composed of friends and family.[51] Catharine Parr Traill’s guidebook, *The Backwoods of Canada*, was based on actual letters the author wrote to her mother, sister, and friends. Because the letters were intended to be shared, each of her correspondents was addressed as “dear friend,” including her mother.[52] There was a hunger for such reports from the colonies: Mary Copleston’s book likely had similar beginnings.

Spinning the Imperial Globe

In their consideration of a future home, the Coplestons seem to have viewed potential destinations as interchangeable. From their initial vantage point in London—the dominant metropolis of the British Empire—they likely drew on prevalent stereotypes when contemplating emigration. Available documents would suggest that family connections and a variety of informants provided them with some understanding of the Canadian colonies. For example, the Reverend Henry Scadding, local historian and later author of *Toronto of Old*, returned to England for a holiday in 1840.[53] In his diary he noted visiting the Reverend Edward Copleston (Edward Arthur Copleston’s father) and his brother, the Bishop of Llandaff, in Honiton, Devon. He also called on the widow of John Simcoe, the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, who lived nearby. Impressions of life in the colony must have circulated within the family and neighbourhood and provided some factual knowledge about building a home in Canada West.

After consulting friends and examining “the latest works on Australia, New Zealand and even Port Natal,” the Coplestons considered their alternatives.[54] If India had provided opportunities for Mary’s family, then another corner of the Empire might redeem the Copleston family fortunes. The Coplestons were not alone in viewing an expanding empire as a means to financial and social

49 *Ibid.*, pp. 136-138.
50 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
51 Cecily Devereux and Kathleen Venema, eds., *Women Writing Home, 1700-1920: Female Correspondence across the British Empire*, vol. 5 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006), p. xxx.
52 Carter F. Hanson, *Emigration, Nation, Vocation: The Literature of English Emigration to Canada, 1825-1900* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009), p. 90.
53 Henry Scadding, *Toronto of Old; Collections and recollections illustrative of the early settlement and social life of the capital of Ontario* (Toronto: Adam, Stevenson & Co., 1873); “Further Extracts from the Rev. Dr. Scadding’s Diary 1838 to 1844,” *Transaction of Women’s Canadian Historical Society of Toronto*, n°. 8-10 (1910), p. 23.
54 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 4.

advancement, and other families had followed similar paths. As Emma Rothschild points out in her book, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History*, the large Scottish family, the Johnstones, operated a family-based global information system and used knowledge and diverse social networks to realize professional and financial ambition.[55] The Johnstones came from the impecunious professional class of lawyers and Scottish factors who required the large canvas of empire to prosper in various military and entrepreneurial roles. Their only hope of finding wealth required leaving home. Rothschild posits that the chronicling of such individual stories illustrates the complexity of empire based on a myrid of personal experiences and interconnections.

Embarrassed by some financial reversal, clearly referenced but undefined, the Coplestons agreed on emigration as the only possible solution to their difficulties. The physical situation of Canada, near by steamer and post to Britain, was a compelling reason for its selection. Making use of available steamer transportation, the Copleston family travelled in October 1856 from Liverpool to Quebec City in eleven days aboard the Montreal-owned *SS Anglo-Saxon*.[56] The length of the voyage was a paramount consideration as the Coplestons had two small children, including an infant. As they had already lost one male child and others in still-birth, the length of passage was decisive in ruling out the Antipodes as a possible home. The Coplestons also travelled with two pet dogs that figure in the fabric of their story.

Several key issues dominated the Coplestons' account of their life in Canada and signified in Mary's reactions to her new society. These concerns included where to settle once they arrived in Canada, employment for Edward, the class structure in the United Province of Canada and the Coplestons' place in it, the scope for gracious living in the colony, Mary's status as woman in a new social structure, and how to generate revenues from a developed but rented farm. Like the Strickland sisters before them, the Coplestons found local opportunities for the British gentleman limited. Law and commerce seemed to favour those with nascent connections, or the capital to build slowly a legal practice or commercial enterprise; Canada lacked the required infrastructure to employ a large professional class.[57] In contrast to many emigrant agriculturalists and mechanics, the Coplestons had to cope in a new environment without the emotional and financial support of close kin or community linkages. While both husband and wife would attempt to augment their income by writing, they believed that they had few alternatives other than farming. A moment of crisis occurred when Edward was inclined to invest in a log-house in a clearing near Orillia, but Mary was clear that she had no appetite for the Canadian bush.[58] She emphatically stated that she associated the forest with being buried alive; subsequently, the couple chose to rent developed farms rather than engage in the back-breaking efforts necessary to clear a farm from

55 Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).
56 "The Ships List," http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/Arrivals/Canada1856.shtml (accessed July 20, 2013).
57 Hanson, *Emigration, Nation, Vocation*, p. xxv.
58 Copleston, *Canada*, pp. 59-60.

dense woods.[59] Mary also documented local pitfalls in making an investment in agricultural land, highlighting the inflation in local land prices and the prevalence of dishonest or deluded speculators.[60] Examining land prices before and after the commercial crisis of 1857, she was perspicacious in her observation about the young colony's tendency to boom and then collapse.[61]

Protecting Rank, Losing Status

The colonial world offered scope for the imposter and the fantasist.[62] A new setting in a distant land can foster the creative imagination or the production of new ideas. Mary claimed a position that allowed her to receive a degree of deference. However rewarding deference—the respectful courtesy of the working class to those of a perceived higher class—might be in England, social hierarchy was more ill-defined in Canada; sharp distinctions over birth and wealth might not be an advantage. In fact, Mary effectively used confusion over social etiquette and colonial pretensions as the source of much of her literary irony. While Copleston gained a smaller benefit from her perceived social station in a colonial society, she was now further geographically from those who might have speculated about her birth and circumstances. Perhaps her book appeared under the name of Mrs. Edward Copleston, rather than Mary Gordon Copleston, because the author wanted Mary Gordon to disappear and was far enough away from her past to make it possible.

Mary was frequently exasperated and conflicted by the changes in the class structure she confronted in British North America. As a young girl in Brighton, Copleston must have absorbed an understanding of the complex British class structure, while in Canada she had to adapt to new social norms. Echoing the earlier comments of Susanna Moodie, she was regretful about the lack of courtesy shown to herself and her family, a respect she would regard as customary owing to her genteel status. She disparaged the assumed familiarity of hotel- and tavern-keepers; she opined on an observed tendency in North America to look after "No. 1";[63] she believed that civility could be beaten out of expatriate Englishmen by the extreme isolation experienced in the frontier setting; and she supposed that all hired men would gradually be overtaken by notions of independence.[64] Copleston was fully cognisant that, to experienced Canadian eyes, she and her family were conspicuous novices, vulnerable in their ignorance, inexperienced, and without friends or family.[65] On the other hand Copleston was open to the social adjustment at work in her new society, that local communities had elements of borrowed Yankee enterprise (or what Copleston called "go-a-headedness") and

59 *Ibid*., pp. 60, 96-97.
60 *Ibid*., pp. 29, 60, 100
61 *Ibid*., pp. 28-32.
62 Kirsten McKenzie, "Opportunists and Impostors in the British Imperial World: The Tale of John Dow, Convict, and Edward, Viscount Lascelles" in Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Wollacott, eds., *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 69-81.
63 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 35.
64 *Ibid*., p. 35, pp. 101-102.
65 "The ways and habits of the country can only be learnt by experience" (Copleston, *Canada*, p. 27, p. 8).

that such communities as Glengarry with "little distinction between high and low have flourished."[66]

Mary Copleston was not alone in her impressions about a changed hierarchy to be found in British North America. Other authors of the period, including the Stricklands, also addressed the mutability of social status in Canada. George Ure, the author of *The Hand-book of Toronto* (1858), attributed the ungenial temperament, or the perceived snobberies of Toronto residents, to a "fluctuating population," without the reassuring ties of kinship and intent on "acquiring wealth and a name."[67] This critique of Toronto as a petty, but pretentious community must have been an accepted common wisdom, as it is unlikely that Ure, who was a nineteenth-century booster of his adopted city, would have addressed this theme. Ure tried to explain an uncertain society where patterns of power were either unclear or changing.

Copleston continually assessed her loss in prestige versus the gains of her new life. While she appreciated sampling urban life in Toronto for several months, she was categorical that the family could not afford town living and expressed concern about a rising class of "nouveau riche" who possessed elaborate new houses.[68] This socially thrusting class with self-conscious airs of "luxury and sumptuousness more than the case at home" (Britain) accentuated her anxiety that the Canadian experiment would be financially unsuccessful, and the Copleston family would suffer a gradual but long-term diminishment of fortune.[69] Occasionally the Coplestons' claims to gentility could work to their favour, as they managed to rent Sidney Cottage in Belleville at a discount from William Hutton, who was concerned about having reliable and careful tenants and was prejudiced in favour of gentlemen.[70]

Copleston's text is replete with genteel aspirations, as well as a few pretentions. While she described the splendour of the sunrise across Lake Ontario, her writing did not romanticize the vast wilderness so idealized by earlier visitors such as Anna Jameson.[71] In her first winter in Coldwater, just outside Orilla, Copleston found the dense forest dark and frightening. She favoured the tamer arrangement of light and shadow captured in picturesque art and was more comfortable in the parlour and, somewhat reluctantly, in the kitchen and the dairy. Mary sometimes seemed to protest too much about the positive sides of her emigration, possibly minimizing her distress over cold, hardship, isolation, and loneliness, stressing instead such recreational pleasures as sleighing.

One of the few contemporary observations of the Coplestons was recorded in William Hutton's papers. In his letters he noted that the couple had improved the aesthetics of Sidney College, rented from Hutton, by building verandas and

66 Copleston, *Canada*, pp. 11, 32.

67 George P. Ure, *The Hand-book of Toronto: containing its climate, geology, natural history, educational institutions, court of law, municipal arrangements, etc.* (Toronto: Lovell and Gibson, 1858), pp. 80-81.

68 Copleston, *Canada*, pp. 68, 73.

69 *Ibid*., p. 68.

70 Boyce, *Hutton of Hastings*, pp. 213-214.

71 Anna Brownell Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2008).

picket fences and demanding that out-buildings be repaired. He reported that Mary had been initially reticent about signing a paper lease as the house was run-down and "dirty."[72] Furniture and household goods were important to her, and she was unabashed in finding significance in domestic detail. Expressing taste was a class demarcation, separating the Coplestons from less-refined colonists. In decorating a rented cottage in Toronto, Mary exulted in the low price of domestic articles. She was particularly grateful for the close proximity of the Jacques & Hay factory, where she purchased inexpensive quantities of walnut furniture produced in a factory setting.[73] While Copleston admitted that the items manufactured by mechanization had neither the substance nor the fine detail of British furniture, she was delighted that she could create an attractive domestic décor with little expenditure.[74] Apparently interested in the transformative aspect of technology, she documented in some detail Jacques & Hay's organizational capacity to mass-produce wooden articles. In counting her blessings in the Canadian context, this domestic breakthrough was important.

Refining the Feminine Ideal

Mary Copleston was particularly revealing in her observations on young Canadian women.[75] As she was setting up her Toronto cottage, she realized that neither of her two servants had any ability to cook for the family. Using "cookery books," Copleston had to develop these skills herself; she had to come to terms with the manual labour of the kitchen and the household.[76] She even expressed gratitude that the family sojourn in Toronto had allowed her to gain some ability in the kitchen without all the inherent responsibilities of also being a farm wife. Her narrative implied that such skills were liberating, favourably comparing middle-class women in Canada to those in Britain. Copleston argued that, while young Canadian women had the capacity to bake cakes, make bread, and churn butter, their crowning achievement was their inherent self-confidence. She lauded a new feminine ideal that reconciled such drawing-room arts as music, foreign languages, or painting with the practical labours of the kitchen and the farm. Copleston was more than willing to jettison the cultivated English young lady for the robust handmaiden of imperialism, who was resourceful, healthy, and competent. Copleston's depiction of the perfect Canadian female settler had a good reception from at least one reviewer. *The Spectator* described Mary's book as useful and remarked that "a sober industrious man, blessed with a good-humoured

72 Boyce, *Hutton of Hastings*, p. 214.

73 While Copleston does not cite the company by name, she makes reference to a visit of a governor-general to a Toronto furniture factory that could only have been the tour by Lord Elgin of the new Jacques & Hay building on October 13, 1849 (*Canada*, pp. 67-68; *Globe* [Toronto], October 13, 1849). See Denise Jacques, "Decent Furniture for Decent People: The Production and Consumption of Jacques & Hay Furniture in Nineteenth-Century Canada" (PhD dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2010), pp. 203-204.

74 Auction records from Exeter indicate that an earlier Copleston household possessed fine drawing and dining room furniture of mahogany and rosewood. See *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser* (Exeter, England), October 25, 1843.

75 Copleston, *Canada*, pp. 71-73.

76 *Ibid*., p. 70.

and 'handy' partner is nearly certain to succeed [in Canada]. Neither fine ladies, nor fine gentlemen, however, have any chance of doing well."[77]

Copleston was clear that she saw no contradiction between self-sufficiency and refinement. She found merit in the new Canadian woman's ability to cope with changing fortunes, a subject on which Mary was fixated.[78] Her frank disclosure of the economic motivation for the family's relocation in Canada was the pivot on which her story turned. She had used emigration to deal with a reversal of circumstance when riches "may take 'wing' or 'fly away,'" and her adoption of the new world was her stated means to triumph over adversity.[79] She laid open the possibility that the role of successful female colonist permitted a new definition of femininity. Mary's transition from naïf to knowledgeable gave her narrative a heroic framework; through struggles in a distant land, the female protagonist progressed from ignorance to insight. Copleston's chosen guide, Catharine Parr Traill, had a more leaden touch as she portrayed her sufferings in the Canadian wilderness as a form of *Pilgrim's Progress*.[80]

Copleston's embrace of the domestic arts might be juxtaposed with the similar experiences of Anne Langton. Langton was of an earlier generation, and in her letters and journals (1837-1846) she too wrestled with the difficulty of living as a gentlewoman without the consistent support of domestic servants. As Helen Smith and Lisa Sullivan observe in their article on Langton, the lady of the house in a genteel British family was largely concerned with house decoration, social life, and supervising staff. Middle-class women were considered delicate; their tasks should not involve manual labour. Working-class women were thought better suited for rough physical work. In her first residence in Upper Canada, Anne Langton realized that, short of field labourers, her family needed her physical work if they were to survive and prosper. With time, her confidence in her abilities increased, especially as she used her considerable intelligence to gain practical knowledge and solve problems.

Although a seemingly conventional woman, Mary Copleston lived in Canada in a particular time and space. This society could offer new alternatives. The oligarchic Family Compact's stranglehold on colonial life had given way to a rising class of merchants and manufacturers, breathing new oxygen into the former Regency society of hierarchy, religious conformity, and loyalty.[81] Copleston witnessed the transformation of the body politic as the united Province of Canada moved from responsible government to a new confederation, from a colony to a country. Canadian economic life was also changing as the government in Ottawa signed a new reciprocity treaty with the United States. The old blend of British loyalty was fusing with the spirit of democratic liberalism. In contrast to Susanna

77 *The Living Age* (Boston), vol. 72 (1862), p. 335. *The Living Age* indicated that it was quoting *The Spectator* (London).

78 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 71.

79 *Ibid*.

80 Suzanne James also says that *Pilgrim's Progress* was a touchstone for Catharine Parr Traill and framed her understanding of her backwoods experience ("Gathering up the Threads," pp. 66, 99).

81 The "Family Compact" referred to an exclusive clique of men who controlled economic and political power in Upper Canada (later Ontario) in the period from roughly the 1810s to the 1840s.

Moodie, who had difficulty accepting the conditions of her family’s new life in Canada, Copleston seemed intrigued by the possibilities of transformation and had a chameleon-like ability to change colouration to her new circumstances. While a life of leisure and modest cultural accomplishments often defined a middle-class woman’s status, Mary always viewed herself as instrumental in building a future, and she embraced active work on the farm or at the desk.

Did the Empire Provide?

Canada: Why We Live in it, and Why We Like it conveyed information about how adventurous British gentry might find a measure of prosperity in Canada. Historically, Edward Copleston’s family had taken advantage of the widening opportunities for Church of England clergymen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when a clerical vocation could be a well-trodden path to education and a comfortable income.[82] Two of Edward Copleston’s clerical nephews administered to colonial flocks throughout the Empire.[83] While Mary Gordon Copleston’s family history was illustrative of how educated Scots of the gentler classes gravitated to the East India Company to make their fortunes, it was likely that Edward Arthur Copleston, as younger son, was somewhat confined in his social expectations. Throughout his life he shifted from one form of commercial activity to another as opportunity beckoned. In Britain, he had taken on a variety of roles: he ran for the office of public coroner; he chose to represent several insurance companies and at least one investment company; and he practised law.[84] In Canada, he farmed, sold seeds, and wrote gazetteers. In both countries the family moved almost every two to three years.[85] Did Edward’s propensity to wander reflect an element of Mary’s early rootlessness? It seems likely that Mary was passing for a British lady of gentle background rather than an Anglo-Indian, and her text referred to the husband and wife as natives of Devon.[86] Disguising her mixed race must have forced Mary to occupy a liminal space, to inhabit a psychic borderland, preoccupied by the wheel of fortune and the hierarchy of class. Canada must have offered new horizons, but she was left always somewhere in between, first starting life in India, then marrying in England, emigrating to Canada, and finally returning to England. Copleston’s interest in observation may have been an attempt to find certainty of place and identity and to resolve her ambiguous status. Her humour acted as a mask for anxiety.

82 John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor, eds., *The Church of England c.1689-c.1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 7; C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics During the Ancien Régime,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 481.

83 One nephew Reginald Stephen Copleston was variously Bishop of Colombo, then Bishop of Calcutta, while his younger brother Ernest Arthur Copleston succeeded him as Bishop of Colombo (Wilkin, “Copleston of Offwell,” p. 245).

84 *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser* (Exeter, England), April 2, 1846, and March 9, 1848.

85 Advertisement for “Genuine British Farm & Garden Seeds, E. A. Copleston, Importer, Sidney, C. W.,” *1860-61 Directory of the County of Hastings:Containing a Full and Complete List of Householders of Each Town, Township and Village* (Belleville: Bowell, 1860), p. 76.

86 This reference may reveal Edward Copleston’s hand in the text. The exact expression is “our native county of Devon” and Edward certainly was born there (Copleston, *Canada*, p. 109).

While the Coplestons used empire to achieve their ends, they also chose a colony without a plantation system or the ready labour of subject peoples. Living in a society short of domestic servants and farm labourers, Mary exhibited within her pages an interest in technology, and the couple experimented with either mass-produced items or evolving farm equipment. They could substitute local articles for antique family furniture, they could buy machine-manufactured pails and brooms at lower prices, and Mary gave up romantic fireplaces for the practical Franklin stove.[87] They eagerly utilized modern agricultural equipment such as the American horse-rake—"patented in Canada West"—and the two horse-power threshing machine.[88] Mary Copleston possessed a Victorian enthusiasm for information, and she embraced modernity in the form of machine-made furniture, learned to cook from an instruction book, and likely compiled facts and figures for local gazetteers. From her book's opening lines, Copleston clearly set out her thesis that the family had emigrated owing to financial embarrassment and that success was to be measured in dollars. In contrast to most settler literature justifying the colonial experience, she had no broad agenda of creating civilization in Canadian obscurity.[89] Instead of building an empire, the Coplestons were focussed on what an empire might deliver to them. The purpose of her book was to prove that success was possible and that others could follow her formula. The space of the colonial periphery could be a remedy for lack of opportunity in the metropolitan core.

Susanna Moodie's writing on the hardships of the nineteenth-century Canadian bush had shaped much public perception. Not all settler experience was consistent, particularly for those with money. The life-histories of Mary O'Brien, Anne Langton, and even Susanna Moodie (once she had moved to Belleville) implied that many new residents of Canada could live quiet lives of some refinement and understated decorum.[90] Colonists of the 1850s were not filling a void, but taking advantage of opportunities in an existing infrastructure. Mary noted her surprise that the conditions described by Catharine Parr Traill no longer applied. Mary Copleston had the good fortune to live in two attractive houses of ample proportions and, in the case of the house in Brockville, a generous view of the St. Lawrence. While in Belleville, the Coplestons enjoyed the companionship of the local clergyman, John Grier, and his family. (Mrs. Grier was a godmother of their son Hubert, born in 1862.) The two Grier daughters, Rose and Hannah, had interesting and fulfilling careers enlarged by spirituality, poetry, and music.[91] Copleston did not live in barren wasteland. While justifiably fearing the isolation

87 Copleston, *Canada*, pp. 65, 67.

88 *Ibid*., pp. 116, 117-119.

89 Literary scholar Robin Mathews stated that Susanna Moodie believed herself a participant in the struggles to make Canada a civilized society and that this theme is a constant throughout Canadian literature. Robin Mathews, "Susanna Moodie: Pink Toryism and Nineteenth Century Ideas of Canadian Identity," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 10 (August 1975), p. 10.

90 Mary Sophia Gapper O'Brien, *Journals of Mary O'Brien*, ed. Audrey Saunders Miller (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968); Williams, ed., *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada*.

91 "Rose Jane Elizabeth Grier," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography,* http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/grier_rose_jane_elizabeth_14E.html (accessed January 8, 2014); Anonymous, *A Memoir of the Life and Work of Hannah Grier Coome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933).

of the Canadian bush, she wrote with almost Tolstoyan fervour of the rewards of rural agricultural life in colonial Canada.

The Writer's Eye

Post-modernism has questioned the veracity of the writer's eye. The first person narrator is never neutral as he or she always writes from a position of personal experience and inherent prejudices. In considering Copleston's frame of mind, the cultural theory developed by Mary Louise Pratt may provide insight. Pratt has posited that when cultures collide they can create a dangerous but dynamic space, which she calls the "contact zone," where power is negotiated and creative struggle can occur.[92] Mary was truly the product of just such a confrontation of races and the walking embodiment of cross-cultural encounter. In India, Britain, and Canada she experienced three respective contact zones, all within an imperial framework and all entailing specific structures of power, race, gender, and class.

Examination of Mary Copleston's vantage point involves looking at her prose within the context of time and place. Copleston's premise that it was possible to live happily in the colonies on less money than in Britain was a finite proposition with a negotiable time-limit. She may have never expected to remain in Canada for her lifetime, or the Coplestons' settlement in Canada West was merely an experiment with an exit clause. She told her audience early in her text that she was cheered that return tickets to Britain were always available, and she had ruled out emigration to Australia as this option would not permit a speedy return. While Copleston's will made it clear that she treasured some memories of her experience in Canada, her book implied that she never regarded it as a permanent solution to her family's diminished income. Instead Canada was only part of the Empire's geographic network, one alternative among others. The tentative nature of the Copleston's sojourn in Canada West might explain why much of her text about this "strange land" has a touristic flavour and often reads like travel literature rather than the observations of a confirmed emigrant experiencing a new homeland.[93] Copleston's traveller's tales convey the impression of a privileged individual intent on consuming local colour and adventure rather than accepting the prevailing culture for her own. She never referred to herself as "a settler." It is conceivable that agricultural life in Canada West was merely an inexpensive alternative while the couple waited for an inheritance sufficiently large for resumption of life in Britain. As Mary's net worth on her death was significantly larger than her husband's, it is possible that her income was keeping the family afloat financially. This assumption, however, can only be a speculation.[94]

Other emigrants to British North America made similar choices, although often only the middle-class—and the elite—had the option of return. People

92 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992). Pratt also noted that cultures often grapple with each other within the context of vastly different ranges of power.

93 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 13.

94 York Place, Leeds, UK, and York House, HM Courts & Tribunals Service, "Will of Edward Arthur Copleston, 12 Forest Hill Road, Surrey, died 6 September, 1879" and "Will of Mary Copleston, 30 Spencer Hill, Wimbledon, died 28 April, 1906." Edward left less than 200 pounds and Mary 593 pounds.

of modest means usually made a life-time decision to emigrate: they could not afford the passage home.[95] Lady-like Anne Langton was fortunate that she had the option of leaving Canada for several years before returning to re-join her brother's household, where she felt needed and of service. Susanna Moodie was set to sail for Britain after 35 years in Canada. John Thurston, Moodie's biographer and literary critic, reflected on the irony that many Canadians have embraced Moodie's story as a national myth, the story of triumph over adversity, despite Moodie's desire to leave. It was likely that only the final illness of her husband, Dunbar Moodie, prevented the couple from departing Ontario. Considering that most of their extended family was then resident in the Dominion, the Moodies must have had compelling reasons to consider a possible return to their native homeland.[96]

If Copleston's experience in British North America could be limited by time, did she have the same hesitancy about her sense of space, the terrestrial vantage point from which she viewed her personal universe? Not surprisingly, considering her history, the empire of British colonies was situated in Copleston's prose as mere geography; each settler society had its various attractions and drawbacks. As Edward Said remarked about the process of colonization and empire-building, it was easy to overlook "the unpleasant aspect of what went on out there."[97] Her vision of empire was uncontested; the world map of British red-coloured colonies was referenced as available real estate in which hard-up British gentlefolk could replicate their middle-class lives at much lower costs. Although she congratulated herself on living modestly away from the distraction or luxuries of the large urban centres, she never wavered in her impression that colonization was part of the natural order of the universe, and she lauded the British Constitution as providing perfect security for life and property.[98] She made no mention of Aboriginal peoples as the original owners wronged by British hegemony. Instead, they appear as merely picturesque or stereotypical figures, without agency, and merely part of a colourful tableau. Imbued in the social context of the time, Copleston did not hesitate to shop for a new country—not as a forever homeland, but as she would any other useful thing.

Any work of literature is based on cultural assumptions. The text of *Canada: Why We Live in it, and Why We Like it* is dominated by Copleston's voice and attitudes. She was not encumbered by either the philosophical considerations or the investigative pursuits of Anna Jameson. Jameson clearly stated that she was interested in the place of woman, both European and Aboriginal, in the colony of Upper Canada. Her views were emphatic in despising Toronto and lamenting the "want of society" for women of her class.[99] Both Stricklands felt the burden of bringing civilization to the backwoods, "of exerting a genteel, Anglo-Protestant

95 Sea travel was dangerous for those in steerage; wrecks were common, and lifeboats were only provided for the crew and first-class passangers. See Arthur Johnson, *The Tragic Wreck of the Anglo-Saxon* (St. John's, NL: Harry Cuff, 1995), pp. 9, 19.
96 Thurston, *The Work of Words,* p. 172.
97 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1993), p. 130.
98 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 2.
99 Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada,* pp.139,146-147.

influence over the Canadian landscape."[100] Susanna, in addition, had early and intense evangelistic experiences that directed her life and outlook. Copleston, in contrast, had a High Church sense of entitlement and was blind or indifferent to colonization as a force for moral change.

Considering Mary Copleston within the context of her own life, one wonders if she was a reliable witness. Her background would lead one to believe that she had a measure of deception. The identifiable voice that resonates through her modest book was very much her own creation. Like Susanna Moodie, who readily mixed fact and fiction, Copleston constructed a new identity in crafting her reflections on Canada. Copleston's eventful life-history provides evidence that her public persona, the character she impersonated in her book, was carefully manufactured to charm her middle-class British readers.[101] Canada and her subsequent writing career had allowed her space once again to change persona or to refine the one that she had developed as a school-girl in Brighton. She alternatively reveals to conceal. She was frank about money and vague about India. Through artful invention and social contacts, Copleston was passing as a woman of some property, or at least background, likely born in Devon. Even her English reviewer referred to her text as "ladylike."[102] Not only was Copleston performing the daily rituals of an English gentlewoman in a personal context; she was documenting her experience in print.

Copleston's reactions to life in Canada are surprising fresh and original; she was unburdened by moral didacticism or by finding a higher purpose for her emigration and settlement. She had no intention of creating a new civilization in a former wilderness; nor was she inspired by an evangelistic fervour. She espoused no feminist outlook as did Anna Jameson. She was unconcerned whether a replica British hierarchy was created in the province or not. Often her sketches of colonial life have a theatrical quality and appear to be a series of formulaic tableaux borrowed from Bartlett's book of Canadian engravings. Copleston depicted her family encountering hotel life in Montreal and Toronto; she admired Lake Ontario from the deck of a steamship; she was ecstatic viewing the charm of Native canoeists negotiating their crafts among the Thousand Islands; she loved sleighing.[103] The narrative and its imagery were suggestive of a scenery and topography that might be admired or dismissed, but above all was appropriated by the first person narrator. Interpreting the periphery to the metropolis, Copleston presented an always pleasing voice consistent with mid-Victorian norms about gender, race, and status, but her husband, children, pets, and fellow residents of Canada West (both European and Native) were almost exclusively used as props or caricatures in a story that solipsistically centred on Mary. Copleston wanted to be liked by her middle-class British readers, and she also wanted to sell books.

100 Hanson, *Emigration, Nation, Vocation*, p. 96.

101 *Ibid*., p. 99.

102 *Examiner* (London), January 25, 1862.

103 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 59. *The Canadian Dictionary of Biography* records that the 120 engravings that appeared in Bartlett's volume *Canadian Scenery Illustrated* have considerable historical value, for they illustrate the country and its people as they appeared in 1838—with the emphasis on the picturesque. See Alexander M. Ross, "William Henry Bartlett," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/bartlett_william_henry_8E.html (accessed February 21, 2016).

Despite the pleasing tone, Copleston inserted within her text some strong opinions. She hardily approved of technology, such as the steamboat and railway that had so transformed the world of Catharine Parr Traill. It helped her outlook that the mail service—with those precious letters from home—was cheaper and more reliable. While Copleston mostly used humour to comment on the poor manners, pretensions, and crudity of Canadian life, she was very clear that she disapproved of draconian Sunday observation, Orangism, and evangelistic low-church tendencies. While she abhorred conspicuous drunkenness, she attributed this common colonial characteristic to the lack of wine and the prevalence of cheaper "ardent spirits." Within her book, Mary had several inter-racial encounters, all reminiscent of the Western narrator encountering the unknown other.[104] Some of Copleston's sketches are positive, such as her descriptions of Aboriginal skill in the canoe or piety during a Christmas service. Two other of her anecdotes, however, focussed on Native inebriation and Aboriginal gullibility. She also commented favourably on the polite and kind services of the "darkies" at Sword's Hotel (see Figure 4).[105] She failed to mention that the waiters were possibly refugees from either slavery or slave hunters.[106]

Figure 4: Swords Hotel, Front Street, Toronto.
Source: From lithograph by Maclear & C., 1855, Toronto Public Library, JRR 342.

Child of Empire

Mary Copleston was a child of the British Empire for good or ill. She also benefitted from moving successfully from one waystation of the colonial world to

104 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation.*
105 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 35.
106 Isabella Bishop, staying in Toronto at the Russell Hotel—comparable to Sword's Hotel—in 1856, identified the Black waiters as escaped slaves. See Isabella Lucy Bird, *Englishwoman in America* (London: John Murray, 1856), p. 186.

another. Her status as a mixed-race person was probably buffered by the strength of her father’s will, her English education, and good connections.[107] Copleston’s likely secret background was so powerful that among her detailed bequests after her death there were no mementos of India, and India was only mentioned in her book in a chance quotation from some local personality.[108] What is shocking in this lacuna was there was no reminder of either her father’s or brother’s experience in Asia. The new Canadian context had offered her fewer restrictions than India or Britain. Better transportation and communications made her world smaller and more easily navigated; she clearly understood the imperative of a good rail link and a post office. Constitutionally she was able to take on a new colouration to create a new life. In contrast to many immigrants from the gentle classes, Copleston does not reminisce about “old England”; both England and Canada were points of departure in a life of movement and change.

For whatever reason, Mary and her husband Edward returned to England in the mid-to-late 1870s and, following Edward’s death in 1879, Copleston would occupy the same Wimbledon house for 27 years. Her family’s imperial connection continued to flourish. Five of Mary’s first cousins commanded cavalry or infantry regiments of the Indian Army, and all saw active service from Kabul to Peking, while Edward’s clerical nephews became bishops in colonial India and Ceylon.[109] Finally, the cycle of Mary’s life was completed as her daughter Mary Ellen and her husband would seek their fortune in India, and several of her grandchildren were born there.[110]

Much of Copleston’s story is told in fragments. While we have her lively text, much of her personal history leaves only a fleeting impression. Still the Copleston narrative has importance for scholars as it provides insight into how a middle-class couple could participate in an expanding empire. Spinning the globe allowed them to choose among colonies, use their personal contacts for information and introductions, and prepare an advice book for potential emigrants, similar to themselves. *Canada: Why We Live in it, and Why We Like it* was intended as a positive, if not light-hearted book, a sunnier version of Moodie’s *The Backwoods of Canada*. While Mary Copleston presented herself as a cultivated, if adventurous, English gentlewoman, the true story was much more complex and subtle. Copleston was more the determined survivor who could use the resources of an empire to furnish the life she sought, but her life-story also captured the interaction of such social forces as empire, race, class, and gender. As she stated

107 Durba Ghosh, *Sex and Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 127. Ghosh’s focus is on the eighteenth century, but the same attitudes persisted into the nineteenth century.

108 Mary Copleston’s will is revealing about her emotional attachments. Reflecting considerable culture, she left a painting by a notable Italian manneristic artist, several photographs of places important to her in her early marriage, various mementos of Canada, but nothing that was reminiscent of India (“Will of Mary Copleston, 30 Spencer Hill, Wimbledon, died 28 April, 1906”).

109 Elliott, *Roll of Honour*, p. 6.

110 “Family Search,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/NJP3-ZP2, https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/FG72-9HQ and https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/FGCW-FBF (accessed July 20, 2013).

in her book's opening pages, she was always reassured by the thought of return tickets.[111] Her family might till the soil, but it put down no long-term roots.

111 Copleston, *Canada*, p. 5.