‘A Peacock's Plume Among a Pile of Geese Feathers’: Rosa Praed in the United States

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Rosa Praed has been claimed as ‘the first Australian-born novelist to achieve a significant international reputation.’1 Almost certainly, she was the first Australian-born novelist to be published in the United States, although she was in England by the time her first novel appeared in America in 1883.2 Of Praed’s forty-seven published works, twenty-five appeared in American editions in the three decades from 1883 to 1915, including twenty-four of her thirty-eight novels in more than forty separate editions. In the years either side of the century’s turn, she was among the best known Australian writers in America, alongside Louis Becke and Rolf Boldrewood.

Praed’s success was not accidental. She worked hard at making sure her books found their way to America and at maximising her chances of profiting from American editions. Yet despite building a significant reputation, her career left few traces in American literary culture once new titles stopped appearing.

Praed’s American career almost began in 1881 when the New York house G. P. Putnam’s Sons, which had a London office, expressed its interest in publishing Policy and passion, but nothing eventuated.3 Otherwise, as with her contemporaries, her early American career was almost exclusively a product of the cheap reprint libraries that flourished before the introduction of the International Copyright, or Chace, Act in the United States in 1891. In this period, seven of her books were published in the cheap reprint series of George Munro and four in those of J. W. Lovell and F. F. Lovell; two were published by the established house of Harper and Brothers; and one each by J. B. Lippincott of Philadelphia and Rand McNally of Chicago.4 The level of activity in these years was frenetic, with Praed’s novels appearing in around eighteen separate editions in just seven years, although in the absence of copyright protection and binding royalty agreements, it is unlikely that the author profited much — if at all.

The first of Praed’s novels to be published in the United States appeared in Munro’s magazine-format Seaside Library. Nadine appeared in 1883, Chapman and Hall’s two-volume English edition having been reduced to only twenty-six pages, and Zéro the following year, this time at forty pages.5 These were almost certainly ‘pirated’, although with no international copyright law, such reprinting was not illegal. In 1885, Munro re-released Zéro in two different book formats...
and *Affinities* appeared as no. 477 in Munro’s Seaside Library. *The head station* followed, as no. 811, in 1886 (and in another series as well). The difference in the numbers suggests just how quickly Munro was producing new titles in this enormously successful series. In 1890, Munro re-released *Zéro* and published Praed’s earlier novel, *An Australian heroine*. Then, in 1891 — the year the Chace Act was passed — it published *The ladies gallery* (co-authored with Justin McCarthy) and *The soul of Countess Adrian*—and then stopped.\(^6\) *The ladies gallery* was also reprinted by Rand McNally and F. F. Lovell in 1889 and the otherwise unknown Continental Publishing Co. of Chicago in 1892. In a parallel burst of activity, J. W. Lovell published *The head station* in 1889 in its Lovell’s Library (it is likely that both the Lovell and Munro editions were pirated from another published by Harper and Brothers in 1886, in Harper’s Handy Series, at twenty-five cents). In 1890, an ‘authorised’ edition of *The rival princess* (also co-authored with McCarthy) appeared in its International Series of Select Novels; and, through Lovell’s United States Book Company, *The soul of Countess Adrian* was released in 1891, the same year as Munro’s edition.\(^7\) *The rival princess* was a new edition of *The rebel rose* (discussed below), which Harper had earlier published in its famous Franklin Square Library in 1888, and Harper re-released the novel under its new title in 1890.

In addition to the three titles released by Harper in this early period, Praed had titles from other established, mainstream houses: *Moloch*, published by Lippincott in 1887, and two works from D. Appleton & Co., *‘The Right Honourable’* (Praed’s first collaboration with McCarthy) in 1887 and the first authorised US edition of *The ladies gallery* in 1889.\(^8\) From this point on, Praed — like Ada Cambridge before her — developed a regular publishing relationship with the New York firm, with proper contracts and, for some works, royalty agreements. Praed supplied the plot for *‘The Right Honourable’*, ‘the story of an ambitious politician willing to sacrifice everything for a woman’, and also its main female character, the woman in question ‘an Australian bush girl with radical views . . . trapped in an unhappy marriage’.\(^9\) Both themes resonate with much of Praed’s other fiction, although one New York reviewer in an otherwise positive response to the novel wondered whether ‘the collaborative experiment ha[d] somehow fettered the masculine writer’ — the novel ‘bright as it certainly is, wants the special charms of brilliancy and *verve* which characterize [McCarthy’s] unassisted stories’.\(^10\) Praed had her revenge a decade later when another American paper remarked that, ‘The books which are entirely her own are much cleverer than those which she wrote in collaboration with Mr Justin McCarthy’.\(^11\)

More immediately, Praed and her husband accompanied McCarthy on a visit to the United States in September–November 1886, visiting New York and New England. McCarthy had a strong constituency among Irish-Americans and Home Rule supporters, but Praed, ‘the Australian spiritualist and novelist’, was also treated as a celebrity.\(^12\) In Boston, she met John Boyle O’Reilly, the former convict who had escaped from Western Australia aboard an American whaler in 1869 and had subsequently become an important figure in Boston’s Irish community. O’Reilly’s novel, *Moondyne* (1879), had been published several times in America and Australia by the time of Praed’s visit. He would later be the model for the politician-bushranger hero of Praed’s *Outlaw and lawmaker*, first published in 1893 and released by Appleton in the United States in 1894.
Both ‘The Right Honourable’ and The Ladies Gallery appear to have been steady sellers, for Appleton continued to issue them through to 1898 and 1912 respectively.\(^{13}\) The Ladies’ Gallery was released in the firm’s Town and Country Library, the most prestigious of all the fiction series. Appleton, however, did not publish The rebel rose, although it is unclear whether this was because of the radical ‘Jacobite’ theme embedded in its historical plot or the complications of its passage into print.\(^{14}\) George Bentley in London recommended that this novel be published anonymously, as it was ‘something of a political roman à clef’ and McCarthy was so well known.\(^{15}\) Perhaps there was also an element of commercial calculation in his advice, for he wrote to Praed that with anonymous publication ‘its chance of a huge success would be enhanced. There would be a mystery about it’.\(^{16}\) The problem was that Praed and McCarthy had already sold serial rights to newspapers in the United States and the colonies, using the novel’s first title ‘The ladies’ gallery’. There was thus little point in publishing the book anonymously if serialisation would make its authorship well known. It was therefore agreed that it would be retitled The rebel rose and an altogether new novel would be written using the title ‘The ladies’ gallery’.\(^{17}\) As it turned out, Bentley’s manoeuvres were largely ineffectual. As Praed and McCarthy had already sold the US book rights to Harper before the novel’s English release, the American edition appeared with the authors’ names in the very same year as Bentley’s edition. The second British edition, under the new title of The rival princess and no longer anonymous, was published in London by F. V. White in 1890, and the Harper and Lovell editions followed suit.

The first of Praed’s sole-authored novels published by Appleton was December roses in 1892. It was followed in regular succession by Christina Chard in 1893, Outlaw and lawmaker in 1894, Mrs Tregaskiss in 1895, Nulma in 1897 and Madame Izàn in 1899. Three of these were in fact first editions, appearing in advance of their English release, and all but the last were re-released in later years.\(^{18}\) All were copyrighted editions published in the Town and Country Library, although Christina Chard and Mrs Tregaskiss were also published separately.\(^{19}\)

The only other significant publication for Praed before the turn of the century was from Lippincott, which followed its earlier edition of Moloch with The romance of a chalet in 1892, reissued in 1897 in the firm’s Select Novels library. Lippincott’s English connections are also suggested by its release of two London-based collaborative books in which Praed was involved: Over the seas: Stories of two worlds (1890), a collection of children’s stories including a number of bush tales by Australian expatriates Praed, Hume Nisbet and Tasma; and Seven Christmas Eves: Being the romance of a social evolution (1894), a juvenile novel in which seven authors each contributed a chapter. Listing the authors’ names, the Atlantic Monthly’s reviewer concluded that they ‘indicate pretty definitely the literary quality of the work, which for the most part, when it is not indifferent Dickensesque, is after the manner of the popular melodrama’.\(^{20}\) Praed also published in American magazines: an article on ‘Literary women in London society’ for the North American Review in September 1890 and a short story in Lippincott’s Magazine in November 1899.\(^{21}\) Another story, ‘Mrs Robinson: A steamboat episode’, had been sold to Tillotsons and syndicated, appearing in the Pittsburgh Dispatch in July 1892 and probably in other American papers around this time.\(^{22}\)

In Appleton’s lists, Praed’s Anglo-Australian romances appeared alongside the more exotic themes of works such as Madame Izàn. However, the Australian
settings and characters of her fiction appear not to have been a drawback for Appleton; if anything, the reverse was the case, for the firm emphasised these elements in its advertising. For Outlaw and lawmaker: ‘In this romance of Australian life Mrs Campbell Praed returns to the field in which she gained her first success. “Outlaw and Lawmaker” . . . will be ranked among the strongest of the novels which have had their scenes in the antipodes.’23 For Mrs Tregaskiss: ‘Mrs Campbell Praed returns to Australia for the scene of this strong and absorbing story, which will be found to present a drama of singular force and interest’.24 And again for Nilma: ‘In this story, which is written with great care and force, the author returns to the field of antipodean romance which she has cultivated with such marked success’.25 In such terms, the (antipodean) romance was lifted above the level of ‘popular melodrama’.

II

Leaving aside the co-authored books, the earliest American review discovered to date is of the United States Book Company’s edition of The soul of Countess Adrian, one of Praed’s early forays into the occult, which the San Francisco Call thought ‘a very charming novel that commends itself to all classes of readers’; that was the kind of notice a good romance attracted.26 The New York Times similarly praised December roses, while acknowledging the less plausible elements of its romance plot: ‘Mrs Campbell-Praed’s style is excellent . . . If the situations are apparently strained, it is the author’s art to present them in such a natural way that the tension is never perceptible’.27 Christina Chard, however, strained rather too much: ‘Mrs Campbell-Praed’s romance is of the most complicated kind . . . a spool on which the filaments of fiction have been laboriously wound, and in the untangling of the thread an uncommon amount of patience is necessary’.28

With Appleton’s consecutive releases across the 1890s, Praed began to be reviewed more regularly, and also to appear in social and literary gossip. Outlaw and lawmaker and Mrs Tregaskiss in particular attracted attention to the author, leading to illustrated paragraphs in papers across the United States plus snippets from London papers recycled by their American cousins. Praed, for example, features in one article as an exception to the rule that English women writers dress badly.29 An earlier piece on ‘Two London literary women’ (Praed and Mrs Cashel Hoey) offered a fascinating introduction to Praed’s reputation:

Her novels are widely read, but in England are kept away from young readers exactly as those of Ouida. They are in a certain sense brilliant, but they are restricted to the delineation of scenes and manners of a fast and loose class of people . . . Her literary style violates all canons of art, as understood and studied by more serious writers; nevertheless, there is a glamour in her periods, a fascination in her study of character which causes a reader to pursue her fiction breathlessly to the end, and then tossing it away, vowing that the time spent in reading it might and should be more profitably employed.30

In 1901 (and again in 1904), American papers repeated a joke that was doing the rounds in London: ‘Why did Anthony Hope? — Because Mrs Campbell Praed’.31 Praed was newsworthy, if never quite in the league of Ouida or Marie Corelli.
Among reviewers, the New York Tribune discerned that Outlaw and lawmaker could not manage its plot without ‘a certain melodrama’, but nevertheless it had ‘an air of truth . . . set forth with almost masculine vigor and humor’: ‘To picture a girl whose breeding is deficient, whose flirtations are in extremely bad taste, and whose heart is rather hard, and yet make the reader like and pity her, is surely a triumph’.32 The reviewer in Outlook (an important New York-based ‘Family Paper’) thought the romance offered a ‘graphic idea of Australian life in the early days of civilization there’, but warned: ‘let no one expect too great literary merit as a characteristic of this merely melodramatic book’.33 This was the critical dividing line for the American reception of almost all Praed’s novels: vivid romance and local colour on one side, mere melodrama and incredulity on the other. Apart from a recurrent interest in her descriptions of the ‘unusual’ scenes of Australia, Praed was read as a writer of romances — superior romances, at best, but there is little evidence that reviewers noted the anti-romantic elements in her work, in particular her ‘analysis of the debilitating choices women are called upon to make in the course of their courtship and marriage’.34

Appleton gathered positive quotations from reviews and reprinted a selection within each new novel as it appeared. While obviously chosen for their positive spin, they do suggest that Praed’s novels were widely and favourably reviewed. Reviews of December roses were quoted from the Cleveland Leader, the Boston Literary World, the Churchman and the Baltimore American: ‘For nobility of conception, delicacy of touch, and sustained action, [December Roses] excels any of the author’s earlier efforts’. Reviews of Christina Chard appeared from the Boston Saturday Evening Gazette and Boston Advertiser: ‘Mrs Campbell-Praed has written several interesting novels, but none more thoroughly so and more exquisitely finished in style than Christina Chard. The novel is one to be studied as well as read’. For Outlaw and lawmaker, the publishers quoted the New York Tribune and the Detroit Free Press — ‘full throughout of surprises of an intensely dramatic character’ — and for Mrs Tregaskiss, the Elmira Telegram and the San Francisco Call.35

Australian novels achieved a presence in the American market in the 1890s to a degree they were not to achieve again until the 1930s, or perhaps even the 1980s. Praed was a key figure in this phenomenon, giving a more contemporary spin to the antipodean romance as established by Cambridge, Tasma and Boldrewood. By 1896, by the time of Mrs Tregaskiss, a reviewer in the San Francisco Call could remark: ‘Novels of Australian life have ceased to be curiosities. The people of that far land have won their way into the field of literature and are so diligently cultivating it that Australian books are no longer rarities’. And within that field, Praed was outstanding: ‘Among the authors who have given us pictures of bush life on the big ranges of that country none have made them more vivid or interesting than Mrs Campbell-Praed, and her new novel, Mrs Tregaskiss, will be welcomed by a wide circle of readers, to whom she is already well and favourably known’.36

Although not fully persuaded by the conventional love story, the novel’s ‘descriptions of Australian scenery and the narration of incidents peculiar to Australian life’ were praised in familiar terms, including passages of ‘black fellows’ dialect:

The incidents of the story include a description of a drought in the cattle country, a strike of the shepherds, a forest fire, a camping-out picnic and the usual scenes
of life remote from civilization. The picture given of Australian life is not wholly attractive, and yet it has its charms for those who like freedom and adventure.

This particular reviewer was well satisfied by the novel’s resolution, in which Mrs Tregaskiss receives a legacy of £20,000 and retires to England with her husband, ‘thoroughly reformed’. The Saint Paul Daily Globe, by contrast, thought that ‘material healing for wounds of the soul seems a little sordid, and the sense of ethical uplift is hardly perceptible’; nonetheless, again, ‘Australian life is vividly depicted’.37

There was nothing, unfortunately, to redeem Nulma:

Mrs Campbell Praed’s latest novel of Australian life is a rather stupid story built on commonplace and conventional lines and steeped in that atmosphere of dull provincialism that makes the little circle revolving around a colonial ‘Government House’ one of the least inviting fields for the novelist.38

Yet again, in the same year and rather against the grain, the Houston Daily Post declared Praed’s The romance of a chalet (in Lippincott’s reissue) ‘undoubtedly her strongest work ... full of the brightest interest throughout ... delicate and searching ... [with] passion and power’.39 By the end of 1897, Praed’s recognition in the United States was registered in the fact that her novels figured second only to Bret Harte among titles borrowed by adults from the Butte Public Library, Anaconda, Montana.40

Madame Izan and The insane root were potentially more controversial than Praed’s Anglo-Australian romances, the former because of its Japanese hero and inter-racial love story, the latter because of its apparently serious interest in the occult powers of the mandrake root. The New York Tribune had mixed feelings about Madame Izan, based largely on the reviewer’s own complacent Orientalism:

There is a good deal of the glorified guidebook about Mrs Campbell-Praed’s story of an English wife and a Japanese husband. There is also sufficient sentimental interest to hold absorbed to the end the confirmed novel reader. The average traveller will grin sardonically over the picture of the Japanese hero gifted with all the manly virtues generally ascribed to the Anglo-Saxon — the unselfishness, the tenderness, the poetic devotion, the noble self-restraint, the lofty ideality ... These are not qualities which the globe-trotter sees in the man of the East. We, however, will not quarrel with the author of this novel over her rosy vision.41

The insane root was taken more seriously as a literary work, and produced some lively debate. Surprisingly perhaps, as a Christian paper, Outlook praised the novel for its unconventional spiritual dimension:

Oriental passion and mysticism are well handled ... The meaning and vitality of the romance lies in [their] unusual presentation of the old but ever-interesting problem of the Soul and the Body. Perhaps it might be termed uncanny, but so might Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.42

Other reviews also compared Praed’s and Stevenson’s novels, to Praed’s advantage:

when we find a novel which is superior to the foundation work of Stevenson’s fame and is of the same character, we must perforce praise it or shame our modernity, since if this kind of work is melodramatic (as is charged by other
reviewers) instead of psychological, then is the celebrity of RLS dependent upon a quality which his admirers would indignantly deny as possible to their idol.\textsuperscript{43}

With a different sense of where modernity might be found, the \textit{New York Times}, in the longest review any of her books received, made the same comparison; while it reversed the assessment, its praise for Praed’s novel was still high:

Mrs Praed does not reach, of course, the height which Stevenson attained in \textit{Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde}, but she has certainly succeeded in lifting her story out of the region of the merely grotesque into the higher plane marked by that masterpiece, and that is no small achievement in dealing with materials so little in harmony with modern ideas.\textsuperscript{44}

Praed would not have been altogether pleased with the review if it reached her, as the reviewer thought the novel dependent upon ‘superstitious absurdities’; indeed, he thought the mandrake might have been left out of the novel entirely for ‘more artistic results’. Nevertheless, the power of Praed’s writing was acknowledged:

while one is eagerly turning the pages of this weird tale, he practically believes in all the mystical magical properties she ascribes to the plant which gives the book its name, and accepts as perfectly plausible and possible the supernatural mechanism by means of which she works out her plot to an impressive and powerful conclusion.

Less justified, perhaps, was the reviewer’s notion that Praed’s Australian birth made it ‘natural that her romances should partake somewhat of the strangeness of her native land’.

An impassioned reader wrote to the \textit{Times} the following week to praise \textit{The Insane Root} as ‘one of the most absorbingly interesting, most fantastically imaginative, and most weirdly beautiful of any book recently issued’:

I think this stands out like a peacock’s plume among a pile of geese feathers. Among the insipid, prosy-prosy, spineless, commonplace rubbish that gluts our market, this book is an exception. It should by all means be a best-selling book. To every one who wants to read a good, a thorough story, a thrilling, exciting, yet comfortable piece of romance, rivalling in a way the ‘Arabian Nights,’ I emphatically want to recommend ‘The Insane Root’ by Mrs Campbell Praed, published a short time since by Funk & Wagnalls.\textsuperscript{45}

We have no evidence as to how well the book sold, suggesting it fell short of best-seller status.

III

Praed’s publishing record in the United States to 1900, although uneven, was certainly substantial enough to make her keenly interested in maximising her earnings in the American market. Her correspondence from the period reveals an author determined to succeed in the United States, but uncertain how best to secure her interests, both before and after the passing of the Chace Act. This was especially the case in the decade following the appearance of her last new title with Appleton — \textit{Madame Izän} in 1899 — at a time when her popularity as an author on both sides of the Atlantic had begun to falter. Appleton went into receivership in March 1900 and, although the firm continued publishing, the Town and Country Library
came to an end in 1903 and the house was reorganised. Whether Praed suffered from the firm’s reversals or whether they were simply not interested in her later occult novels is unknown. It is slightly odd, perhaps, that Appleton did not pick up her memoir, *My Australian childhood* (1902), given their earlier celebration of her treatment of Australian themes, but it might just have been an unwillingness to invest in something other than a novel. The book remained unpublished in the United States. Apart from a later relationship with Cassell, Praed’s subsequent novels went to different American presses in a series of one-off publishing relations.

As early as May 1886, by which time Munro had already released a number of her titles, Praed was inquiring of George Bentley about just where she stood in relation to American publishers in the absence of copyright protection. His reply gives a rich sense of a contemporary English publisher’s sense of his American counterparts:

I am afraid nothing can be done of any service to you in regard to America . . .

Your only plan is to take whatever offer the American publisher of your last work makes you.

They [American publishers] stand shoulder to shoulder in robbing us, and if A has taken a book, B respects A’s theft — in other words there is honour between thieves there. Holt is honest, but he dare not buy, because he would be what they call ‘printed upon’ if he did.

Whoever printed your last work is the best to apply to.

Whether Praed was able to exert any influence at all over her American publications before Appleton became involved is not clear. By mid-1889, she had engaged the London-based Art in Advertising Association as literary agents, and in June the agency’s Mrs Smith wrote in response to Praed’s inquiries regarding opportunities in the American market. Smith had met ‘Mr Groves of the New York *World*’, the controversial newspaper owned by Joseph Pulitzer, and reported Groves as saying that ‘Australia has no interest to the Americans’. That was the bad news. The good news, potentially, was that he had paid as much as £3000 for the American rights to a book — but also as low as £100. Smith thought that if Praed could complete her new book by the following year, she ‘may have a chance of a big sum’.

After the passing of the Chace Act, with Appleton as her publisher and with an agent in London, a more regular set of agreements could be set in place. Praed reserved the US rights to *Christina Chard* and *Mrs Tregaskiss* in her contracts with Chatto & Windus, and possibly for all the novels published by Appleton. Statements from the Authors Syndicate, which was acting as Praed’s London agent by August 1894, reveal that she received £55.2.6 for the US copyright on *Mrs Tregaskiss* (whether this is a full or part payment is not clear) and an advance against royalties of £50 for *Christina Chard*. She was still earning modest royalties for *December roses* two years after its release.

At the same time, correspondence with William Morris Colles of the Authors Syndicate reveals the complications the Chace Act produced, despite its potential benefits to foreign authors. In December 1898, Colles wrote to Praed in relation to her novel, *The scourge-stick*, that the Syndicate had copyrighted the work in America and had subsequently offered it to several American publishers. None had
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taken the book, however, ‘mainly on account of timidity in consequence of the state of the book trade in America’. Nonetheless, it remained in the hands of an American agent, and Colles was hopeful of being able to ‘make arrangements’. Bibliographical records indicate one American edition, published by J. W. Chartres, but Chris Tiffin suggests this is ‘probably a phantom edition’, printed and deposited in the Library of Congress in March 1898 in order to secure copyright, as the letter from Colles suggests. It consists only of Book One of the Heinemann edition. The novel was known in America, as it features in a New York Times essay from September 1900 on the unsatisfactory nature of heroines in fiction, but of course English editions were distributed in the United States, and London remained central to the culture of American men of letters. The essay’s author thought The scourge stick a powerful novel, despite its ‘unhealthy heroine’.

In the early years of the new century, Praed also corresponded with G. Herbert Thring, a solicitor for the Society of Authors, as to whether securing copyright by serial publication prejudiced book rights in America and about the strategy of copyrighting by publishing portions of a book in the United States. In December 1903, Thring advised:

> If you set up and bring out, only portions of the book in the United States you will only succeed in copyrighting those portions which are thus produced there. This proceeding has been taken frequently. It is best therefore, if you adopt this course, to take out the most prominent chapters and have them set up in the States, so that the book would be practically valueless without the insertion of these chapters.

> No case has been tried in the United States Courts, dealing with this subject, and I do not know how far the proceeding would be sanctioned. There is no harm however in your trying it if you have not the time to set up the whole book or if you do not care to run to so large an expense.

No doubt Praed’s mixed fortunes in the American market — both her success with Appleton and her subsequent difficulties — led her to be particularly concerned about her American rights in these years. The insane root, as mentioned, was published in 1902 by Funk & Wagnells, which had developed a ‘Standard Series’ for fiction, comprising ‘cheap books of a “better” class’. Most likely, T. Fisher Unwin, who published the book in London in the same year, had followed his common practice and sold page sheets to the American firm for simultaneous publication. Her next American title, Fugitive Anne, was published in London by John Long at the end of 1902 and subsequently in New York by the New Amsterdam Book Company/R. F. Fenno in 1904. Then the American editions dried up, despite (or because of) the fact that Praed then produced ‘an avalanche of books, many written hurriedly to make money’.

Praed worked particularly hard to copyright Nyria in the United States. She had explicitly crossed out the clause granting US book rights to the publisher in her contract with Unwin, although it had had US rights in her earlier agreements for The insane root and My Australian girlhood — ‘I don’t feel prepared to give up control of American rights,’ she told Unwin. Unwin had first contacted Praed in October 1900 with a view to publishing her, and Praed had forwarded the manuscript of The insane root. Unwin asked, in turn, for a brief scenario of the book so he could show it ‘to American friends’. Apparently he was unsuccessful
in arousing American interest, writing to Praed that if he had been able to make arrangements ‘with America either for serial rights or volume publication of the book’, he would have been able to revise his offer, which stood at 250 guineas outright for ‘all rights whatsoever in the said work throughout the World’. Nyria, by contrast, was negotiated on a royalty basis — indeed, a generous 25 per cent flat royalty, though without an advance. (Unwin tried because of the work’s length to reduce the royalty to 15 per cent, but Praed resisted.) In December 1903, Unwin also advised Praed on the strategy of securing American copyright by publishing part of a book in the United States, recommending that the most prominent chapters be published so that the book would be valueless without them.\(^{59}\)

The next phase in the unfortunate saga of Nyria occurred early in 1904 when Praed’s friend and fellow Theosophist Alfred Sinnett inquired of London publisher John Lane, founder of The Bodley Head, whether the latter could copyright a novel in the United States.\(^{60}\) Lane had kept a New York office since 1896. He wrote to Praed that for £10 he could indeed do as she wished, ‘have a portion of your new novel set up in America, and placed in the proper quarter demanded by the Copyright Law’, but he could not guarantee that this would ensure copyright for the whole work. He also took the opportunity to state his interest in publishing one of Praed’s books in England and America. While the length of her new novel meant prohibitive production costs, Lane looked forward to being offered ‘a book for both countries’ in the future.

Praed forwarded her £10 and correspondence proceeded apace regarding publication dates and the copyright situation. In April, Lane wrote asking for a fortnight’s notice of the English publication date as he had heard from New York that ‘it is not absolutely safe to publish a book in America before it is issued in England, that is to say, that the copyright is not secure’. Their careful planning for simultaneous publication was thrown into disarray when Unwin delayed its publication date by nine days. Praed wrote to Lane, ‘I greatly fear from what you tell me that this jeopardises the copyright in the States, insofar as I was able to secure it, but I assume regretfully that nothing can now be done’; and to Unwin, ‘If, as I am told, this delay jeopardises the copyright in the States, it will be extremely vexatious & disappointing for me’.\(^{61}\) Nyria — or rather a portion of the book — had been copyrighted in America by Lane’s office on 9 May 1904. The problem was that because part of the novel had been copyrighted in the United States before the book’s publication in England, the whole book could no longer be protected. Whether this was the reason, or whether it was the novel’s length and occult theme, Nyria never did find an American publisher, despite being sent to Putnam and Appleton, and perhaps other houses.\(^{62}\) Praed had written to Unwin in early April, ‘I should be glad if the announcement as to the United States copyright might be inserted though I believe this is not a legal essential’.\(^{63}\) Unwin agreed, and thus the English edition — rather poignantly — contains a copyright notice to the effect that the book had been copyrighted in the United States in 1904 by R. M. Praed.

Australian authors, like their British contemporaries, typically felt that their publishers or agents were not making as much effort as they could to secure American publication. One response was for the author to retain American rights rather than assign them to the British publisher, in the hope of achieving a separate agreement with an American firm. Many of Praed’s contracts with British houses thus leave the American rights with the author. Ideally, this meant a separate edition
copyrighted in the United States, and separate royalties for the author rather than a profit-sharing arrangement with the English publisher. On the other hand, it could mean the loss of ‘guaranteed’ income if the English publisher could make an American sale. Stanley Unwin, writing in 1926, argued that authors were mostly better off allowing their English publisher to sell an edition to an American house on a profit-sharing basis:

Every English publisher worth his salt tries to ensure American copyright for his authors’ books by securing an offer from an American publisher to print their work in the States; if he fails, he sells sheets, which is usually less profitable to the author, though sometimes more.64

In arguing this case, he was repeating the lesson his uncle had given Praed in 1904 in relation to *Nyria*:

I fear it is too late now to be successful in publishing the book in America. If the American market had been part of our contract no doubt we should have arranged affairs months ago when the book might have been published simultaneously in London and New York but I feel confident any arrangements I might make at this juncture would not be satisfactory to you.65

Praed’s English publications were probably distributed in America, although we have no direct evidence of this; and even if her published output was falling, she could still be newsworthy. Indeed, *Nyria* especially was in the American news, not least when Praed’s more famous contemporary, H. Rider Haggard, claimed to have been contacted telepathically by his dog as the latter was dying. As a headline in the *San Francisco Call* put it, ‘Rider Haggard’s Strange Dream in Connection with his Dog, and Mrs Praed’s Communications with an Ancient Roman Girl, Interest Britons. Reincarnated Maiden Helps a Woman Write Novel’.66 Rider Haggard’s interest in the possibility of telepathic communication between man and animals — and hence whether ‘the same sort of soul exists in both’ — was joined in reports from London to Praed’s claims to have received the story of *Nyria* from Nyria herself, ‘a young unmarried woman who remembers her previous existence, near 2000 years ago, as a martyr under Domitian’.67 Mrs Praed had ‘outclassed’ Rider Haggard, the *San Francisco Call* reported, with her story of ‘communications with a reincarnated Roman maiden’.68 Given such publicity, it is surprising that the book was not picked up by an American publisher, and it might well have been that Praed’s efforts to protect her rights by copyrighting a portion of the book had the opposite effect to the one she desired, dissuading publishers from taking it on.

Her presence in the American market was only resumed with three titles published by Cassell & Co. simultaneously in London and New York: *By their fruits* in 1908, *Opal Fire* in 1910 and *The Body of His Desire* in 1912.69 Only the middle title had an Australian setting. *By their fruits* was announced as ‘the first novel that has come from the pen of Mrs Praed for some time past’ — true only in the American market. By October 1908, Cassell was advertising the novel as in its third printing, the publicity consisting of a paragraph from Justin McCarthy, borrowed from the New York *Independent*, which aimed to draw the novel to ‘the attention of American readers’: in a year without any novels calling for special attention, he wrote, *By their fruits* was ‘entirely out of the common, alike in conception, character drawing and in its curious blending of the real and the ideal’.70
Praed also published a number of magazine stories in 1908–09, in the Christmas number of the *Saturday Evening Mail* and in the *L.A. Herald*.\(^{71}\) Opal fire was announced in October 1910, alongside John Foster Fraser’s *Australia: The making of a nation*, also from Cassell. *The body of his desire* was advertised in May 1912 with the following — perhaps dubious — enticements: ‘The plot is extraordinary. The theme is the psychic conflict in the soul of a popular preacher, who materializes out of his own vital essence the spirit of one whom he has loved and forsaken in an earlier incarnation’.\(^ {72}\) No American reviews of these works have been traced. A later novel, *The mystery woman* (Cassell, 1913), was on sale in the United States, but no evidence of an American issue has been located.\(^ {73}\)

In 1912, as noted earlier, Appleton republished *The Ladies’ Gallery, Outlaw and lawmaker* and *Mrs Tregaskiss*. Apart from these releases, Praed’s final appearance in the American market was an edition of *Lady Bridget in the Never-never Land*, which was published in New York by Brentano’s around October 1915.\(^ {74}\) It was picked up for review in the *New York Times*, and its assessment — perhaps like the novel itself — returned to the themes of a much earlier stage in Praed’s career:

The characters and plot of the story are of a familiar type — the misunderstandings between husband and wife, the appearance of the other man, the threatened tragedy and happy ending, with joy and prosperity galore — all these follow well-beaten paths. So far as these factors are concerned, the book is an average novel, fairly well done and fairly interesting. But the locale of the tale is one which is still comparatively unusual and possessed of considerable freshness. The account of Lady Bridget’s experiences in the bush is thus somewhat out of the ordinary, and therefore interesting.\(^ {75}\)

In an article on the contribution of colonial writers to English letters in the *Salt Lake Tribune* of 16 July 1911, Praed was singled out as ‘one of the first [Australian writers] to break down London prejudice’ with *An Australian heroine*, although the article also notes that ‘since that day she has inclined to occult themes of somewhat cosmopolitan flavor’. Nonetheless, the article spoke in wholly positive terms of the ‘vast web of romance’ being woven by British novelists and poets from every part of Britain’s colonial possessions.\(^ {76}\)

Despite achieving a certain level of celebrity and more than a decade of favourable reviews, Praed left little trace in American book culture after *Lady Bridget’s* brief moment in the limelight. This was partly a result of shifting tastes and partly the effect of a growing nativism in American publishing; but it was also a ‘generic’ effect. The sheer reproducibility of romance conventions counted against the lasting impact of any particular novel, however ‘unusual’ or ‘fresh’ its locale. Finally, there was little consciousness in the American market of a distinct Australian literature (as opposed to antipodean variations upon colonial romance themes) that might have sustained Praed’s reputation even as the ‘modern novel’ came to preoccupy editors and reviewers. In a pattern that would be repeated across the twentieth century, Australian fiction was discovered, forgotten and then discovered again. While in 1896 one reviewer could remark that Australian novels had ceased to be curiosities, by 1916 they were once again ‘somewhat out of the ordinary’.

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David Carter

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Endnotes


2 Praed was born in 1851 in the colony of New South Wales in an area that later became part of Queensland. She left in 1876 for England, where her first novel was published in 1880. She returned to Australia only once, in 1894–95. See Clarke, ‘Rosa Praed’ and Patricia Clarke, *Rosa! Rosa!: A life of Rosa Praed, novelist and spiritualist* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999).


6 Tiffin lists the Munro edition of *An Australian heroine*, but notes that the book has not been sighted.


8 Justin McCarthy was a popular novelist, essayist, and Irish Nationalist member of the British parliament, already published in the United States. Justin McCarthy and Rosa Praed, ‘The Right Honourable: a romance of society and politics’ (Chatto & Windus, 1886).


11 *Omaha Daily Bee*, 19 April 1896.


15 Chris Tiffin, “Our literary connexion”: Rosa Praed and George Bentley, *Australian Literary Studies* 27(3–4) (2012), 120. Tiffin points out that Bentley was also Publisher in Ordinary to the Queen, so could not publish anything overtly controversial.

16 George Bentley to Rosa Praed, 13 February 1888, Praed Papers (9/4/60).

17 Tiffin, ‘Our literary connexion’, 120–1.

18 *December roses* (Appleton, 1892; Simpkin 1893); *Christina Chard* (Appleton, 1893; Chatto & Windus, 1894); *Mrs Tresgaskiss* (Appleton, 1895; Chatto & Windus, 1896).


20 *Atlantic Monthly*, Mar. 1894, p. 419. The six other authors were Clo. Graves, B. L. Farjeon, Florence Marryat, G. Manville Fenn, Justin Huntly McCarthy (Justin McCarthy’s son) and Clement Scott.

21 For an account of this fascinating story, see ‘Karl Sandeze: A literary episode’, *Lippincott’s Magazine*, November 1899, 794–800, see Chris Tiffin, “‘By Mrs Campbell Praed’: Author and text’, *BSANZ Bulletin* 22(2) (1998), pp. 77–9.
Based in Bolton, Tillotson & Co. had offices in London, New York and Berlin, and syndicated articles and fiction across Great Britain and the United States. In July 1894, Tillotson wrote to Praed stating that their best offer for a story ‘would be £50 for serial, translation and American rights’ (Praed Papers, 9/1/29).

New York Times, 8 November 1895.
New York Sun, 3 July 1897.
Morning Call, 14 June 1891.

For example, in the Louisiana Populist, the Globe-Republican (Dodge City), the Eddy Current (New Mexico) and the Stark County Democrat (Ohio), February 1896; ‘English women who dress badly’, Evening Star (Washington, DC), 20 June 1896.

'Two London literary women', Daily Yellowstone Journal (Montana), 17 March 1889; the article probably appeared widely (it sources the Pittsburgh Chronicle).


Outlook, September 1894, 439.
Tiffin, Rosa Praed, p. 10.
From the front matter of Appleton’s editions of Christina Chard, Núlma and Madame Izàn.
San Francisco Call, 12 January 1896.
Saint Paul Daily Globe, 26 January 1896.
New York Sun, 24 July 1897.
Houston Daily Post, 18 October 1897.
Anaconda Standard (Anaconda, Montana), 20 December 1897. The list is of books borrowed by adults on a single day, 24 November. The accompanying list includes only three titles, Christina Chard, December roses and Núlma, but perhaps there were multiple borrowings.
Outlook, 8 November 1902, 612.
'Compared with Stevenson', Houston Daily Post, 22 February 1903.
'Mrs Praed’s new story', New York Times, 22 November 1902.
T. Everett Harry (Marietta, PA), 'From readers', New York Times, 29 November 1902.
Tebbel, Between covers, pp. 104–5.
That Praed was writing My Australian girlhood was noted in a number of American papers — for example, the New York Tribune, 2 March 1902 and the New York Times, 20 September 1902.
Bentley to Praed, 22 May 1886. Praed papers (9/4/51).
For an account of Praed’s publishing history in London, see Tiffin, Rosa Praed, pp. 13–14 and “Our literary connexion”.
Mrs Tregaskiss, Praed Papers (10/1/5); Christina Chard, Praed Papers (10/1/11); December roses, Praed Papers (10/1/12).
Rosa Praed in the United States

51 Colles to Praed, 14 December 1898. Praed Papers (9/2/32).
52 Tiffin, *Rosa Praed*, p. 28.
53 M. E. W. Sherwood, ‘Heroines’, *New York Times*, 15 September 1900: ‘I dislike an unhealthy heroine, such as Esther Vassall . . . Clever Mrs Campbell Praed, do not scourge us with such sharp sticks’.
54 Thring to Praed, 18 December 1903; earlier letter re serial rights 2 January 1903 (9A/11/5).
55 Tebbel, *Between covers*, p. 373.
56 Two editions are listed in the Library of Congress and NY Public Library: New Amsterdam 1903 and R. F. Fenno 1904 respectively. The book was copyrighted by the former in 1903 but published by the latter in 1904. A letter in Praed’s papers from *Publishers’ Weekly* to an American correspondent talks of the book having been transferred from the former to the latter when the former ‘gave up business’: 16 January 1905, Praed Papers (8/5/13).
57 Clarke, ‘Rosa Praed’, p. 310. The period was also marked by tragedies in Praed’s personal life, including the death of her son, Humphrey, in a motor car accident in Los Angeles.
58 Insane root contract dated 29 July 1901; *My Australian girlhood* contract dated 30 May 1902; *Nyria* contract dated 27 March 1903. Praed to Unwin, 12 March 1903, Praed papers (9A/1/16; 9A/3/6).
59 Correspondence between T. Fisher Unwin and Praed, 30 October 1900, 8 October 1904, Praed papers (9A/1/1–9A/3/46).
60 See James L. W. West III, ‘The Chace Act and Anglo-American literary relations’, *Studies in Bibliography* 45 (1992), 307: ‘Any of [John Lane’s] titles with potential for both the British and American markets were manufactured in the United States and copyrighted in Washington, while overrun sheets were sent to England, bound there, and copyrighted for the British market’.
61 Praed to Lane, 10 May 1904; to Unwin, 10 May 1904. Praed Papers 9/3/13 and 9A/3/36.
62 Tiffin’s bibliography records one edition of ‘Nyria: A drama of the days of domitian’, listed in the catalogue of Brown University (Rhode Island) but no longer traceable. He suggests it may be ‘an outline or section printed for copyright purposes, although it is not held by the Library of Congress’ (30).
63 Praed to Unwin, 3 April 1904. Praed Papers 9A/3/33.
65 T. Fisher Unwin to Praed, 8 October 1904, Praed Papers (9A/3/46).
66 *San Francisco Call*, 13 September 1904.
67 *San Francisco Call*, 7 August 1904. See also 12 August 1904.
68 *San Francisco Call*, 13 September 1904.
69 Cassell retained rights for publishing the novels ‘in all forms and in all countries’. Agreement for *By their fruits*, 18 June 1907, Praed Papers (10/4/6).
70 *New York Times*, 12 September 1908; advertisement *New York Sun*, 10 October 1908.
72 *New York Times*, 4 May 1912.
73 Statement from Cassell, 30 June 1913, Praed papers (10/4/1).
Advertised *New York Times* 9 October 1915. Pagination the same as the English edition, suggesting it was printed from sheets.


‘Oversea Writers Capture England’, *Salt Lake Tribune*, 16 July 1911.