Values and Evaluations: Reading for beauty in John Lindley’s
*A Sketch of the Vegetation of the Swan River Colony* (1839-40)

Issue 13, December 2010 | John Ryan

*According to Linnaeu’s [sic] classification, I come under the head of the Miscellaneous Botanophilists.* - Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, 17 February 1852

Why were certain Southwest Australian plants privileged as beautiful, whilst others were considered of no consequence in the aesthetic imagination of colonial European botanists, settlers and visitors? A response to this rather complex question is prompted by a reading of the first substantial published European account of the flora of Western Australia, John Lindley’s *A Sketch of the Vegetation of the Swan River Colony* (hereafter referred to as *A Sketch*), published in three instalments between 1839 and 1840. Lindley’s document represents an early European endeavour to demystify the plant life of the Swan River. Through the publication, the vegetation of the colony was ushered into the global marketplace by a particular style of value-laden scientific writing. A reading of *A Sketch* ties together with Paul Carter’s contention in *The Road to Botany Bay* that ‘however “scientific” it may purport to be, the language of empiricism remains metaphorical’. Employing a hybrid language of technical nomenclature and European aestheticism, the short treatise appropriated—through science, naming, and ideas of beauty—the newly identified plant species of the colony.

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Combining both written and illustrated depictions, *A Sketch* is a historically pivotal document in the history of botany in Western Australia, a region of high floristic biodiversity and unusual endemism. Through a literary analysis of a natural history document, this article holds that Lindley’s publication provides a glimpse into the essential practices and discourses of taxonomic science. The evolution of taxonomic systems for classifying plants has been well-explored by historians of science such as Thomas and Farber who stress the role of social and religious influences. During the nineteenth century, the ordering of plants and animals also corresponded to the establishment of European empires, as botanical and colonial explorations often occurred simultaneously. However, Lindley’s text highlights the underemphasised connection between aesthetic values and the systematising of plant life. As the basis for structuring the Swan River flora into named visual patterns, Old World tenets of beauty abetted Lindley’s scientific project by demarcating particularities: colour, symmetry, balance, gracefulness and softness. As science strongly characterises the ways in which human cultures conceptualise plants, evaluations recorded in botanical documents are part of the production of longer enduring values. *A Sketch* therefore exemplifies the recursive relationship between evaluations and values: perceptions of plants instil broader cultural meanings, which reciprocally undergird visual evaluations, linking human modes of seeing the natural world to pictorial floristic forms.

**Economies and configurations: Reading *A Sketch***

For early botanists, collectors, artists, writers and visitors, the floral array and faunal menagerie of early Australia and the Swan River Colony confounded taxonomic sentiments. New World species inverted the conventions of flora observed elsewhere on the globe. Between 1793 and 1795, the English botanist and founder of the Linnaean Society, James Edward Smith, published the first book on Australian flora, *A Specimen of the Botany of New Holland*. A colleague of the cosmopolitan botanist Joseph Banks, Smith observed the contradictory nature of New Holland plants and the difficulty of invoking traditional tenets of botany in the New World:

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When a botanist first enters...so remote a country as New Holland, he finds himself in a new world. He can scarcely meet with any fixed points from whence to draw his analogies. Whole tribes of plants which first seem familiar...prove on a nearer examination, total strangers, with other configurations, other economy, and other qualities; not only the species that present themselves are new, but most of the genera, and even natural orders.  

*A Sketch* conveys a comparable tone, alternating between familiarity and estrangement. Although situated after Smith, as well as the investigations and writings of decades of explorer botanists, Lindley’s document provides insight into late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century modes of perceiving the indigenous vegetation of New Holland. Through a hierarchical system of naming intertwined with judgements of beauty, *A Sketch* encodes a system of perception, bred of both objective and subjective values. The aim was to differentiate an unnamed and, hence unknown, flora into classes of horticultural significance, bringing the ‘total strangers, with other configurations, other economy, and other qualities’ into European proximity as living and pressed specimens, seeds, flowers, illustrated images and aesthetic connotations. As a document with broader popular appeal, *A Sketch* is pre-ecological in character and intent as it stylistically incorporates taxonomy and aesthetics.

Four essential themes found in the document will be addressed: the character of the broader landscape expressed by native vegetation, the horticultural object, the commoditised plant, and the named plant. Keeping in mind the mystique of colonial Western Australia, Lindley sets out to sketch the Swan River environment through concerted detail on taxonomic families. The beauty of privileged New World specimens implies the inadequacy of less appealing species in the imagination of nineteenth-century European botanists and horticulturalists. In Lindley’s terms, the horticultural object was a visibly demarcated form, construed along the same lines as a lifeless artefact of appreciation and evaluated for its beauty as an object. The treatment of non-visual senses embeds immediate sensory experience within prospective capitalistic enterprise and commercial values. The senses of taste and smell, in particular, could be transmuted into economic terms. Closely linked here, taxonomic naming is deployed as a mode of stratifying plants along quasi-social hierarchies of orders and families with evaluations of beauty as discriminating nodes along the chain.

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Words and images: The anatomy of a botanical document

British horticulturalist and botanist, Dr. John Lindley, held several highly esteemed positions in the world of professional botany, including Professor of Botany at University College in London. A prolific author on botanical subjects, as well as the last editor of the serial Edwards’s Botanical Register (1815-1847), Lindley published the journal for about thirty years between 1829 and 1847, including in the serial many of his own writings on botany. The Botanical Register was an illustrated horticultural magazine, established by the natural history artist Sydenham Edwards in 1815. Before he died in 1819, leaving editorship to Lindley, Edwards illustrated five volumes of the magazine with the botanist John Bellenden Ker Gawler authoring most of the textual descriptions. Edwards had been a watercolour artist with Curtis’s Botanical Magazine, which began publishing in 1787 and is now the longest running botanical magazine in the world. Hence, A Sketch arose out of the tradition of botanical publications combining text and illustrations, and throughout the work there is a cross-current between written and graphic expository forms.

A Sketch scientifically named and identified two-hundred and eighty-three new plant taxa, whilst reviewing the classificatory observations of naturalists, explorers and settlers in Western Australia, including botanists Charles von Hügel, Stephan Endlicher, Charles Fraser, Robert Brown, and James Drummond. Adept at identifying gaps of knowledge in early nineteenth-century botanical science and the need for new publications in emerging areas of global plant knowledge, Lindley coalesced the ‘several scattered notices of Swan River plants’ into A Sketch, giving the most complete and concise portrait of Southwest plants available at the time. Lindley issued A Sketch as an appendix to Edwards’s Botanical Register. Nine hand-coloured lithographs by an unidentified artist, along with four wood-cuts, accompany the fifty-eight page discussion. Part I, containing pages 1-16 and plates 1-4, was issued on 1 November 1839. Part II, consisting of pages 17-32 and plates 5-7, was published on 1 December 1839. As Part III, the final pages 33-58 and plates 8 and 9, were issued on 1 January 1840.

Before Lindley’s account, the only significant published European flora of Western Australia was von Hügel and Endlicher’s 1837 Latin work Enumeratio plantarum quas in Novae Hollandiae ora australoccidentali, compiled from the pressed collections of von Hügel. However, unlike Enumeratio plantarum, A Sketch addresses a horticulturally minded audience and is less a technical treatise than a union of embellished description and objective classificatory nomenclature. Prior to von Hügel

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11 Lindley, A Sketch p. i.

and Endlicher, written works focusing on Swan River Colony plants appear mostly as abbreviated scientific articles or popularised narrative accounts in botanical journals. In 1830, Colonial Botanist of New South Wales, Charles Fraser, published ‘Remarks on the botany, &c. of the banks of the Swan River’ in Hooker’s botanical miscellany. A member of Stirling’s 1827 expedition to Western Australia, Fraser penned the narrative account of the flora in compelling visual detail, which captures a sense of awe and intrigue. Fraser precedes Lindley in the use of aesthetic appeal in written depictions of colonial biota, commenting that ‘I observed quantities of a species of Brunonia growing in great luxuriance on the margin of a salt marsh; its flowers of a brilliant sky-blue’.\textsuperscript{13} Intervening between Fraser and Lindley, other brief accounts included Scottish botanist Robert Brown’s paper ‘General view of the botany of the vicinity of Swan River’, published in the \textit{Journal of the Royal Geographic Society} in 1832. The paper was compiled primarily from Fraser’s 1827 collection, from which Brown received specimens through Alexander Macleay and James Mangles, totalling one hundred and forty Swan River species.\textsuperscript{14}

Unlike many of the naturalists from whom he draws, Lindley never set foot on Western Australian soils, declaring early in the document that he founded his conclusions on the previous observations of explorers and botanists like Brown and Fraser, as well as the collections of Mangles supplied by Molloy and Drummond. Whilst some judgements of beauty were deduced from living specimens growing in English gardens, others depended completely on dried examples. The genus \textit{Tribonanthes} are ‘plants of no beauty, as far as can be ascertained by their appearance in the form of dried specimens’.\textsuperscript{15} Lindley acknowledges his reliance on other collections and that ‘the materials from which the following sketch has been drawn up are the foregoing documents, and an herbarium of about 1000 species, formed by the communications of Mr. James Drummond, now resident in the Colony, Captain James Mangles’ and others.\textsuperscript{16} A significant omission in \textit{A Sketch} is the oversight of the collector Georgiana Molloy, whose superior pressed specimens strongly informed Lindley’s conclusions. \textit{A Sketch} was based largely on a collection supplied in Molloy’s first dispatch of plants to England in 1838.\textsuperscript{17} \textit{A Sketch} therefore is more than a technical document about plants; it is a record of cultural information networks, circulating seeds, specimens and ideas, in the colonial currents of Western Australian botany.

\textsuperscript{13} Fraser, C. (1830). Remarks on the Botany of the Banks of Swan River, Isle of Buache, Baie Geographie, and Cape Naturaliste. \textit{Botanical Miscellany}, 1, 221-236.


\textsuperscript{15} Lindley, \textit{A Sketch} p. xlv.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid p. ii.

\textsuperscript{17} Moyal, ‘Collectors’ p. 336.
Metaphors and misnomers: Characterising the Swan River Colony

Basing opinions on the reports of early nineteenth-century explorers and visitors, Europeans tended to regard the Australian landscape and its plants as, not only distant and unknown, but anomalous and inverted. The art historian Bernard Smith summarises a predominant early attitude towards Australian nature as inversion or ‘the belief that the natural productions of Australia were novel creations and that the characteristic features of Australian nature were contrariety and eccentricity’. As a consequence of the perception of the flora as confounding, Lindley’s document attends to the task of suffusing the consciousness of a northern readership with images of the more prominent Swan River botanical families, sorted taxonomically and described with compelling visual detail.

Carter argues that scientific taxonomy enabled the assimilation of unfamiliar Australian plants into a universalised system of translocated specimens:

Equipped with the artificial system of Linnaeus, novelty ceased to present a problem. Utterly strange forms became type specimens. Less curious plants might be assigned to existing genera. The taxonomy depended on no close examination.

Lindley’s perceptual portrait juxtaposed desirable and displeasing groupings. A contemporary reader is given a glimpse into the botanist’s grappling with the task of systematising Swan River plants into a comprehensible schema. As the historian Keith Thomas plainly states about early eighteenth-century taxonomy, ‘these classificatory schemes represented an ambitious attempt to impose a new form of intellectual order upon the natural world’. Moreover, in the view of Thomas, the hierarchy of early taxonomy paralleled the stratification of society into kingdoms, tribes and nations. A Sketch reiterates the taxonomic sorting of plants into a quasi-social hierarchy but with distinct aesthetic judgements of beauty or no beauty.

Certain families of plants indicate the character of the Swan River as an antipodal place. More than other botanical families of the new colony, the abundant, water-loving carnivorous Sundew family or Droseraceae ‘evidence…the springy nature of the soil at Swan River’. The primeval Proteaceae, including the profuse genera Banksia and Hakea, forms a distinguishable aspect of the visual

18 Again Martin A New Land & Ryan The Cartographic Eye are illustrative here.
20 Carter, The Road p. 20.
21 Thomas, Man p. 65.
22 Lindley, A Sketch p. xx.

character of the landscape: ‘No where is the many-faced appearance, from which these plants derive their name, more conspicuous than at the Swan River, where they are extremely numerous’. The colony is the ‘headquarters’ of the Haemodoraceae family, including the iconic Kangaroo Paws ‘to which the expression “nullibi copiosae” [not widespread] recently applied to it, is no longer applicable; for at the Swan River they seem to form about one-fiftieth of the species’. Written and illustrated images of distinctive plant families evoked the general sense of Swan River place in the imaginations of popular audiences across seas.

With similar attention to the correspondence between plant groupings and landscape character, Fraser’s ‘Remarks on the botany’ relates narratively the appearance of Swan River environs. In addition to setting out a comparative geography between the western and eastern colonies, Fraser’s report deploys a comparative aesthetics of flora with commensurate emphasis on concepts of beauty in the plant world. As an example, he speaks of ‘two other species of the same genus [Metrosideros], but of less beauty’. Alternating between places of barren and infertile appearance to those of luxurious and promising verdure, the Swan River landscape is described as abruptly variable in character and contradictory.

Like Fraser and Lindley, Brown also attempted a sketch of the visual character of the Swan River vegetation. The Proteaceae are “the most striking, as well as the most extensive…tribe which, from its general dispersion, and the remarkable forms of its numerous genera and species, includes many of the chief peculiarities of the vegetation of New Holland”. Other species which impart a particular character, or the ‘chief peculiarities’, to the Southwest landscape included the Zamia palm (Macrozamia niedeli) and the Christmas Tree (Nuytsia floribunda). The more conspicuous, though anomalous, plants ‘which greatly contribute to give a character to the landscape’ included bullanock or Kingia australis. In contemporary scientific dispute, Kingia is assigned to the Dasypogonaceae, a small plant family presently unrecognised by the official world taxonomic system Angiosperm Phylogeny Group.

23 Ibid p. xxx.
24 Ibid p. xliii.
25 Fraser, ‘Remarks’ p. 228.
27 Ibid p. 17.
Springing from the stylistic precedents of Brown and Fraser, Lindley considers the peculiarities of the Swan River flora, both in terms of singularity and eccentricity. Many early Australian botanists struggled with the subversion of botanical norms by the endemic taxa, specially adapted to conditions of low soil nutriment, solar exposure and high geological stability.\textsuperscript{29} The inflorescence of \textit{Calothamnus} ‘is so peculiar as to deserve to become the subject of special enquiry’.\textsuperscript{30} The configurations of other species are strange and befuddling, falling outside the scope of taxonomy at the time: ‘\textit{D. Quadrilatera} has leaves which look more like objects prepared to puzzle a geometer than any thing already known in the vegetable kingdom’.\textsuperscript{31} Commonplace expectations of natural history are turned upside-down. \textit{Jacksonia densiflora} are ‘very strange looking plants, with branches so like leaves that they would certainly be taken for them by an incautious observer’.\textsuperscript{32} Certain floristic species of the Swan River Colony challenge conventions of botany formulated through observation of taxa elsewhere, yet the evaluations reiterate visual values originating in taxonomy and aesthetics.

Lindley employs a distinct figurative strategy, one used throughout colonial history and preserved today in the common names of plants.\textsuperscript{33} Old World analogues—small \textit{heath-like} flowers—bring the foreignness of Southwest species into the familiar corridors of commonplace botanical experience. Comparisons to European analogues recur in the English names of Swan River species, including conspicuous examples of catachresis such as \textit{sheoak} (\textit{Allocasuarina fraseriana}), \textit{holly-leaved dryandra} (\textit{Banksia sessilis} or parrotbush) and Swan River \textit{mahogany} (\textit{Eucalyptus marginata} or jarrah) to name only a few. Old World metaphors are expository devices for depicting the Swan River flora through the comfortable language of a European readership. The difficulty of envisioning and explaining the visible forms of the flora necessitated the use of rhetorical tropes to connote new taxa. \textit{Cycloigne} ‘calls to mind the European species of \textit{Onobrychis’},\textsuperscript{34} whereas a species of sundew bears ‘bright scarlet bulbs the size of the largest kind of hazel nut’.\textsuperscript{35} \textit{A Sketch} calls upon linguistic techniques to bring the strange configurations and economies of Swan River species, and the broader landscape, into the familiar topographies of European natural history.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{29} See Seddon, \textit{The Old Country}.
\textsuperscript{30} Lindley, \textit{A Sketch} p. ix.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid p. xv.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid p. xiii.
\textsuperscript{33} See Carter, \textit{The Road} p. 29 for an analysis of the naming practices of Banks.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid p. xvi.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid p. xx.
\textsuperscript{36} See Carter, \textit{The Road} p. 29.
Vision and beauty: The horticultural object

Whereas some plant taxa could be classified as horticultural objects, others were objects of no beauty, and therefore of no potential commercial value as decorative additions to European plantings. A Sketch exemplifies the meaning of objectification as literally ‘object-making’. Allied to taxonomy as an instrument for inscribing the gross morphology of flora into a recorded form, botanical illustration enciphers the aesthetic features of plants. Through both images and words, the text’s union of illustrative art and taxonomic categorisation towards species identification privileges the sense of sight. A visual discourse of aesthetics necessitates the distancing of the perceiver from the ‘horticultural object’. Although the work of taxonomy is undertaken through careful scrutiny and tactile dissection of plant specimens, the resulting depiction, based on a perceptual evaluation by Lindley and others, encodes a system of visual values that isolates and freezes a specimen in time and space.

The European quest for the ‘horticultural object’ idealised or rejected plants according to pleasing formal criteria. As horticultural objects, select species could be propagated in the formal gardens of the northern hemisphere and thereby reflected compositional ideals of garden beauty developed outside of Western Australia. Thus, the horticultural object is a circumscribed and extracted object of visual art. Carter critiques incisively the taxonomic object of the natural world, which in Lindley’s terms, is furthermore an aestheticised object:

"Each object, found, translated into a scientific fact and detached from its historical and geographical surroundings, becomes a complete world in itself. It loses all power to signify beyond itself, to suggest lines of development or the subtler influences of climate, ground and aspect. In short, its ecology, its existence in a given, living space is lost in the moment of scientific discovery."

For example, plate 7 of Laxmannia grandiflora and a specimen of Pipe Lily (Johnsonia pubescens) displays anatomised plant organs arranged at the bottom of the page (Figure 1).

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38 Carter, The Road p. 22.
A Sketch disseminated information to the European public on the potential to cultivate certain aesthetically worthy Southwest plants in Old World gardens. Its overarching objective was to estimate the suitability of certain taxa for inclusion in European plantings, but suitability in Lindley’s terms is ascertained along two-dimensional lines. The text is therefore both horticultural in emphasis and commercial in character, with one outcome expressed as the prevention of ‘double names’ through the standardisation of the taxonomic nomenclature for the emerging plant taxa. Building on the publications of forebears Fraser, Endlicher and Brown, A Sketch consolidated various plant names to create a standardised reference for the readership to determine ‘whether particular species are worth possession, either for the sake of their beauty or singularity [emphasis added]’: 39

The frequent arrival of seeds from this Colony, the excellent state in which they are received, and the facility with which further supplies can be procured, appear to render some Botanical account

39 Lindley, A Sketch p. i.
of this remarkable country a desirable appendage to a work which, like the Botanical Register, forms an original record of new plants introduced, or worthy of introduction, to our Gardens.\textsuperscript{40}

By ‘Gardens’, Lindley intimates formal decorative European plantings, valued for their beauty, in contrast to functional edible gardens or Aboriginal bush gardens, valued for their sustenance.\textsuperscript{41} The term ‘singularity’ implies the cultivated plant’s material uniqueness, the term also underlies the extraction of the plant from its ecological associations, fixing a specimen as an isolated, translocated and even appropriated dead object of appreciation. As a work with horticultural emphasis, \textit{A Sketch} offers only minor reference to potential climatic or habitat differences between the hemispheres of the world, including differences of soil content and seeding regimens, that would affect propagation and cultivation. Rather than ecological or even horticultural in focus, \textit{A Sketch} considers the beauty, prettiness, strikingness, colour, brilliance and flowering variation of different Swan River species. As stressed above, ‘beauty or singularity’ signifies the inner perceptual imagination that underpins the work. Beauty is largely accorded through the criteria of form and colour, a theme also found in Brown and Fraser.

\textit{A Sketch} strives towards popular appeal, in order to disseminate information about the horticultural and commercial viability of plants. As a textual resource for nineteenth-century horticultural markets, \textit{A Sketch} capitalises on the impact of aestheticised images of Swan River taxa.\textsuperscript{42} As part of a strategy of promoting indigenous plants in European industries, aesthetic language compels feelings of attraction through insinuations of beauty or strikingness. As with Lindley, Fraser’s descriptions of the Swan River flora carry similar overtones, possibly for the purpose of increasing the influx of settlers to the western colony. Appealing largely through the power of sight and drawing extensively upon the capacity of the mind to visualise, plants are depicted as objects of visual discourse to forward colonial perogatives. Beautiful plants attract both settlers, drawn to the promise of fertile land, and purchasers seeking translocated beauty. The Myrtle family is composed of ‘bushes, with small heath-like leaves, and white, yellow, or purple flowers, of great brilliancy’ and forming ‘a most striking object in the vegetation’.\textsuperscript{43} Lindley constructs the Swan River flora as objects of art,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid p. i.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} For a seminal reference on Aboriginal gardens of the Southwest, see Hallam, S. J. (1975). \textit{Fire and Hearth: A study of Aboriginal usage and European usurpation in south-western Australia}. (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies).
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid p. lviii.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid p. v.
\end{itemize}
conceiving of particular plants as isolated jewels in the monolithic rough of the Western Australian bush.\(^{44}\)

But whilst some species will be horticultural objects, others will be of no beauty and not suitable for inclusion in European plantings. Such species fall outside beauty speak. Lindley refers to the Goodeniaceae in largely dismissive terms with most of the family ‘not at all suited to the objects of cultivators’.

With the exception of the fine royal blue Leschenaultias and the indigo Dampieras of the family, ‘all the other species, and there are many, are by no means beautiful objects’.\(^{46}\) Similarly, to further affirm the hierarchy of aesthetic evaluations, in reference to the genus Stenopetalum, Lindley writes that ‘none of them [are] of any Horticultural interest’ and the Stackhousias encountered are ‘species of no beauty’.\(^{47}\)

The incantation of beauty inversed continues from the beginning to the end of A Sketch. Attractive categories are visually denominated, even though the senses of taste or smell might be richly pleased. Species of Rhodanthe are ‘annuals of no beauty’\(^{48}\) and Cylindrosorus and Myriocephalus ‘are of no beauty’.\(^{49}\) Grasses and sedges ‘have no connection with Horticultural objects’.\(^{50}\) However, while objects of no beauty fail to meet criteria of visual value, the same species might be extensively aromatic or tactile. Hence, the abnegation of multi-sensory experience is prerequisite for an aesthetics of beauty. The Myrtle family is ‘not in general so handsome as those already mentioned’ even though ‘the fragrance of which exceeded any thing’.\(^{51}\) Even though it might be exceedingly aromatic, a plant is pleasing as long as it appears so. Two species of the genus Lyperanthus ‘have no pretensions to beauty, but have a very singular appearance with their dingy sad-coloured flowers, and are very fragrant’.\(^{52}\) The sense of smell here is excluded from Lindley’s evaluation, and colour is placed along a hierarchy of emotion induced by aesthetic evaluations: singular, sad-coloured, not beautiful but aromatic.

\(^{44}\) For a critique of the construction of plants as objects of art, see Ryan, J. (2009). Plants that perform for you? From floral aesthetics to floraesthesis in the Southwest of Western Australia. In Australian Humanities Review, 47, 117-140

\(^{45}\) Ibid p. xxvi.

\(^{46}\) Ibid p. xxvii.

\(^{47}\) Ibid p. xxxviii.

\(^{48}\) Ibid p. xxiii.

\(^{49}\) Ibid p. xxiv.

\(^{50}\) Ibid p. xxiv.

\(^{51}\) Ibid p. x.

\(^{52}\) Ibid p. liii.
Botany and commercialisation: Sensory experience in economic terms

Whilst species with ‘no pretensions to beauty’ might be excluded from formal Old World gardens, fragrant or edible plants could be capitalised upon through trade. Thus, the reader is exposed to Lindley’s speculation about the prospective economic importance of certain aromatic or palatable species. Instead of a hierarchy of beauty, A Sketch in some passages propagates a hierarchy of economic values linked to non-visual pleasure. Indeed, the commodification of Southwest Australian plants is found throughout historical booster literature, such as by Ogle and Groser, written to attract colonists to the west coast of New Holland.53 The conceptualisation of native plants as potential global exports marks the beginning of colonial history, as exemplified by the sandalwood export industry.54 The smell, taste, sound or sensation of a plant may be etched into its nomenclature, yet the history of plant sensuality is also one of economic codification. The fragrant leaves and half-ripe fruits of Hedaroma ‘might be worth collecting for the use of the perfumer; and if so they would furnish a new and most agreeable article of luxury to Europe’.55 Commodified as exports, indigenous plant foods like the Drosera ‘may be easily obtained for the purpose of exportation, and may assist the poorer settlers in turning to account the produce of their land’.56

The requisitioning of native species for global enterprise characterises colonial emigration literature of Western Australia, in which rich descriptions of the landscape persuade potential emigrants. Historian James Belich identifies a correlation between certain types of published material and the practices of settlement, arguing that “formal settlerism manifested itself in “booster literature” or “emigration literature”: books, pamphlets, newspapers and journal articles, lectures, and advertisements [that] almost monopolized published information about emigration destinations”.57 Ocular-centric attitudes towards indigenous plants amplify the appeal of the booster literature of the antipodal Swan River colony. Published in 1839 by Nathaniel Ogle, The Colony of Western Australia was created to entice ‘emigrants’, ‘capitalists’ and ‘the younger branches of the higher classes’ to the nascent colony. To serve the agenda of settlement, Ogle’s book relies on a visual vocabulary of plants with the speaker situated at a perceptual distance: ‘The earth is enamelled with flowers; at

55 Lindley, A Sketch p. vii.
56 Ibid p. xxi.
some seasons the meadows have been compared, when at a distance, to surfaces of golden chintz’. 58 Hence, the visual appeal of plant forms amplifies the persuasiveness of booster literature.

By no means should Lindley’s work be classed as booster literature. However, the links between aestheticism and settlerism found in the literature of Ogle and Groser, tied to commercial and colonial prerogatives, is reiterated in A Sketch. Lindley ponders other ways to commercialise Swan River species. These values emerged through non-visual pleasure, particularly the fragrance and palatability of the plants. The Sundew family ‘appear likely to be in some cases of commercial value as dyer’s plants’. 59 The bulbs of certain species possess ‘a deep scarlet powder secreted by the scales of the bulb…more like the colour obtained from Archil than any thing else to which I can compare it’. 60 Archil, a violet dye from lichens of the Canary Islands, serves as a trope overlaying the Swan River flora with pre-existing commercial meanings. The orchid Glossodia brunonis has ‘large roots, enveloped in numerous coarse skins, and as sweet as a chesnut [sic], even when dried; they would certainly afford a delicate article of food’. 61 Lindley’s evaluation of the non-visual aspects of the flora carries values of trade and commodity, regardless of existing Aboriginal networks of sustenance, and reflecting settlerism and the imperatives of colonial appropriation.

Colonisation and classification: The naming of plants

Both scientifically systematic and artistically concerned, Lindley’s publication centres around classification with a horticultural directive. A Sketch shows the inner workings of the value-laden process of sorting species through name-granting, a practice engaged in by European botanists classifying New World taxa. Lindley attends to standardising names for species in colonial reaches and for attaining uniformity of the descriptive terminology for plants in which ‘half a dozen names were proposed in different places to express the same idea’. 62 As Lindley lamented, the language of botany and the naming of plants varied so enormously that botany suffered from a crisis of communication: ‘the language of Botany is marvellously in want of reformation’. 63 Both Thomas and Schiebinger have observed that the standardisation of names entails the stratification of the plant

59 Lindley, A Sketch p. xxi.
60 Ibid p. xxi.
61 Ibid p. li.
63 Ibid p. i.

world into social hierarchies: families, classes and orders. Taxonomic hierarchies in *A Sketch* are further conjoined to judgements of beauty and aesthetic assertions.

The naming of a plant is the ultimate point of reference in the discourse of botanical science, but names are also cultural productions. Nomenclature enciphers a confluence of cultural values, reiterated in every utterance and re-utterance of names. Before the arrival of colonists, the plants of the Swan River were denoted by Aboriginal names. The pre-colonial Christmas Tree *Nuytsia floribunda* invoked neither the Christian holiday nor the Dutch explorer Nuyts, but rather a web of indigenous life ways inherent to the appellant *mudja*. Hence the overlayering of settler terminology onto indigenous signifiers is a nuance of Western Australian colonisation and empire. Arranged in stratigraphic layers, the plant world becomes a palimpsest of nomenclatures. On the power asymmetries of plant naming practices, Skene comments that

the early settlers overlaid the place names of the indigenous people with their own; the botanists were likewise guilty of erasing Aboriginal plant names and imposing a different way of relating to the flora of Western Australia.

In taxonomy, name-granting is the defining practice for universalising plant knowledge, whereas Aboriginal names are endemic to the Swan River or the broader Southwest region, like the plants the names denote. In an Aboriginal sense, names are coterminous with the plants themselves and the habitats with which they are symbiotic.

In taxonomic terms, names govern the universal expression of information, whilst generally minimising the conveyance of local character or sentiment.

Often names for Southwest plants commemorate significant male figures in the history of botany, although in Western Australia women collectors were pivotal to the development of early plant taxonomy. *Manglesia* was ‘named by Endlicher in compliment to Captain James Mangles…to whose exertions the country owes the greater part of the plants as yet introduced from this colony into our gardens’. As Skene notes, ‘in eighteenth and nineteenth century Australia, exploration and


67 Skene, ‘The Power’.

the concomitant act of naming was an overwhelmingly masculine activity: there seems to be little “space” for women in this founding practice of cultural definition’. Like the names of mountains, deserts, bodies of waters and localities, plant names often perpetuate the pioneer myth as honorifics for explorers and important figures in colonisation, impressing a gendered convergence of values, histories and ideologies upon flora.

The newly identified genus *Loudonia* is ‘a tribute to the eminent services rendered to Horticultural Botany by John Claudius Loudon, Esq. author of the Arboretum Britannicum, and of many other valuable works well known in every part of the civilized world’. Furthermore, named *Hedaroma latifolium* by Lindley for its rich fragrance, but now known as *Darwinia citriodora*, the colonial and contemporary taxonomic names for Lemon-scented Darwinia encode natural history through the evocation of Darwin, juxtaposed to the fragrance of a lemon. Hence, within Lindley’s larger project of nomenclatural standardisation, *A Sketch* is both a technical output and a cultural production, relating plants to humans through a system of naming. Constrained by the mechanical, reductionistic and poetically-cautious nature of botanical enquiry, *A Sketch* invokes names and judgements of beauty, but disengages endemic knowledge of the Swan River plants, with the author Lindley himself positioned at a speculative distance.

**Absence and aesthetics: Conclusion**

As an important early publication in the cultural history of Southwest flora, *A Sketch* shows how subjective judgements may be inherent to scientific documents of this period. In its focus on identifying horticultural objects through taxonomising, *A Sketch* records the commonplace transhemispherical exchange between the colonies and Europe, through plant material, such as seeds, flowers, and whole dried specimens, but also in the form of values towards plants, preserved both in perceptual concepts and in idealised images of horticultural interest. Intently prioritising visual evaluations and visually-derived values, *A Sketch* suggests the speculative leanings of taxonomy and the hierarchical arrangement of life forms based on principles of beauty.

Rather than situated in regional awareness and indigenous understandings, *A Sketch* is globally focused in design. To this end, the document evidences the core impetus of taxonomic botany towards standardised knowledge of the plant world. Whereas local plant names and understandings inhabit regions, taxonomy universalises, not only through nomenclature, but also through value judgements of beauty. Most glaringly for a modern reader, *A Sketch* absences the contextualised plant and the strata of ecological relations embedding species within their environments and to other

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70 Ibid p. xlii.
animals and plants, a reality now being considered by botanists, such as Stephen Hopper, researching Western Australian plant life. As contemporary ecological science reveals, landscapes and plants that look idyllic but idle, unproductive, unattractive or repulsive—as objects of beauty or no beauty—are biologically critical to a host of organisms, including human beings.

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