Proceedings 6th National Conference of the Australian Forest History Society Inc, Michael Calver et al. (eds)

Nature as culture: Transformed by the bush

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Peer reviewed contribution

Keywords: Georgiana Molloy, Blackwood River, James Mangles, Ellen Stirling, Augusta, the Vasse

ABSTRACT: Georgiana Molloy and her husband Captain John Molloy took up land at Augusta in 1830. Her early life was shaped by the powerful landscape of the English Border country, the ideas of Rousseau that permeated educated European society and the Church of England's comfortable certainty that the English garden was a model of God's creation. Later she was much influenced by the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, with its more sceptical and enquiring attitudes to science, social justice and progress. Botanising was a popular pastime for women of Georgiana's class and involved recognising plants and their families and attaching their Latin names.

European culture was in upheaval. The French Revolution's ideas of freedom, equality and brotherhood were reflected in an explosion of cultural ideas, paramount being the primacy of the individual. Its artistic expression took two main forms: the discovery of nature as the mirror of human sensibility, and the revolutionary idea of the conscious individual. The romantic concept of nature as both picturesque and sublime began a train of ideas still central to modern attitudes to the environment. In Augusta, and later at Vasse, Georgiana was immersed in a pristine landscape radically different from the neatly cultivated countryside of England. The enormous trees around the mouth of the Blackwood River contrasted with the delicacy, subtlety and abundance of the wildflowers so different from plants of European gardens and greenhouses.

Ellen Stirling, wife of the first governor Captain James Stirling, facilitated contact between interested settlers and European scientists, principally through her cousin, James Mangles, who visited the Swan River colony in 1831. Georgiana Molloy's letters to Mangles are a unique record of the flowering of ideas and feelings about the landscape and the indigenous flora of the South West of Western Australia. The joys and tragedies of her young family and the rigours of colonial life were all seen against the potent background of her absorption in botany, her experience and understanding of this Australian landscape and her burgeoning identification with the bush and its plants.

Alienation from our landscape is central in Australian culture from high art to domestic gardens. This cultural disjunction has serious consequences including failure to value the natural landscape and an inability to see indigenous plants as beautiful in every sense of the word. It impacts severely on issues such as water usage, nutrient pollution of waterways and land clearing where cultural values determine practical outcomes. In Australia, nature is culture in a way that is no longer possible in much of the world. The transformation of sensibility achieved by Georgiana Molloy transcends the historical details of her life, enlightening a landscape endangered by a failure of feeling.

1 THE EUROPEAN CULTURAL INHERITANCE

Georgiana Molloy's life was shaped by her physical environment. Her happy memories of childhood were of botanising and gardening with her mother around their comfortable house outside Carlisle in the Border country just south of Hadrian's Wall on the banks of the Eden. She responded to the expansiveness of the rather austere landscape with its largely treeless moors and heaths. When she visited her friends the Dunlops at Keppoch House in Dumbartonshire and later at Rosneath she loved the Scottish lochs and hillsides and the country walks and botanising rambles through heaths and sedgy pools as well as woods of oak, beech, walnut, Spanish chestnut and planes. Her experience however was confined to a quite small geographical area outside which she had never travelled.

Like many daughters of the landed gentry she was not sent to school, but she spent her life in houses full of books amongst educated and stimulating people. She found her contact with an intellectual world of learning and ideas in the church, amongst people with strong social consciences, many of whom, characteristically, were amateur naturalists. Although she didn't formally learn Latin she was certainly familiar with classifying and naming plants correctly. She very likely enjoyed the gardening magazines that were beginning to appear in response to the popular interest in horticulture that was sweeping Europe.

She was also swept up in the drama of the flamboyant, charismatic preachers who conjured up panoramic visions of Heaven and Earth, Hell and Paradise. A few days before her marriage and departure from Scotland for her new life on the other side of the world she attended a huge religious gathering, held outside her friends' church beside the Gareloch. The scale and power of nature, the rhapsodic landscape and the combination of intellectual enquiry, moral insight and emotional intensity crystallised a personal framework that was to form the basis of her future life.

In a personal, historically necessary female way, she internalised the values expressed by contemporary philosophers, scientists and artists to develop a way of life, a sensibility, which was sufficiently robust to sustain her virtually alone in a foreign place and in a powerful and mysterious landscape that terrified and alienated many settlers.

Her imagination was not formed by the Greek and Roman imagery that so coloured the landscape for the young Bussell brothers, her co-colonists at Augusta (Lines 1994). Rather, her sensibility was influenced by the Bible and its great metaphoric stories of gardens, both Eden and Gethsemane, and particularly Milton's re-statement of Adam and Eve in a Garden organised by a very bloke-ish God, where authority was a male preserve, but looking, wondering and thinking were female activities. The garden was also a familiar image in the Church of England's popular iconography. The pretty English flower garden was the model of God's creation – neat, cheerful, well ordered, reflective of social class, full of plants shaped by human horticultural tradition and supported by popular culture such as the sentimental language of flowers. Georgiana's church associations were with the evangelical wing of the presbyterian Church of Scotland.

The nearby University of Edinburgh was the scene of great advances in natural science with many future intellectuals and scientists beginning their careers there. Among them was a contemporary of Georgiana's, Charles Darwin. Another influential contemporary, also from northern Britain and a member of the Unitarian church, was the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, creator of great novels exposing the cruelty and harshness of industrial England, advocating religious tolerance and inventing a hero who was a natural scientist collecting in far-flung corners of the world and including his future wife in the scientific enterprise.

The French Revolution, with its ideas of freedom, equality and the brotherhood of Man, was reflected in an explosion of ideas that changed human sensibility forever. Central to this radical upheaval was the concept of the primacy of the individual. Its artistic expression took two main forms that were often intertwined. The first was the appearance of the revolutionary idea of the conscious individual exemplified in the music of Beethoven and the painting of Goya. Artists encapsulated the intensity of both rapture and agony with a sense that the individual is the ultimate unit and that this transforming level of awareness carries heavy burdens of responsibility (Vaughan 1978).

Both Beethoven and Goya made direct responses to Napoleon himself and to the Napoleonic wars that so shaped the lives of many Swan River colonisers. Captains Stirling and Molloy were both veterans of these wars and in both cases the aftermath of British victory contributed to their decisions to go to the Swan. But the settler whose life and consciousness truly reflected this spirit of the age was Georgiana Molloy.

The second aspect of this change in sensibility was the discovery of nature as the mirror of human sensibility, for example in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. William Wordsworth's multitude of short poems capturing the intensity of an often momentary, personal experience of nature culminated in his great work *The Prelude* which is an autobiographical account of his encounter with radical ideas and his transforming experiences while walking vast distances in the landscape, across the Swiss Alps, in France and Germany and from one end of the British Isles to the other, looking, feeling and thinking.

Artists dissected with great intensity their experience of landscape and all it contains from tumultuous cloudscapes, "rocks and stones and trees", tiny mosses and lichens and animals to human beings. Scale was important – the vast and the most minute. They created a great internal drama that was played out as external nature. This explosion of sensitivity, of a heightened awareness of the internal world of thinking and feeling, grew in hand in hand with the expanding and transforming understanding of natural science that was taking place in the scientific world all around them.

In many ways this change in ethos, technically known as Romanticism, marked the beginning of the modern world (Levey 1966). An anecdote about Coleridge serves as a potent illustration of this. He was on a walking tour with a male companion when they stopped to gaze at a superb waterfall. Coleridge turned to his friend and said, "It is sublime". A couple of tourists wandered up to look at the spectacular sight. The woman turned to the man and was overheard to say, "Isn't it pretty" (Barker 2001).

This little story contains many complex ideas. Apart from the general misogyny of the age, the conversation illustrates the assumption that women's responses will be of a lower order and their language of more domestic, personal and non-intellectual type. Putting this aside, Coleridge's use of the word "sublime" was a potent statement of a theory of landscape that was to pre-occupy many artists for a very long time. It saw landscape, and nature, as a metaphor for the highest state of human consciousness, of a transcendent state of awareness that enlarged and transformed understanding. For example it equated physical scale with emotional scale, best shown in the immense distances in JMW Turner's landscapes. It emphasised the awe-inspiring and possibly even catastrophic power of nature. Artists pitted themselves against nature in order to experience for themselves the drama of colossal scale and visionary light as well as to marvel at the intricate mysteries of tiny things. It was obligatory to walk across the Swiss Alps to experience the magnificent skies, light, clouds and storms, to climb the majestic passes and to feel the sun, wind and rain and dramatic changes in the weather.

In many ways this is the beginning of the sequence of ideas that leads to modern environmental movements. It dramatises the need for human contact with wild, untrammelled nature. It gives inherent value to the natural world. It encourages exploration and greater understanding of nature (Batchelor 2001) The use of superb photographs in the campaign to save Tasmanian wilderness was a perfect contemporary example of this concept in practice. The woman tourist's use of the term "pretty" was no less an insight into the future. This is the beginning of the age of mass tourism and the commodification of landscape as "picturesque" – like a picture. Ironically, the overwhelming public success of Wordsworth's poetic evocation of the sublime landscape of the Lake District created one of the first picturesque destinations for the popular mass tourism industry, thereby changing the place forever.

Artists have always constructed the visual language through which we see the world. Certain iconic paintings become lenses that sensitise us to particular formats or images that we then recognise in the external world. The Picturesque is above all the template for a formally structured picture – the mountain on one side balanced by the tree on the other, framing the lake, classical ruins, sentimental country cottage, etcetera in the middle distance and the human activity, classical or

modern, in the foreground. The Picturesque style also has a strong component of nostalgia, a longing for a more perfect past, a dream of a lost golden age.

Georgiana Kennedy married Captain John Molloy at Rosneath on 6th August 1829, a couple of months after James and Ellen Stirling and the first settlers had arrived at the Swan River. She was twenty-four years old and he was forty-eight. The wedding was a simple affair. Three days later she left the landscape of her early life for the first time, to go south to London and then Portsmouth to prepare for her departure as a colonist in the antipodes. On the way the newly married couple visited Georgiana's mother who gave her daughter a present of yucca lilies, while other friends gave her English flower seeds. In London she bought herself a large hortus siccus and equipped herself with other seeds and gardening tools (Lines 1994, 64). She also took a hive of bees.

After a busy period of preparations and then some weeks of delay at Portsmouth, the Warrior finally sailed on 23rd October 1829. On the 12th January 1830 they reached Cape Town where Molloy was entertained by an old military colleague and his Spanish wife. Georgiana was interested to see the natural vegetation of the Cape and referred to it as, "in her experience, a botanical domain beyond compare". She also visited a botanical garden, bought seeds and collected cuttings including oleander, cape gooseberries and her famous import, watsonia (Lines 1994, 92).

2 COLONISING

The Warrior arrived off Fremantle on 12th March 1830. Like several other of the female colonists she was pregnant. Immediately on setting foot on dry land she records looking at the plants in the sand hills around Fremantle. She noted, "But the season was Summer … found no flowers … some of the trees almost aromatic" (Molloy 1830 quoted in Lines 1994, 98).

Several days later she sailed up the Swan and shared an intimate moment with a fellow colonist, the well-to-do London builder Thomas Turner who was to be her future neighbour. They admired the beauty of the river and the dense green of the forest that bordered it. She described it in letters as, "an unlimited extent of dark green woods … trees of full growth with branches untroubled by storm and unpruned by man". The Swan River was "beautifully wooded to the water's edge with both copse wood and magnificent old trees". The soils must be fertile and fruitful, she thought, because of "the immense timber growing from it" (Molloy 1830 quoted in Lines 1994, 98).

The Molloys were persuaded by Stirling to take up land at Flinders Bay, as all the surveyed land around Perth had already been allocated and he wished to extend the colony further around the coast. The Molloys, the Bussells, the Turners and a their servants and labourers sailed south on the colonial schooner with Stirling and Roe, the government surveyor. The arrived on 2nd May and Stirling immediately named the Blackwood River and Hardy Inlet after Nelson's officers. Stirling walked along the beach pegging out grants for each of the settlers entitled to an allocation of land (Lines 1994, 110). Molloy was appointed Government Magistrate and, as soon as Stirling departed, began his official duties by naming the new settlement Augusta and distributing other names of his aristocratic family connections around the settlement (Albany, York, Duke, Frederick)

Three weeks later, in a rain soaked, desolate tent on the beach, Georgiana gave birth to her first child. The baby died several days later and was buried in the sandy soil, the tiny grave marked with a little bower of sticks covered with "a purple creeper" and a little bunch of blue flowers. Then she sowed some hyacinth seeds around the little grave. "It was so hard I could not see it was in love," she wrote (Molloy 1833 quoted in Hasluck 1955, 73). Georgiana Molloy responded by planting her first garden. It contained jasmine, lilies, some of her English flower seeds, the watsonia and her mother's yucca lilies (Lines 1994, 113-4). By the following spring visitors were commenting on its elegance and its civilising presence in the wilderness.

Their houses were instructive. The large, hard working and jolly Turner family set out in a very efficient and professional manner to build a substantial two-storied house with the materials they had brought from England. Molloy, the military officer, directed his workers to build his simple two-storey dwelling with a separate kitchen, along with the other necessary buildings for the little colony. The Bussell boys, 22, 16 and 14 years old and completely ignorant of practical trades were

assisted by some of the labourers out of kindness. Their rough hut was full of trunks of books, half open and often read aloud in the evening. "I clasp them as the old Greek did his personal shield," John wrote (J. Bussell 1832a, quoted in Lines 1994, 140). They did in fact see these classic texts as their shield against the forces of wild, uncivilised nature. The very presence of these books confirmed their belief in their own civilised state of existence. He quotes Aeschylus,

> "Here we have reached the remotest region of the earth
> The haunt of Scythians, a wilderness without footprint."
> (J. Bussell 1831b, quoted in Lines, 1994, 123)

The Bussells had a remarkable aptitude for finding the texts that so exactly express the ideas that echo down through the years to this very day - the uncivilised wilderness full of barbarians. Like terra nullius, this is a flexible concept and classical literature was a very practical comfort and guide for the coloniser. The drama the Bussells were living was real, but it was also nebulous, made of cultural assumptions that imposed a linguistic, visual and imaginative template on the landscape.

They did see beauty in the bush … "a spot that the creative fancy of a Greek would have peopled with Dryads and naiads and all the beautiful phantoms and wild imagery of his Sylvan mythology" (J. Bussell 1832b, quoted in Lines 1994, 157). And they certainly had very real and very ambiguous feelings about the Nyoongars … "There is something to make one shudder when one crosses unawares in his path, the naked Lord of the Forest" (J. Bussell 1831a, as quoted in Lines 1994, 122).

The forest too was physically daunting for them … "an almost impenetrable undergrowth … and trees that had been blown over by storm or prostrated … by the white ant, obstructed our path at every turn". It was uncivilised. Charles wrote, "Nature has been permitted to run to waste, and man, not to mention his fairer partners, is sadly wanted to correct her too great luxuriance." (C. Bussell 1832).

The Bussells saw themselves, Homer in hand, sitting beside their pre-fabricated and transported, little classical fireplace, to all intents a domestic temple, in their hard won home, surrounded by untamed wilderness that they were slowly transforming into good, civilised, useful, possessed and profitable landscape.

Within a couple of years Georgiana Molloy had two healthy daughters, a very pretty flower garden and a productive vegetable garden. The house had a little veranda in front with rambling nasturtiums at one end and a much-admired purple creeper, probably Hardenbergia at the other end (Lines 1994, 255). She was also taking charge of their farming activities and was very pleased with her crops which succeeded where others had failed.

Molloy seems not to have been a natural farmer and had limited success with his livestock. He was also away from Augusta for a great deal of the time fulfilling his official duties. She automatically became acting magistrate in his absence, dealing with numerous difficult problems, including conducting a distressing funeral and managing a frightening confrontation between Nyoongars and settlers without the use of force. She then had to write the lengthy reports required by the Governor.

The Molloys, like all the Swan River colonists, were beset with the problem of lack of labour, servants setting up on their own as soon as they could. With little help, she looked after Sabina, Mary and then her new baby, John, ran the property and began to venture into the bush to look at plants. She didn't have names for them but she could call them beautiful. She could see that they were different and interesting. She commented on the smallness of the bush flowers in comparison to the more spectacular, highly-cultivated English flowers. She was beginning to recognise plants and feel familiar with the flowers, the birds, the seasons, the beach, the sunsets and, in fact, to love the landscape in its details and in its oneness. She was at home in Augusta.

Just before Christmas 1836 she received a letter and a parcel including a hortus siccus and, in her words, "a particularly choice box of seeds" (Molloy 1837, quoted in Hasluck 1955, 147). It came from someone she had never met asking her to collect seeds and plants for him. She

immediately wrote back accepting the invitation and set about collecting specimens and noting plants to collect seed from. With her two small daughters and toddler John, she made happy excursions into the surrounding bush. Not being able to correctly identify the plants, she extemporised. She collected leaves as well as flowers and seeds and noted the locations as well as writing descriptions of the whole plant. She began to work at night, making up small packets of seeds, each with an identifying leaf. With Molloy also interested, they ventured further afield, going up the river in their boat to "the granite rock" where they made lists of plants to be revisited when the seed was ready to be collected.

The letter writer, Captain James Mangles, was Ellen Stirling's cousin and a brother naval officer of James Stirling. The Mangles family were wealthy and well-connected merchants with interests that included a shipping line and a trading company in British India. Ellen's father and later her brother were directors of the East India Company.

Mangles was well educated and was a naturalist and horticulturalist who had the means to indulge his interests in a quite substantial manner, engaging with the world of professional horticulturalists in the great gardens and scientific institutions. He liked to grow and catalogue rare plants. He corresponded with botanists, the Horticultural Society and especially with Joseph Paxton at Chatsworth.

Mangles had visited the colony in 1831 and stayed with the Stirlings for three months. His interest in botany seems to have increased after his visit to Perth and return to England with what was then scientific treasure, giving him great prestige and credibility among the scientific establishment. Back in England, Mangles wrote to his cousin Ellen Stirling asking for her assistance in continuing his collecting of seeds and plants. She responded by suggesting several settlers who might help – Captain Meares, Mrs Bull and Mrs Molloy.

3 A NEW SENSIBILITY

On the 11th November 1837 tragedy struck the Molloy family in Augusta. As everyone was going about their early morning tasks after breakfast, nineteen-month old John disappeared and was drowned in their well. It was a shocking event in the little Arcadian world that had evolved in Augusta.

A little over a year before this Charles Darwin had left King George's Sound and sailed past the little settlement at Augusta, homeward bound and tired at the end of the long expedition. A bit further up the West Australian coast, he drew the first, tentative, now iconic, little diagrammatic tree in his notebook. A few years later his life too was changed by the death, in his arms, of his beloved daughter Annie. He, like Georgiana Molloy, had to battle with the religious template that was inherent in the social fabric of their times and, as morally sensitive people, of their lives. Darwin's official study at Cambridge was in Divinity, with ordination into the Church of England assumed to be his future. Most of his influential teachers, as dons, were also clerics of some sort. His wife always feared for his soul as his scientific directions became more explicit. But he too could not understand the random death of a much-loved child as love. It seems that the stark and relentless fact of her death was a turning point for him (Desmond and Moore 1991).

So it was with Georgiana Molloy. Religion had been the centre of her early life. She had been obsessed with biblical imagery and moralistic stories. She overtly tried to impose what she saw as Christian moral values on others. This didn't make for happy relationships in many cases and contributed to her social isolation, perhaps even from her husband. You can see her at this point put away the religious books and pre-occupations, and replace them with the botanical ones. As she recovered from the tragedy she became a different individual. Her new life was in the bush and her house became a herbarium (Hasluck 1955, 148).

She took up her pen and wrote a brief, formal, introductory paragraph to Mangles. "Forgive me, my dear Sir, for thus using towards a Stranger the freedom and minute detail that Friendship warrants and desires." (Molloy 1838a, quoted in Hasluck 1955, 155) She then passionately spilled out the whole story of her child's death. She probably never expressed herself to any other individual

in such a cathartic manner. The raw emotion of this first long letter established a powerful connection between writer and recipient. Then in the same letter she begins to think freely about the plants around her, lamenting the lack of what she calls their associations (culturally consolidated imagery), marvelling at the purity and intensity of their colours and wondering about "weeds", that is, to her eyes, the less significant, generalised botanical landscape.

Her life with her children became focussed on collecting for "Captain Mangles' box". They must have spent a great proportion of their time in the bush – in fact probably all that remained after dealing with the necessities of life, without servants, where they had to produce a large proportion of their own food. She also had to clothe her family and attend to their education. In the evenings she spent many hours mounting the specimens, collating seeds, packing things as well as she could and writing long letters to Mangles describing their activities, mixing botanical information with amusing and touching stories about the children. Although she did not fit the stereotype of the genteel female flower painter, she did express a desire to see the pure colours and exquisite details of the living flowers represented visually.

The box was finally soldered shut, much care and effort having gone into collecting fresh seed and keeping it in good condition. However the box languished in the house for many months as no ship appeared. Finally the government schooner arrived, and rising from her sick bed after the birth of another baby, Georgiana summoned all the available young female bodies to take the box on her cart down to the beach to be loaded. Ellen Stirling's assistance was again required to send the box on to her cousin in London.

At the same time she maintained her beautiful flower garden around the house. She describes the sensual pleasures of her life, in the garden and the bush with birds all around.

> Our clime is heavenly … my little flower garden of British, Cape and Australian flowers pour forth their odour … a variety of beautiful little birds most brilliant in plumage sporting around me … the Australian robin with shiny black back and head and the breast of a very bright scarlet. Also a little bird of a complete blue … the Honeyeater … have a long curved beak … the symmetry of their form is perfect … accords with the elegance of their food … perch on the most slender flower stalk and apply the beak to the blossom. (Molloy 1832, quoted in Hasluck 1955, 98)

She tells Mangles of balmy evenings outside in the garden, overlooking the river, as she plays her portable organ in the moonlight. She loved Augusta.

4 ENCOMPASSING THE LANDSCAPE

This happy world was shattered when Molloy finally made the decision to follow the Bussells to the easier farming land of the Vasse. She was profoundly sad to leave what had become for her a little paradise at Augusta. She dug up her favourite plants - "torn from their native soil like their mistress" (Molloy 1840, quoted in Lines 1994, 269) - and carried them in a basket that she protected with her long skirt as they rowed up the Blackwood before riding the final stages to their new home on the Vasse.

She loved not only the bush flowers and her own garden at Augusta but also the whole landscape, the grandeur of the forest, the broad river and the magnificent sunsets over the ocean. She speculates in a letter to Mangles that those who are interested in botany will probably share her feelings for the sublime in both landscape and nature. As the family travel through the bush to the Vasse, she looks with interest at the changing landscape and new plants. Her disappointment was extreme when they arrived at the rough cottage Molloy had prepared on a very unprepossessing piece of ground, near the series of muddy pools that was the Vasse. No forest, no grand views, no rich vegetation, no sunset over the ocean. Her first action was to plant the remnants of her Augusta garden in the most hospitable ground she could find before going to bed at the end of a depressing journey.

Before long however she begins to see this different landscape and grasp the fact that it is full of a whole new world of botanical treasures. The exploration and collecting begin immediately, but she had no hortus siccus and no paper. She begged an empty log book from the captain of an American whaler stationed in Geographe Bay and began her serious work again in earnest.

American whaling ships were frequent visitors to the south west coast and often spent extended periods in and out of the area. Her collections were later sent via America to London, as the more frequent ships helped her ensure the seed was fresher when it reached Mangles. One friendly captain had rowed them up the Blackwood River on a collecting trip and then helped in the move to the Vasse. Later another took the family in what we can only imagine to be a perfect trip to Cape Naturaliste, where she dreamed of a cottage at Meelup, camping out under the stars and collecting at every possible opportunity for a week.

The botanist Ludwig Preiss visited and stayed with the Molloys for a month. She learned from him the correct names for many of the plants she was collecting. Sadly, she was disappointed by his visit, finding his treatment of specimens, over which she lavished so much care, rather sloppy. She was also disappointed in his lack of enthusiasm for the plants and the beauty of the landscape and in his failure to keep his promise to send more of the scientific information she craved. Or perhaps he was dismissive of a genteel, female, amateur flower enthusiast. James Drummond also visited her and collected in the area for a week, but there seems to have been no meeting of fellow spirits on this occasion either.

She described the Nyoongars as her best collecting partners, most willing to climb trees to get seeds and by far the keenest observers of the things she wanted on a walk through the bush, to say nothing of their ability to lead her to particular plants and home again safely. From the early days at Augusta Georgiana had established good relations with the Nyoongars, beginning with two men who had learnt passable English in Albany. Soon she had at least enough Language to communicate effectively. One man stored his spears in her house and there are numerous accounts of mutual sharing of food – she gave flour or potatoes, they gave fresh meat or fish. Later at the Vasse a whole network of connections existed with Aboriginal men, women and children involved in day-to-day activities while others brought specimens from afar.

Mangles' second box arrived just before Christmas 1839 and contained the botanical materials she needed as well books and magazines, both botanical and general, and personal presents of scented soap, fabric and thread. His accompanying letter contained the long wished-for confirmation of her worth as a botanical collector and acknowledgement of her skill and care in preparing the seed and specimens. Mangles also expressed his open and natural friendship and like-minded enthusiasms.

Within quite a short time of energetic collecting another box was filled and when one of the American captains offered to take it, all other activities in the household were suspended to complete the collection quickly, with all the children assisting. There are several occasions when her very young daughters are credited with finding new species. She again writes to ask Mangles for better materials for collecting and preparing plants and for more information about plant names. This box contained 106 species, 67 named and 39 unknown. As soon as the ship had sailed she asked Molloy to make her a large box 6 feet by three feet for her next collection. She joked that although the freight wouldn't be cheap, at least "he has no milliner's bill to pay, therefore he may spare me a little indulgence in what is more beautiful and more durable." (Molloy 1838b)

She was extremely pleased with an invitation from Mangles to write for a publication he was involved with, and by his assumptions of her knowledge of the flora and abilities as a collector. He had started to ask her about specific plants for example *Kingia australis* and *Nuytsia floribunda*. She made many expeditions for these, especially to collect the quickly dispersed seed of *Nuytsia*, revelling in her new-found expertise and greatly enjoying her interaction with the Nyoongars. On one occasion she was overwhelmed by the beauty of a woody pear in full blossom. She later had great pleasure in being able to call it *Xylomelum*, one of the Nyoongars obligingly climbing the tree to get her good specimens of the pear-shaped nuts she had seen before but been unable to identify.

Mangles' next box was another treasure chest for all the family. It included some gifts for Molloy and the children, two microscopes, cuttings for her garden and most importantly, a copy of

"A Sketch of the Vegetation of the Swan River Colony" which used her material passed on by Mangles to John Lindley, secretary to the Horticultural Society, and Professor of Botany at London University. The publication, although only an addendum to the much larger Botanical Register, was of supreme importance to Georgiana Molloy in confirming the significance of her work, even though, in our terms, it was inadequately acknowledged. It also emphasises the short period of time that it could take for collections to be reflected in publications, and underlines the very high value placed on these collections by the European scientific community.

More boxes arrived from Mangles. They contained vegetable seeds and fruit tree cuttings for her garden as well as a complete Shakespeare and other literary works and books and magazines about gardening. Her letters are recorded in Mangles' letter books, transcribed by a secretary. These records of Mangles' correspondence also document letters from other colonists and his cousin Ellen Stirling and follow the complex web of contacts that saw the seeds and plant collections distributed to Kew, to Paxton at Chatsworth, to Lindley at the Royal Horticultural society and to other gardens and commercial horticulturalists in England and other parts of Europe.

The Reverend John Wollaston was an observant and admiring visitor to the Molloy household. Where her husband sometimes expressed some annoyance at her neglect of other responsibilities, Wollaston saw only the grace of the household, achieved with no servants and only the 11 year old Sabina to assist her. He arranged for his son to go collecting with her and commented in his diary, "Where I see aridity, she sees Paradise" (Henn 1948, 26).

Georgiana Molloy had undergone a most radical transformation. She now saw the world with Australian eyes, through the lens of the bush. Her register of beauty placed a higher value on the very complete landscape and its astonishingly interesting details that she had explored and become absorbed in. This new vision coloured all aspects of her life from the domestic to her most elevated conscious experience. And her most intimate companion in this great life-changing experience was a man that she never met who wrote to her from the other side of the world. Perhaps it was the very freedom of never actually meeting, in a class and convention ridden society, that allowed them both the liberty to express ideas and feelings, enjoying a real and very productive friendship that would otherwise have been most unlikely.

5 LANDSCAPE, LANGUAGE AND IDEAS

Alienation from the landscape in which we live has been a central theme in Australian culture for two hundred years. There is no better example than Patrick White, who struggles with the issue but ultimately sees the Australian landscape through metaphors of harshness, extremity and the absence of civilisation. The painter Drysdale shares a similar vision, each of them celebrating the fortitude and endurance of people who survive in such an inhospitable environment.

A senior decision-maker responsible for communicating with the public recently summed up a discussion with me about changing attitudes to water use by saying, "They just have to get used to the fact that we live in a desert". His use of the word "desert" is an example of cultural and physical disjunction. He was describing the South West of Western Australia, which is among the top three biodiversity centres in the world with a spectacularly rich botanical heritage, much of it forest of one type or another, that is perfectly adapted to this ancient land surface with its leached soils and mostly quite low rainfall. It forms our diverse, unique and beautiful landscape – our greatest cultural heritage.

Language, the filigree that transmits and shapes culture, evolves in particular landscapes. The metaphoric membranes that create actual words and ways of saying things as well as the subtle language of metaphor that colours the English language have grown on European soil, under European skies and in European weather. It is built on crucially different remembered experience. The modern European languages embody the vast periods of time that have witnessed the shaping and reshaping of Europe in the image of its successive civilisations.

The slightest knowledge of an Aboriginal language begins to expose the difference of human experience. Just as the Eskimo have fifty words for snow, so The People, the Nyoongars, had a

language that was adequate for describing this landscape and their way of living in it. Ngaanyatjarra, a Western Desert language, grew in and describes an altogether different landscape that can accurately described as a desert. Water is scarce and knowing where to find it is of central importance. The Nyaatjatjarra words for laughter – relax and laugh – kurrurnpa yirralarrku - literally mean "spirit made liquid".

A deep awareness of subtle things is what makes language real. There is a sense of recognition. Things don't need to be explained. It melts hearts and changes people. It makes us feel close to each other and to know and feel securely where we are. It unifies ideas and feelings. Cultural disjunction is an ever-present reality in the English we speak and in our visual language. It has serious consequences including a failure to value the natural landscape because we can't describe it properly. It impacts severely on issues such as water usage, the conservation of old growth forest and land clearing policy. In these areas, cultural values are usually unrecognised, but are central to the way issues are discussed, the way decisions are made and to the practical outcomes.

Rare people can adapt and change and really see a new place. Georgiana Molloy came here and saw that it was beautiful. She planted her garden of pretty English flowers. She saw the Blackwood River, the dark eucalypt forest, and the "enamelled ground" of wildflowers. Out of personal tragedy and a sense of isolation from her original cultural context, she emerged to see her new world as wonderful in detail, magnificent in its entirety, as paradise, as sublime. Out of simple feelings of pleasure in the beauty of the place she came to understand it and to love it. She didn't long for something that wasn't there or think of the real centre of her consciousness as somewhere else. Botany was her all-consuming passion and through it she became a mature, richly conscious individual. She felt fulfilled as a person. She achieved a status she never would have dreamed of in England. She attained a deep sense of identity with this place and with its plants. Her inner world and the outer world she lived in sang in glorious harmony. She died in 1843 aged 37 after the birth of her seventh child. The transformation of sensibility achieved by Georgiana Molloy transcends the historical details of her modest life and stands like a beacon of enlightenment in a landscape still endangered by failures of feeling.

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