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‘There is no Original Creative Power in the Place’:* Creativity and Colonial Anxiety

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‘There is no Original Creative Power in the Place’:* Creativity and Colonial Anxiety

Paper for ‘Antipodean Fields: Bourdieu and Southern Cultures Conference’ 8-10 June 2011, Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney

‘The Englishman possesses eminently the deductive and comparative faculty, and the organ of creativity,’ wrote the British academic turned colonial politician C.H. Pearson in 1859, in one of the earliest appearances of the abstract English noun ‘creativity’ in a published work. This paper investigates the concept of creativity as it was deployed in the cultural and economic fields of the nineteenth century, with particular attention to the relationship between the British metropolis and Australian colony. It examines the mobilisation of the term in diverse fields, including education, commerce and empire-building, by capitalists and workers, colonizers and colonized, in their strategic manoeuvres across the social structures of the time. It takes inspiration from Bourdieu by seeking to understand the ways in which the term functions as both a claim to symbolic power and as a source of mystification that is generally — though not always — used to give distinction to the experience, perspectives and material productions of the privileged.

The paper is part of a larger project that challenges the traditional historical narrative that locates the origins of the discourse of creativity in the art of the Renaissance and/or Romantic eras by exposing the specifically modern preconditions for the emergence of the new term.

* *South Australian Register*, 30 December 1869

Camilla Nelson lectures in Literature and Communications at the University of Notre Dame, Australia. Her novels have been shortlisted for national awards and her academic essays have appeared in *Text, New Writing, Rethinking History* and *Cultural Studies Review*.

