

**‘Since my dear Boy’s death’:
Grief, Botany and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century Western
Australian Bush**

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In the paddock behind my grandparents’ house on our family property, beneath a stand of pines on ground made dusty by the milking cows that rested there in the heat of the day, was a square of wrought iron fencing. The sharp, decorative palisades enclosed a small headstone, on which was written: *Hamish White, 1976 to 1977*. ‘Why,’ I asked my father when I was young, swinging on the gate to the yard as I watched him mix feed for some waiting calves, ‘does the grave have a fence around it?’ My father placed the lid on the bucket of feed and shook it, then replied, ‘To keep the cows out.’ I leaned over the gate to give it momentum, and asked another question, ‘Why did you have it on the farm and not in town?’ My father tipped the feed into the calves’ trough, grunting, ‘Town was too far away.’ He didn’t elaborate, and when the bucket was empty he went through the gate. I jumped off and latched it, while the calves edged unsteadily towards the trough.

Only when I was older did I realise the significance of the site of a grave: that the space was hallowed and the fence was there to prevent sheep and cattle from entering it. When I was older still and began reading literary criticism, I found that such graves held a place in the national consciousness. Elizabeth Webby, in her essay ‘The Grave in the Bush,’ contemplates the significance of visual and literary representations of the bush grave, commenting that it ‘usually functions as an indication of ownership of the land or the desire for such legitimacy. While the unburied body may be consumed by the land, in the sense that it is likely to be eaten by dingoes, crows, or other fauna, the buried body is at home in it’ (34). This dovetails with a remark my mother had made, that they wanted to keep Hamish close to home. It seemed apt, too, that for a family whose land was their livelihood, their child would be buried in the place that enabled them to live. Nearly 150 years earlier, Georgiana Molloy, one of the first European emigrants to Augusta in southwest Western Australia, also lost her child. She buried her daughter in an alien landscape, the hostility of which was magnified by her grief. At the same time, by placing a part of herself that she had nurtured for nine months into the soil, she expressed a tentative acceptance of her new home. As with my parents, the land helped her to persevere.

Raised in England, Georgiana was a woman accustomed to a life of leisure. She lived near Carlisle until her gentleman father was killed by a fall from his horse, after which time the family moved to Rugby (Hasluck 13). When she agreed to John Molloy’s proposal of marriage, Georgiana knew she would need to leave her family and sail to the opposite side of the world. She would also have known, boarding the ship at Portsmouth in October 1829, that she was pregnant (Lines 79). Yet she never expected to find herself, at the end of that voyage, giving birth in a tent on the shores of Augusta.

On 24th May 1830, the day after Georgiana’s twenty-fifth birthday, it was raining so hard that water seeped through her canvas tent, muddying the soil underfoot. An umbrella was held over her as contractions wracked her body, while outside the thin grey trees clashed in the wind. She gripped her husband’s broad hand, sweat dripping down her cheeks. When she

held her tiny girl in her arms, she couldn't stop staring at those exquisite blue eyes and wet, dark hair. Here, at last, was solace for the sun's relentless glare, the persistent flies, and those trees that looked flayed. The next day, however, Georgiana found her daughter's dress soaked in blood because the umbilical cord hadn't been properly tied. A few days later, the girl had convulsions and her feet were icy. There were tiny white spots like blisters on her tongue, her temperature veered between hot and cold, and she began screaming and wouldn't stop. Georgiana gave the baby to her husband and pressed her hands over her eyes. Eleven days after the birth, her baby died. Georgiana listened to birds crying hoarsely from the trees, and hated them.¹

Among Georgiana's archives in the Carlisle Archive Centre is a detailed account of her daughter's declining health after the birth. It is not clear if this undated account is a diary entry, or if it was addressed to a particular reader, but the careful cataloguing of details of the baby's illness, such as her breathing, expressions, hunger and evacuations, appears to be an attempt to make sense of the event. The success of this endeavor may have been limited, for three years later, on 1st October 1833, Georgiana wrote to her friend Helen Storey, who had also lost a child, 'I truly sympathise with you, for language refuses to utter what I experienced when mine died in my arms in this dreary land, with no one but Molloy near me' (501A). Georgiana's use of the phrase 'language refuses to utter' indicates the inadequacy of words to express her obliterating grief. Facts could be stated, plainly and baldly, but not the sadness to which they gave rise. Sometimes it was simply the absence of words that said the most.

As a child who enjoyed order, I occasionally emptied out the contents of cupboards, then sorted and restacked them neatly therein. One summer's afternoon, bored during the endless school holidays, I attacked the dressing table on the verandah. I lifted out sheafs of paper, notebooks, cards and tarnished silverware, grouping everything according to size. Among the notebooks was one given to my mother by the hospital in which she gave birth to Hamish. As I was inquisitive and liked reading, I opened it up. Inside, in my mother's round cursive, was a list of dates and notes of Hamish's growing height, weight, and when he began crawling. I turned the pages until, halfway down on the left hand side, I came to the entry, 'Hamish died.' The rest of the notebook was blank. Quietly, I closed the covers and finished stacking the papers. I placed them carefully in the back corner of the dressing table, then went outside into the bright sunshine.

Georgiana found that not only was she unable to recount her daughter's death to her friend, but she was also at a loss to adequately describe the surroundings in which it occurred, and in which she was forced to live. In a letter to her sister Elizabeth Besley, dated 9th November 1832, she referred to the bush as 'the unbounded limits of thickly clothed dark green forests where nothing can be described to feast the imagination' (501A). Her words suggest a monotonous mass which allowed little light; perhaps an appropriate metaphor given the devastating start to her life at Augusta. Her later reference to the 'dreary land' of Australia, mentioned in the letter to Helen Storey about her baby's death, indicates how Georgiana's perception of the Australian landscape was conditioned by loss—both of her English homeland and of her child. It was a place marked by bitterness, not by hope and inspiration.

This perspective extended to Georgiana's depiction of her child's grave. To Helen Storey, she wrote, 'Its grave, though sodded with British clover, looks so singular and solitary in this wilderness, of which I can scarcely give you an idea' (501A). The clover to which she refers is that which her husband planted on the grave, in keeping with the attempts of many

European settlers to replicate the landscape as it existed at home. However, the uncertain results indicate how overwhelmed the settlers were by their surroundings. The clover looked out of place, as they did, and it was isolated, as they were. As Georgiana concludes, the enormous strangeness of the landscape, and the grief which it had occasioned, were simply beyond expression. Her reference to 'wilderness' also recalls Elizabeth Webby's observation that the need for burial in the nineteenth century 'can be interpreted as a desire to conquer and control the land and a fear of being conquered by it, as signified by the body at the mercy of the wilderness' (37). By way of example, Webby refers to nineteenth century male writers such as Horace Flower and Charles Harpur, and artists including Fred McCubbin and Tom Roberts from the Heidelberg School, who used the image of the grave in the bush as a way of establishing dominion over the landscape. In a country striving to establish itself and to create national stories of triumph and prosperity by making the land arable, such images were inevitable. However, Georgiana was a female writer of private letters, more interested in expressing her connection with her surroundings than in contributing to the narrative of nation building. While a fear of being engulfed is conveyed by her description of the grave, with its singularity pitted against the ubiquitous wilderness, the creation of the site harboured a nascent attempt at acceptance.

Perhaps because language had failed her, Georgiana and her husband attempted to articulate their grief for their daughter in a symbolic way. In her undated account of her daughter's death, Georgiana refers to the grave more favourably:

Some time after her burial, dear Molloy went unknown to me and sowed Rye Grass and Clover over it and has recently put some twigs across it to form a sort of trellice [sic] with the surrounding creepers which in this country are very numerous. I have also sowed Clover & Mignonette which are up & planted Pumpkins which will rapidly creep on the twigs over it & form a sort of Dome.
(DKEN/3/28/2)

The touching representation of the Australian creepers mingling with the English plants indicates an aspiration to come to terms with the forbidding landscape. Furthermore the creation of a trellis—a framework for climbing plants—shows a willingness to provide support so that the native Australian and imported English plants could grow together. William Lines also cites a letter Georgiana wrote to her mother in which she describes placing 'some little blue [native] flowers' on her daughter's body in the coffin (CRO DKEN/3/28/9, qtd 113), again suggesting Georgiana's responsiveness to her surroundings. Such positive interactions imply not so much Georgiana's desire to control or possess her environment, as steps towards acceptance.

These steps were made in tandem with Georgiana's waning faith, which was challenged by her child's death. As with many others of the nineteenth century middle class, she was strong in her Christian convictions, but three years after burying her daughter, she wrote to Helen Storey, 'I have not made the use of those afflictions God designed ... I thought I might have had one little bright object left me to solace all the hardships and privations I endured and have still to go through. It was wicked and I am not now thoroughly at peace' (501A). Georgiana felt guilty about her failure to abide by what Pat Jalland, in *Australian Ways of Death*, refers to as 'a spiritual trial to purify the parents' souls and teach survivors the lessons of God's will' (70). Georgiana's faltering faith was not an uncommon response from those living in the colonies, for whom the combination of 'social isolation, pioneer hardships and an initially alien environment could encourage an early move towards secularism or a

different kind of spirituality' (293). This was also shaped by the absence of clergymen, congregations and churches which left settlers in rural areas to create their own, personal rituals for death (Jalland 4-5), as Georgiana did with her simple bush burial. Not only did this burial signify a shift away from the intensity of her faith, but also as a budding attachment to her surroundings, one which was to become marked after the death of another child.

It was a November morning in 1837, warm and bright. The family—Georgiana, her husband Molloy, their daughters Sabina and Mary, and their son John—ate breakfast and played with John, who was in an exuberant mood. The servant Charlotte, entrusted with looking after the little boy, then left him in the care of his sister Mary, while Georgiana prepared to churn the milk. After ten minutes, Mary appeared without John. Charlotte became alarmed, for the pair were inseparable. He wore a bell in case he strayed into the bush, but they couldn't hear it. 'Have you been to the well?' Georgiana cried. Molloy frowned and quickly replied, 'Don't frighten yourself, he never goes there.' But Charlotte was already by the deep pool of water, crying out. They ran up, watching Charlotte pull the child from the water. Georgiana took her son, cradling him, and fell to her knees. Water soaked into her skirts. 'He cannot be gone!' She glanced up at her husband. 'Surely he's only sleeping?' Molloy leaned down and lifted the child away, his lips tightening. There was no breath. The medical man was at the Vasse, some fifty miles north. He knelt beside his wife with their child and shook his head. Georgiana folded her arms over her belly and bent her forehead to her knees. Molloy looked upon his only son, watching water trickle from his curls. He willed that small, powerful heart to beat again. His wife began to sob.²

As with her first child's death, Georgiana was compelled to put the event into words. However, where the first account was a factual document, the second was an impassioned account written to a stranger, Captain James Mangles. A member of the Royal Society and an amateur botanist, Mangles had connections with the Loddiges nurserymen of Hackney in London, and with Joseph Paxton, gardener at Chatsworth and designer of the Crystal Palace for the 1851 Great Exhibition. He was an adventurous man who was at sea for fifteen years, reaching the position of officer by the time he left the navy in 1815 (Lines 219). In 1831 he sailed to Perth to stay with his cousin Ellen Stirling, wife of James Stirling, the governor of Western Australia for ten years from its inception in 1828. During this sojourn he made contact with George Fletcher Moore, an early settler, and later requested him to collect specimens and seeds. Through Ellen Stirling, he also expanded his network of collectors (Lines 222). Georgiana was added to this network when she received a box of seeds and a letter from Mangles in December 1836.

Georgiana did not reply to Mangles until 21st March 1837, three months after she received his request. She wrote a brief, formal letter, mentioning repeatedly her lack of time, and temporarily excused herself from collecting seeds, writing that 'as all my former pursuits have necessarily been thrown aside (by the peremptory [sic] demand of my personal attention to my children and domestic drudgery) I feel that it will be long ere I can make any adequate return in Australian productions' (479A). However, in November of that year her son died. Two months later, on 25th January 1838, Georgiana began a long letter to Mangles, including the account of her son's accidental drowning and the announcement that, 'Since my dear Boy's death I have up to the present time daily employed myself in your service' (479A). Needing a diversion from her grief, Georgiana had drawn upon her skills in collecting flowers and went into the bush to collect seeds.

Georgiana's familiarity with collecting would have stemmed from her education as a young woman of leisure. Botany was a polite activity in the lives of English girls and women, being 'both a fashionable form of leisure and ... an intellectual pursuit' (Shteir 36). Georgiana also sailed to Australia with intentions of collecting, for she packed a *hortus siccus*, a book into which specimens were fastened for identification purposes. Her brother George had been 'anxious to employ me as a collector also,' she wrote to Mangles on 31st March 1837, but she had not found time for the pursuit. She had also, prior to this, collected Australian seeds which she intended to exchange for English seeds with her sister Eliza but, she wrote in a letter of 13th November 1833, 'Molloy forgot where he put them' (501A). Following her son's death, however, Georgiana did find time to collect for Mangles, and her perception of her surroundings began to shift. Where before she had referred to the bush as an indistinguishable mass of vegetation, now she focussed upon individual flowers and came to adore them.

On a rare afternoon on her own, while Molloy took care of their daughters Sabina and Mary, Georgiana saddled the horse and rode into the bush. The sunlight, broken by trees, fell lightly upon her shoulders, while sweat itched in the crooks of her elbows. She negotiated the horse around fallen logs, watching for snakes, and plucked a leaf from *Darwinia citriodora*, a low-lying shrub with red, bell-shaped flowers. She rubbed it between her fingers, releasing the raw scent of lemon. Colour snared her eye and she pulled up the horse. She turned her head and exhaled at an expanse of orange like a sun setting against the trees. It was the *Nuytsia floribunda*. Georgiana slid from the saddle, gathered the horse's reins in one hand and her dress in the other to step through the long grass. She knotted the reins to the low bough of a eucalyptus and untied the calico sheet from the saddle pack. Beneath the tree, where she thought the seeds most likely to fall, she unfolded the sheet and spread it out, pinning down its corners with rocks. Fortunately, it was a still day and the seeds would float directly onto the cloth. Although a headache, most likely from the fatigue, throbbed at the base of her neck, she remounted her horse and set off in search of the *Kingia*, a grass-like plant sprouting several heads. It was a distinct specimen, unlike the tiny *Drosera* which she relied upon her daughters to find. Being closer to the ground, the girls could spot the delicate mauve clusters more easily.³ Soon the trees thinned into dusty scrub, and she spied the spiky heads of the *Kingia* stretching from a blackened trunk that looked like it was wearing a skirt. Georgiana pulled a knife from her pocket and sawed off some of the heads. It was certainly an odd-looking plant, and nothing like anything that could be found in England. As she walked back to the *Nuytsia floribunda*, the memories of her son's smiles and golden hair were layered against the crinkly bark of a *Casuarina* and the sound of his bell woven among the harsh cries of cockatoos. Sometimes it seemed to her that, because she had buried her child in the Australian soil, and because that soil was responsible for the unbearably soft *Acacia* that bloomed in spring, the *Clematis* that wended delicately over shrubs, and the crops of *Asteraceae* that dusted the red soil like snow, she could not help but love it.

Georgiana's attentiveness to the plants was necessary because she believed she did not have an authorised means of naming them. Although she had a competent knowledge of English plants and was a dedicated gardener, like many of her female contemporaries she had no scientific understanding of botany. This was because it was impossible for women to participate in the institutions which formalised botanical science. They could not be 'members of the Royal Society or the Linnaean Society, could not attend meetings, read papers, or (with very rare exceptions) see their findings published in journals of those societies' (Shteir 37). Not only were they barred from such organisations, it was also difficult for them to understand the Linnaean system of classifying plants. This system, developed by

Carl Linnaeus in his *Systema Naturae* of 1735, ordered plants into 'classes' according to how many stamens (male parts) they had, and then into 'orders' according to their number of pistils (female parts). The classes and orders were given Latin names, but many women were not taught Latin. Access to the language therefore became a sign of a larger world 'to which some women wanted access but from which they were formally excluded' (Shteir 56).

Restrictions such as these led Georgiana to write to Mangles on 8th July 1840, 'I send two flowers of the ... I dare not say what, Dr Lindley must determine.' Dr Lindley was, ironically, the first professor of botany at University College, London, who was behind the movement to make botany more scientific, engineering a demarcation between what he called 'amusement for ladies' and botanical science, 'that occupation for the serious thoughts of man' (cited in Shteir 5). However, undeterred by her lack of scientific knowledge, Georgiana developed her own system, whereby she gave each flower and its seed a number. She then asked Mangles, in a letter of 25th January 1838, to 'oblige me by sending me the names of the different flowers according to their numbers; I have kept the numbers of each, and the duplicates of most of the Specimens that I might have the satisfaction of hearing some name attached to them' (479A). In this way, Georgiana was able to avoid the frustration created by using the Linnaean system, which plagued others new to Australian flora, such as James Edward Smith, founder of the Linnaean Society.

In *A Specimen of the Botany of New Holland* (1793), Smith described his attempts to fit the flora into a language not designed for it:

When a botanist first enters on the investigation of so remote a country as New Holland, he finds himself as it were in a new world. He can scarcely meet with any certain fixed points from which to draw his analogies; and even those that appear most promising are frequently in danger of misleading him. Whole tribes of plants, which at first sight seem familiar to his acquaintance, as occupying links in Nature's chain ... prove, on a nearer examination, total strangers, with other configurations, other oeconomy [sic], and other qualities; not only the species that present themselves are new, but most of the genera, and even natural orders. (9)

Smith's frustrations stemmed from a lack of correspondence to an existing system. They were no 'points,' 'links,' 'configurations,' nor 'orders,' all terms which suggest prior relationships. Yet where Smith found himself at a loss, for Georgiana the absence of a classification system gave rise to an entirely different response to her surroundings, resulting in a more poetic means of describing plants. She wrote to Mangles on 21st November 1838:

No 67 is very elegant, of uncommon foliage, the color [sic] of its blossoms a bright reddish lilac and very viscous; the plant with small white pendulous blossoms tipped with red is particularly beautiful and more like the flower of a dream. (479A)

By referring to plants only by number, Georgiana was free to make associations in a poetic and creative way, as signalled by the reference to the dreamlike flower. In addition, without the capacity to call the plants by their proper names, she was forced to pay greater attention to their attributes to recognise them, in this instance the colour and sap of the flower.

Such attentiveness was also necessary in her interactions with Charlotte Heppingstone, a young girl who remained at Augusta when Georgiana and her neighbours moved north to the Vasse. Charlotte collected seeds for Georgiana, and relied upon their descriptions for identification, as evidenced by a note she included with some seeds: 'I have obtained all the seeds but the one which is prickly—I do not know it by the description you gave me of it ... if you will send me a description of that seed I will endeavour to get it' (479A). Charlotte's note indicates that, without names, the correspondents needed to observe the plants' characteristics so as to identify them.

Georgiana's acuity with studying the plants and their environment led to increasing confidence in her work, and on 25th January 1838, after a year of collecting, she wrote to Mangles:

I have no hesitation in declaring that were I to accompany the box of Seeds to England, knowing as I do, their situation, time of flowering, soil and degree of moisture required with the fresh powers of fructification they each possess—I should have a very extensive conservatory or conservatories of none but plants from Augusta. (479A)

In this she was, as Susan K. Martin has observed, like other female botanists in the colonies such as Louisa Meredith in Van Diemen's Land and Catherine Parr Traill in Canada who, in remaining in one place and venturing out on excursions, developed their knowledge from 'prolonged and intimate contact with their local ecosystems' (31). This offered them an advantage over their more transient, male counterparts such as Ludwig Preiss, who stayed with Georgiana for a month and, as she wrote to Mangles on 14th March 1840 'informed me as to many of the names—but found many that he was quite a stranger to' (479A).

Although she relied on botanists such as Preiss and Mangles for the scientific names of plants, Georgiana was intelligent, innovative and dedicated enough to create her own system of knowledge about the specimens she encountered. As well as using description, she devised her own names for the plants to aid her collecting with Charlotte. She noted to Mangles in a letter of 31st January 1840 that Charlotte 'knows the names we ourselves used to distinguish them by' (479A). This tendency was akin to Catherine Parr Traill's, who emigrated to Canada in 1832 with her husband. As she tramped through the backwoods, she named plants as she encountered them, with no regard for their scientific names, explaining that, '[a]s much of the botany of these unsettled portions of the country are unknown to the naturalist, and the plants are quite nameless, I take the liberty of bestowing names upon them according to my inclination or fancy' (102). The names which these women coined never made it into botanical nomenclature, because they had been devised without a scientific structure, and without Latin. Yet it was precisely because of this lack of structure that the women engineered a deeply personal engagement with their surroundings. Martin highlights this in relation to Louisa Atkinson, a writer and botanist from New South Wales. In her first newspaper column in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'A Voice from the Country,' Atkinson lamented the lack of common names for native plants, asking her readers: 'How can we make a friend and a pet of a thing which even to our inmost minds we have laboriously to describe as *that* plant with the quinate leaf, or lance leaf, or so on?' (Atkinson 5, qtd in Martin 33). Atkinson's words suggest 'an authority derived from positioning the relationship to flowers in an intimate, personal, spiritual and therefore feminine sphere' (33). Gender, while barring women from one form of botanical knowledge, also facilitated another. In addition, Georgiana's familiarity with her surroundings resulted in a receptivity to the original names

of the plants—that is, those given to them by the Indigenous people. On describing a tree, she wrote to Mangles on 14th March 1840, ‘the Native name is “Danja” and I rather think it will turn out to be a Hakea’ (479A). That she had no difficulty keeping two naming systems in her mind indicates how she had a distinctly different relationship with her surroundings and with the Indigenous people who lived there, than those who named the plants in England.

Weak with illness, Georgiana reclined in the armchair in her room. Her newborn, Flora, slept in a crib beside her. The doors were open, letting in birdsong, fresh air, and the high chatter from her three other daughters playing beneath the peppermint trees. There was a moment of silence, then Sabina, the eldest, burst in with a cry. ‘Mama, here is a native! He’s brought you flowers.’ Georgiana held a finger to her lips, gesturing to the baby. With effort, she pushed herself up and walked carefully to the verandah. The fellow, tall and straight-backed, proffered a bunch of flowers. Georgiana took them from him, recognising the bright yellow *Hibbertia* and the orange petals of a flame pea. She was reminded of the time Battap had allowed her to place a piece of crimson *Antirrhinum* in his hair, which had been coated with red earth and fat from cooking. He’d been uncomfortable with her gesture, for his people disliked flowers, but he allowed it all the same. Georgiana looked up, but she could not read the man’s expression.⁴

Despite her amiable interactions with the Noongar people, Georgiana was not removed from the colonising process. She festooned them with flowers as though they were dolls, not humans, and incorrectly applied English plant name to an Australian specimen (*Antirrhinum* is a snapdragon and did not exist in Western Australia). Like other settlers, she also believed in the concept of *terra nullius*, a Latin expression derived from Roman Law which meant ‘no man’s land.’ In other words, they thought the land uncultivated and therefore available for occupation, regardless of the Indigenous people already living there. This is apparent in phrases embedded in Georgiana’s writing, such as her exclamation to Mangles in a letter of 14th March 1840: ‘How many, many years must these treasures have blossomed in this Country without one eye to appreciate them’ (479A), which suggests she thought that the Noongar were blind to the country through which they moved. Another indication of her involvement in colonialism comes from her comment to Mangles in a letter of 21st November 1838: ‘I was anxious you should first be in possession of what I conceive to be unknown to the floral world’ (479A). In this phrase lie the basic themes of imperialist botany: the race to acquire and the prestige to be gained from giving plants new names.

By erasing the names given to places and plants by the Indigenous people, and replacing them with new names, the Europeans claimed the country for their own. Jamaica Kincaid in *My Garden (Book)* describes this process in relation to Christopher Columbus: ‘This world he saw before him had a blankness to it, the blankness of the newly made, the newly born. It had no before’ (115). To possess it, ‘he named and he named; he named places, he named people, he named things’ (115), thereby estranging the original inhabitants from their country. Kincaid relates the result of this humorously:

if after the conquest an Aztec had gone into a shop and said ‘It’s my husband’s birthday. I would like to give him some flowers. May I have a bunch of cocoxochitl, please?’ no one would have been able to help her, because cocoxochitl was no longer the name of that flower. It had become the dahlia. (118)

The dahlia was renamed after the Swedish botanist Andreas Dahl, just as some eighty plant species were named after Joseph Banks, botanist on James Cook's voyage to Australia.

While Kincaid makes light of the dispossession through naming, she is also, as an Antiguan affected by colonialism, sensitive to its repercussions. She writes: 'This naming of things is so crucial to possession—a spiritual padlock with the key thrown irretrievably away—that it is a murder, an erasing' (91). By snapping the link between language and environment, the colonisers broke the connection between the Indigenous people and their surroundings. At the same time, they also facilitated the creation and maintenance of relationships among male collectors. As Muller-Wille has noted, plant specimens were 'invested with the power to establish new social relations ... "Tributes" and "briberies" were paid in the forms of seeds and specimens; rewards were given by coining names; revenues were counted in terms of "new" specimens' (47-48). This practice is exemplified in the relationship between Mangles and James Stirling, governor of Perth. *Anigozanthos manglesii* was named after Mangles by David Don, Professor of Botany at King's College London from 1836 to 1841, and librarian at the Linnaean Society of London from 1822 to 1841. Don wrote:

This singularly beautiful species of *Anigozanthos* was raised in the garden at Whitmore Lodge, Berks., the seat of Robert Mangles, Esq. from seeds brought from Swan River by Sir James Stirling, the enterprising governor of that colony, by whom they had been presented to Mr. Mangles. (Sweet 265)

The friendship between Mangles and Stirling was honoured by the gift of seeds and their growth in Mangles' Berkshire estate. Mangles was subsequently celebrated further by the naming of the plant, which is now the emblem of Western Australia.

Georgiana's gender prohibited her wholehearted participation in this process of erasure and renaming, as she could not name the plants using Latin, nor acquire authority from their exchange. However, her contribution to the collecting project by supplying Mangles with specimens meant that she remained implicated in colonialism. So too was her husband, who was Government Resident and responsible for laying out the land in the settlement, which was the home of the Noongar people. The parallel between their activities is borne out in Georgiana's application to Mangles, in a letter of September 1838, for a rake:

[I] wou'd be particularly oblig'd by you procuring me a Garden Rake, fit for a Lady's use, as I am oblig'd to borrow one of Captn Molloy's with the most formidable teeth, spreading destruction and next to annihilation wherever it is applied. (479A)

While her husband tore down trees, creating damage like his large rake, Georgiana effected the dispossession of the Aborigines through her botanical work, through which the collectors and their patrons laid claim to Australia. It may have been a neater form of devastation, but it still had damaging consequences. Yet it must also be acknowledged that her gender created a space for a different relationship with her environment: one that engaged, however fleetingly, with the Indigenous presence through her awareness of the flora's original names. The burial of part of her body, through the death of her children, also kindled a strong attachment to her surroundings, one which was far warmer than that of the men who renamed plants from the opposite side of the world.

Where Georgiana's loss was dispersed in the landscape, my parents kept their grief tightly to themselves. After my frank questions as a child, they yielded no further information about Hamish. I picked up fragments from time to time: he was a happy, smiling baby; there had been an inquest at the local court house which confirmed his death was an accident; my cousin mentioned that his father had helped mine dig the grave; my mother said that people in the small country town would cross to the other side of the road to avoid speaking to her. I was appalled. 'They weren't being malicious,' my mother explained, 'they just didn't know what to say.' But there was malice, I thought, in not being brave enough to walk past a woman who had just lost her child. As I grew older, I sensed it was unfitting to press them about the subject. However, as if in response to this lacuna in our family, Hamish's absence began to manifest in my fiction. From the moment of its conception, I knew my first novel would be about a woman who had lost her baby and subsequently became unhinged. In an earlier short story, I followed in painstaking detail a mother's discovery of her child's cot death, while my third novel examines the unravelling of a relationship after a couple's child isn't destined to live. It seemed that, where Georgiana's loss was buried in, and emerged from, the flora of the southwest which she came to love passionately, my parents' grief flowered in my writing.

Perhaps I shouldn't have found this so surprising. Life and death, after all, are inextricably bound, and represented thus in botanical tropes. The mandrake, for example, was said to grow at the base of gallows when men were hung, sprouting from the seeds of their ejaculation. As Michael Taussig writes, the mandrake 'is proof of the continuity of life at the precise moment when life is taken' (129). The yoking of women, flowers and death was also a popular trope in the nineteenth century, when so many women died in childbirth (Seaton 17). Likewise, if writing was a creative act, it wasn't so strange that novels and stories should have been birthed from my former brother's death, and that I should have been drawn to Georgiana, who had lost her children as well.

When I was fifteen, my parents left the property. 'We thought we'd always be there,' my mother said when she spoke to me of the grave, and it seemed some consolation that in that place we had loved there was still a part of ourselves, as there had been for Georgiana when she departed Augusta for the Vasse in 1839. It was an area further north, where the soil and opportunities for grazing were better. Georgiana was devastated, and described it to Mangles, in a letter of 31 January 1840, as a kind of banishment: 'My feelings on leaving my much loved retreat, are best exprest in those beautiful lines of Milton, where he represents Eve driven from her Garden in Paradise, as your Cousin well knows we suffered much in every way, and also enjoyed much undisturbed happiness' (479A). In a move reminiscent of her and Molloy's planting of clover and pumpkins on their daughter's grave, Georgiana planted a crimson China rose on her son's grave before they left. Later, she found in *Peter Parley's Cyclopedia of Botany* (1838) that Mangles imported the plant to Swan River (later known as Perth) in 1830. Just as her and Molloy's earlier crafting of the bower to enable English and Australian specimens to entwine was emblematic of a modest acceptance of their surroundings, so too was this gesture symbolic of the man and circumstances who had ignited Georgiana's love affair with the Australian bush, as she wrote to him on 25th January 1838, 'but for your request, I should never have bestowed on the flowers of this wilderness any other idea of that than passing admiration' (479A). Death had seeped out into the landscape and prompted Georgiana's poetic relationship with it, just as my parents' loss had infiltrated my writing. The grave and the act of burial were not merely symbols of confinement, but seeds for transformation and creativity.

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¹ Details taken from Kennedy Family Papers, DKEN/3/28/3.

² Details taken from letter from Georgiana to James Mangles, 25 January 1838, 479A.

³ Details taken from letter from Georgiana to James Mangles, 25 January 1838 and 11 April 1842, 479A.

⁴ Details taken from letter from Georgiana to James Mangles, 31 January 1840, 479A BL and letter to Elizabeth Besley, 13 November 1833, WA501A.