

## **‘The Far Distant Shores Where the Kangaroo Haunts’: Barron Field’s Voyages and Expeditions**

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The earliest years of Australian literature fell within a period of transition in English literature which is, very broadly, between a tradition of neo-classical attitudes and the dissemination of romantic beliefs and principles. The attempt to export a congeries of already decaying eighteenth century values to a land without any cultural history, largely occupied by those whom the parent country had rejected for transgressing some of those values, holds its own paradox. Bruce Clunies Ross wryly quotes the aim of Captain Watkin Tench of the First Fleet, who on leaving ‘every scene of civilisation and harmonised manners, to explore a remote and barbarous land,’ wished to ‘plant in it those happy arts which alone constitute the pre-eminence and dignity of other countries’.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly by a quarter of a century after 1788, the ‘happy arts’ had been well under attack from the first generation of romantic poets. It was just at this point that Barron Field arrived in the colony as the reluctant first judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales. To survey his travel journals and, if more briefly, his poetry and other writings in the colony, focuses the situation, for Field was both an inheritor of the manners and the pastoral ideals of the eighteenth century and a dedicated convert to the poetry of Wordsworth. He was, too, well aware of the paradoxes of the ‘remote and barbarous land’. Such a survey may help, also, towards meeting one of the acknowledged limitations of the *Oxford History of Australian Literature*. Its editor comments:

Our most difficult decision was to omit a section on non-fictional prose. Documentary writing ... and general prose have a special

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importance in Australian literary history, because of their quality and their influence upon other literary forms.<sup>2</sup>

Field's impact upon early nineteenth century Sydney must have been considerable, if only to judge from the strength of the reactions. The resistance expressed to his over-sophisticated verses seems to have been equalled only by the wide distrust of his judicial pronouncements. Yet his advocacy of Wordsworth must have affected the slightly later literature of Australia.

Field<sup>3</sup> arrived in Sydney with a strong literary background. He was born on 23 October 1786 in London and died at Torquay on 11 April 1846; thus he was a contemporary of the first generation of Romantic poets and essayists. His unusual first name was his mother's maiden name. He might well have been called Cromwell, as he claimed descent on his father's side and used the Protector's seal. This would have prevented him (and later would-be wits) from some name-punning, as in his 'Kangaroo' poem of *First Fruits of Australian Poetry*, 1819 ('... the ground was therefore curst; And hence this barren wood'); in Edward Smith Hall's versified review of *First Fruits* ('Poor are the first fruits of a Barron Field, ... Poor are the first fruits of thy sterile brain'); and in Patrick White's laborious pun in *The Solid Mandala* (a modest paper on Field which left 'no stone unturned').<sup>4</sup>

Field was a lawyer by profession. By inclination, practice, and self-advertisement he was a man of letters, like other nineteenth-century legal lights such as Scott and Talfourd. Although he produced a number of legal works, including an analysis of Blackstone's *Commentaries*, his chief interests were in literature and the humanities. He was a substantial minor poet. He read widely in the classics and in the full range of English literature, and was particularly well versed in the poetry and drama of the Renaissance and of his contemporaries. This made him all too able to pepper his writing (principally scholarly criticism and editing, biography, and essays) with obscure jokes and allusions and unsourced quotations. There is a pretence of learned complicity with the reader while in fact teasing him. In what follows, I have endeavoured to indicate Field's sources.

Field was a close observer of nature, and some of his recordings

of the beauties of landscape and seascape remind one of Coleridge's observations in his notebooks and letters. He was also a keen amateur botanist; although his approach seems to be that of the eighteenth century amateur scientist, in Romantic fashion he despised the aridity of mere classification. The only other poem of *First Fruits*, 1819, 'Botany Bay Flowers', celebrates the native fuchsia and the fringed violet (comparing the violet with images from *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). The botanists had 'gather'd and dissected, press'd and dried, Till all their blood and beauty are extinct'. There is an echo here of Wordsworth's 'We murder to dissect' in 'The Tables Turned', and Field felt similarly that 'Poets are few, And Botanists are many, and good cheap'.

Field was the willing acquaintance of many writers, the intimate of several, and a zealous member of any literary circle to which he could gain entry. He was close to Leigh Hunt, with whom he was at school at Christ's Hospital a few years after Coleridge and Lamb were there. When Hunt was jailed in 1813 for criticism of the Crown, Field went to great trouble to make the imprisonment comfortable and to work for Hunt's release.

Field was treated with gently mocking affection by Lamb, to whom he seems to have introduced Marvell's poetry. He was the 'B. F.' of Lamb's famous visit in 1815 to 'Mackery End, in Hertfordshire'. When Lamb's essay was published six years later, it was with the hope that 'peradventure he shall read this on the far distant shores where the Kangaroo haunts'—apparently a jibe at the 'Kangaroo' poem. When *First Fruits* was sent back from the colony Lamb reviewed it quickly in Hunt's *Examiner*, January 1820, repeating the kangaroo joke and ironically hailing the volume as the 'dawn of refinement at Sydney'. He compared 'The Kangaroo' to the 'Bermudas' of a Marvell supposedly banished to Botany Bay (and in doing so registered Field's introduction of Marvell and, what some contemporary readers missed, Field's ironical intent). Lamb assured Field in a letter that Coleridge, Wordsworth and Charles Lloyd were greatly impressed by the poem. Field apparently chose to take this tongue-in-cheek remark seriously, for when in 1825 he collected a number of his poems in

*Geographical Memoirs of New South Wales* it was 'in consequence of the approbation which some of them have received from several of the first poets and critics of our times'.

Field knew Mitford, John Wilson (the 'Christopher North' of Blackwood's, whose poetry he dubbed 'Wordsworth and water'), the publisher Murray, Collier, Barnes of *The Times* (he had been the drama critic, and had helped Barnes towards a post as parliamentary reporter), Horatio and James Smith, and Talfourd. He vied with Talfourd to be Lamb's biographer after his death, and did publish long memorials of Lamb and of Coleridge in *Longman's Annual Biography and Obituary* for 1834 and 1835. He met and corresponded with Crabb Robinson, through whom he met Blake's widow. At one time Field contemplated an edition of Shakespeare, incorporating notes by Hunt, Mitford, and Coleridge as well as himself; a copy of Isaac Reed's twenty-one volume edition, 1803 printing, with these notes in manuscript, is held in the State Library of New South Wales. Later he proposed an edition of Donne which would include 'the wittiest piece of bawdy in the world'. Through his interest in Donne and Marvell he was influential in the Romantic revival of metaphysical poetry.

Above all there was Wordsworth, and Wordsworth's wife and sister. Field's love for Wordsworth's poetry began with *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800 when he was fourteen. It sustained his legal studies and practice, permeated his travel journals, featured in his writings (and no doubt discourses) in the culturally impoverished colony, and lasted through his whole life. He aspired to be Wordsworth's editor and attempted to be his official biographer. Wordsworth's disapproval neither spoiled their long friendship nor prevented Field's numerous suggestions for revisions of the poetry from being received sympathetically.<sup>5</sup> Wordsworth granted the rare favour of reading to him unpublished poems as they strolled together over the 'old poetic mountains' (Field intended the phrase to be recognised as from Gray's *Progress of Poesy*). He gave his 'kind natured Friend' fascinating snippets of information, as is shown below and in the *Memoirs*.

The harshest judgment of Field was that of Benjamin Disraeli, who in 1830 found him 'a bore and vulgar ... without breeding ...

a noisy, obtrusive, jargonic judge, ever illustrating the obvious, explaining the evident, and expatiating on the commonplace'. Crabb Robinson was more generous, remarking that 'he talks amusingly, although there is something of grand ha! about him'. In the colony Field attracted similar extremes of response, from Mrs Macarthur's early 'agreeable and well informed' to complaints of dictatorial superiority by Judge Advocate Wylde and of vulgarity by John Macarthur (who initially had welcomed Field's appointment). These remarks have been recorded more fully elsewhere, together with accounts of Field's difficult judicial career;<sup>6</sup> they are mentioned here because they reflect some of the qualities of Field's prose. He could be pompous and witty, wordy and knowledgeable, pedantic and interesting.

Field was entered on the books of the Inner Temple in 1809 and called to the Bar in 1814. In 1816 he was appointed Judge in the colony. Newly married, he set sail on the *Lord Melville* in August, arriving in February the following year to 'administer tedious justice in inauspicious unliterary Thiefland' (as Lamb put it in the *Examiner* review). His departure was marked by a somewhat ambiguously complimentary verse epistle from Hunt:

Dear Field, my old friend, who love straightforward verse,  
And will take it, like marriage, for better, for worse ...

Hunt included a Wordsworthian reassurance that in Nature 'We study her fields, and find "books in the brooks" '.

On both the five month voyage out and the four month voyage home Field kept journals. The outward journal would doubtless have been perused in the colony, as with the homeward journal later when it reached publication. The journals were written up for publication in the *London Magazine*, and in 1825 they were collected by him, together with his poems and with papers on the colony by himself and others, in the *Geographical Memoirs*, published by Murray. The title page bears as epigraph a verse from Joshua xv.19 (also in Judges i.15): 'Give me a blessing; for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water'. It is a characteristic play, for the Biblical context is of the gift of a field in a dry land. The volume's dedication to Lord Bathurst

included the comment, 'Australia is the land of contrarities where the laws of nature seem reversed ...'. Epigraph and dedication together indicate Field's unchanging view of the 'south land', coastally at least, as arid and paradoxical. One paradox was the kangaroo, which in *First Fruits* he thought 'Contradiction ... harmoniz'd', like sphynx, mermaid, centaur, or minotaur. It was a chimera actualised 'On Creation's holiday' in the combination of 'squirrel fragile' and 'bounding hart':

But a third so strong and agile  
Was beyond all Nature's art;  
So she joined the former two,  
In thee, Kangaroo!

This seems to be a paraphrase of Dryden's epigram on Milton as the successor and union of Homer and Virgil:

The force of nature could no further go;  
To make a third she joined the former two.<sup>7</sup>

The journal of the outward voyage is introduced by tags from Seneca and Shakespeare which make clear Field's soured view of his exile. The former is about the sweetness of memory in suffering ('Quae fuit durum pati, Meminisse dulce est'). The latter is adapted from Gaunt's advice to the banished Bolingbroke in *Richard II*, I, iii: The sullen passage of thy weary voyage [sic] ... the precious jewel of thy home return'.

The voyage started with a violent storm followed by a long calm, so that it took over a fortnight to get further from Gravesend than shore lodgings on the Isle of Wight. Field wished that the time had passed as entertainingly as it had for Fielding (see *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, published posthumously in 1755), in a voyage which had begun with a similar delay; although he may have had glumly in mind, too, Fielding's death soon after his arrival at Lisbon. He praised Fielding's inventiveness with lines borrowed from Wordsworth's 'Simon Lee' ('O reader ... a tale in everything').

When the *Lord Melville* reached the 'great boil' of the Bay of Biscay Field miserably recalled '... imprison'd in the viewless winds, And blown with restless violence about The pendent

world', the lines from Claudio's vision of death in *Measure for Measure*, III, i. Life became less gloomy as they passed Madeira and Palma, and saw flying-fish 'sparkling from the waves in shoal-flights', tropical phosphorescence, and leaping bonito and albacore. But in mid-October the ship was becalmed for a fortnight on 'the burning line', bringing to mind Donne's 'The Calm' (ll.1–10 and 17–18). The last two lines quoted, '... in one place lay Feathers and dust to-day and yesterday', link to his observation of an 'elegant and companionable' bird, the petrel, which with legs 'long like a lark's' seemed to walk upon the water and remain dry; hence, he supposed, the naming of the bird after St. Peter.

Later in October, on the run down to Rio de Janeiro, a Spanish or Portuguese pirate ship hove in sight. She showed no colours and (presumably by signalling) conveyed only that she came 'from sea' and was bound 'to sea'; a message which Field shortly compared to Scrub's budget of news and to the Devil's answer to a similar enquiry. He had in mind the servant in Farquhar's Restoration comedy *The Beaux' Stratagem*, who when sent to find information about Aimwell reported confidently (III.i) that the gentleman was a stranger, unseen before, and of no known country, origin or destination; and Job i.7, 'From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it'.

In early November albatrosses were seen off the coast of Brazil. Field recalled 'Mr Coleridge's wonderful ballad of "The Auntient Marinere"' (the spelling suggests that he had in mind the 1798 version). It is remarkable that he could immediately cite the source for the Mariner's crime, Shelvocke's *Voyage Round the World ... [1719–1722]*. He commented off-handedly, 'The idea of this tale is doubtless taken from the following passage':

We had continued squalls of sleet, snow, and rain; and the heavens were perpetually hid from us by gloomy, dismal clouds. One would think it impossible any thing could live in so rigid a climate; and indeed we had not the sight of one fish, since we were come to the south-ward of Strait le Maire, nor one sea-bird, except a disconsolate black albatross, who accompanied us several days, hovering about us, as if he had lost himself; till Simon Hatley, my second captain, observing, in one of his melancholy fits, that this bird was always

hovering near us, imagined from his colour, that it might be some ill omen; and, being encouraged in his superstition by the continued series of contrary tempestuous winds, which had oppressed us ever since we had got into this sea, he, after some fruitless attempts, at length *shot the Albatross*, perhaps not doubting that we should have a fair wind after it.

It is not only remarkable that Field knew of the passage (exactly that identified by Lowes in his classic study in 1927)<sup>8</sup> but that he knew of it by the date of his journal. The shooting of the bird was suggested to Coleridge by Wordsworth in conversation in 1797 after the latter had been reading Shelvocke; but this was not known for many years. In 1852, after Wordsworth's death, a note by Alexander Dyce was published which referred to a dinner conversation some time after 1834 when Wordsworth mentioned his part in Coleridge's indebtedness. Wordsworth also mentioned the matter in the notes he dictated to Miss Fenwick in the early 1840s but these notes remained in a copy manuscript for many years. On the other hand, in an article published in *Tait's Magazine* in 1834, two years after Coleridge's death, De Quincey claimed to have faced Coleridge with the matter in 1810 and to have been told subsequently by Wordsworth that the debt was 'notorious', but no support has been found so far for this claim. The whole question has been debated at some length.<sup>9</sup> It should be pointed out, then, that Field's remark is the first printed recognition of the source by a number of years. Either Field had made the connection independently or, more probably, Wordsworth (less probably, Coleridge or Lamb) drew his attention to it. Wordsworth and Field had met over dinner in May 1812, again in May 1815 (when Wordsworth was 'very chatty about poetry'), and again in June 1815; and most probably on other occasions before Field's departure. It follows that De Quincey's claim of 'notoriety' (or at least, common knowledge), which Lowes called 'malicious ingenuity', now seems more probable.

Sometimes an embarrassingly literal-minded man, Field had a further point to make about the albatross. Coleridge had 'certainly worked this hint [from Shelvocke] into an awful and beautiful poem'; but the lines 'every day, for food or play, Came to the



Mariner's hollo!' and 'In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud, It perch'd for vespers nine' (ll.73–6) showed 'a great mistake' of landsmen. Only land-birds accidentally blown off course could perch thus. An albatross could neither perch on nor rise from the rigging, finding it difficult enough to rise from the sea by scrambling along the waves, its wing having five joints to spread in order to fly. It appears that Field was essentially in the right, save that only three wing joints are involved in flight.<sup>10</sup> His objection thus becomes logically prior to the more familiar one that the very size of the bird would have made it impossible for it to be hung around the Mariner's neck.

Once set on this kind of tack, Field was prompted to raise similar objections to a passage from 'Wordsworth and water' Wilson's popular 'Isle of Palms' (1812) in which sea-birds following a ship 'The loss of their resting-mast deplore'. Yet he 'would not be pedantic', and so praised Campbell's line 'Doom'd the long isles of Sydney Cove to see' (from *The Pleasures of Hope*, 1799, Pt II) although Port Jackson, let alone Sydney Cove, has no such isles. His objection was, he said, to the irresponsible 'pure fancy-piece' (it is not clear, perhaps deliberately so, if Coleridge was meant to fall under this criticism). An example was the unfortunate Henry Headley's description of New Zealand as 'unpeopled', 'set in a nameless main', and with flying penguins and 'shrill-ton'd' petrels: 'surely Mr Headley might have learned from Captain Cook'. This is the kind of criticism Field was later to subject Wordsworth to, line after painstaking line, for fifteen years or more; a procedure Wordsworth not merely tolerated but surprisingly largely welcomed.

Dolphins were seen on the same day as the albatrosses, and one was caught and killed. Its brilliantly changing colours in its death throes, 'an endless variety of blues, greens and yellows', made it the most beautiful creation Field had ever seen, 'a very peacock of fishes'. Incongruously, he thought 'nothing but the last scene of a pantomime can approach its brilliancy, and then it is as much superior to that as nature is to art'. Field compared Byron's description of a sunset, when the day 'Dies like the dolphin, whom each pang imbues With a new colour'. (The

passage, from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, IV, xxix, 259–62, must have been added later, perhaps when the extended poem reached the colony, for the fourth Canto was not published until 1818). He suggested a similarity, which otherwise has not been noticed, to lines from Falconer's *The Shipwreck*, 1762 (II, 81–6) which compare the colours of the dusk and of the dying dolphin. Falconer's lines, though, were 'weak, cold, wire-drawn' (that is, spun out) when set beside 'the condensation, the application, the point' of Byron's. Nevertheless Falconer, now largely forgotten, had been popular and admired for his nautical accuracy; Field may well have hit on Byron's source.

Anchoring in the harbour of Rio de Janeiro in late November for a fortnight's stopover seemed 'like sailing in a ship of heaven, into a new planet', despite the 'pettiness and barbarism' of the Portuguese. An expedition inland is described in a passage which illustrates Field's picturesque sensibilities and which may be compared with passages in his later account of crossing the Blue Mountains in New South Wales. The scenery becomes a stage set:

The whole ride lay along narrow passes round romantic mountains, in many parts very steep and precipitous. Magnificent aloes and warm orange-trees, with their fruit

Like golden lamps in a green night,

grew spontaneously; and frequent streams refreshed, and cascades illustrated, the landscape.... A French nobleman, who is building a house in the neighbourhood, came walking down the passes of the waterfall to join our party: it was

much like the back scene of a play  
Or melodrame, which people flock to see,  
When the first act is ended by a dance  
In vineyards copied from the south of France.

We could see him zig-zag towards us ten minutes before he arrived,—I had almost said come on the stage.

The first quotation is from Marvell's 'Bermudas' (l.18), and may either have prompted the remark in Lamb's review quoted above

or have been inserted later in response to it. The second, aptly placing Field's sense of the occasion, was inserted from Byron's *Beppo* (ll.325–8), published in 1818.

When the *Lord Melville* eventually sailed on round the lonely waters of the Cape of Good Hope more albatrosses were sighted. Nine were caught on baited hooks, but no disaster followed and Field may well have felt that Coleridge had again failed the pragmatic test. The albatrosses, and other birds, were the main relief from boredom, for until early January ships were 'rare; From time to time, like pilgrims, here and there, Crossing the waters' (from Wordsworth's *Miscellaneous Sonnets*, XXXI, published 1807). Early in February a south-westerly gale 'afforded me an opportunity of verifying the equal truth of Dr Donne's "Storm"'; Field quoted appropriately, 'Then, like two mighty kings ... our sails assail' (ll.25–30).

In Bass Strait they encountered the porpoise, 'the dolphin of the ancients', which appeared to 'roll round, out of the water, as if it were one of the wheels of Neptune's car'. Ovid's description of its movement, in the third book of the *Metamorphoses*, and Virgil's notes in the fifth book of the *Aeneid*, Field held to be more accurate than the 'vulgar error' of the painters and of the ancient Greek coin-makers who represented the porpoise as monstrously crooked and deformed.

On 17 February the South Australian coast was sighted; it was 'cliffy and woody, and had a look of home'. As the ship finally approached Port Jackson the country seemed still more welcoming—even though what Cook in his first voyage had called lawns would turn out to be 'mere marshes'.

The voyage ended after one hundred and fifty two days at sea. Field had suffered months of loneliness, of seeing 'nothing lovely but the sea and sky' (an adaptation of Coleridge's 'And saw naught lovely but the sky and stars', 'Frost at Midnight', l.53). In these empty days it was the sea birds, and chiefly 'the albatross, "the bird that loved the man", took pity on us', while 'How like a load on the weary eye, Lie the sky and the sea, and the sea and sky!'. Misquoting slightly from memory, Field is nevertheless deliberately running together three passages

from *The Ancient Mariner* (Pt V, l.404, Pt IV, l.286, Pt V, 250–1) and associating them with the healing message of 'Frost at Midnight' to suggest that it was the albatross (and other birds and sea creatures), rather than any Polar Spirit or kind saint, who blessed and relieved their isolation. He may, too, have hoped his reader would recollect the preceding line in 'Frost at Midnight' and apply it to Field himself: 'For I was reared In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim'.

No doubt prompted by the images of confinement and of vastness in both poems, Field added a reflection of his 'profound author' to the effect that it is not easy to conceive how interesting a single wild duck may be when seen swimming in a 'round objectless desert of waters' which attracted not an expected feeling of immensity but a sense of the apparent 'narrowness and nearness (as it were) of the horizon'. Coleridge concluded with the well known remark, 'So little are images capable of satisfying the obscure feelings connected with words!'. (The passage is from *The Friend*, No. 14, 23 November 1809, reprinted in *Biographia Literaria*, II, 1817.) Field offered the possibly unnecessary explanation that the flat sea, as Milton called it, can be seen for only five or six miles round, but that when a headland is in sight (for example the peak of Teneriffe), the ideas of vastness and distance are restored (the reference is to *Comus*, l.375, and, probably, *Paradise Lost*, IV, 987).

The other consolations of shipboard were 'few indeed and small, compared with its many and great pains'. It was 'sport' to watch the head of a huge wave rising into the wind's sweep and being blown off in atoms like dust before turning into foam. Or one could watch the waterfall-like foam of the wake: 'As the sea settles after each dash, the froth veins and clouds the dark water, and gives it the precise resemblance of marble', a likeness Virgil had noticed. There was the beautiful effect of the sun shining through spray, producing a rainbow in the dark sea which could be fancied to lie fathoms deep:

An Iris sits amidst th'infernal surge,  
Like Hope upon a death-bed ...  
Love watching Madness with unalterable mien.

Nevertheless, 'he that would go to sea need have neither ears nor nose; for booms and bulkheads will creak, and provisions will emit their odour. Were a man, like the king of the Black Isles in the Arabian Nights, marbled from the girdle downwards, he might with impunity go to sea as a passenger; but he who has the misfortune to have a stomach, and legs unused to balance his body on moving boards, had better stay on *terra firma*'. (The image from *The Arabian Nights* may have been gleaned from Keats's *Endymion*, I, 405–6, first published in May 1818.) Field asserted, 'Man was never meant to cross an ocean', finding support in Sidney's remark, 'That dwelling-place is unnatural to mankind ...' (*The Arcadia*, Bk II, Ch.7).

Field was received with a 13-gun salute and a house was built for him in Macquarie Place. Required to report on the conduct of the female convicts on the voyage, he replied ambiguously that although the women had been permitted to cohabit with the officers and seamen, there was as little immorality on the ship as it was possible could prevail in the circumstances (he meant that sea-sickness could enforce chastity).

Field was not slow to foster what cultural life existed in the colony. Besides his poetry and his various addresses, he edited (and probably bowdlerised)<sup>11</sup> *The Memoirs of James Hardy Vaux*, and persuaded Murray to publication in 1819 (after his return he probably had a hand in the editions of 1827 and 1829). The addresses are of lesser present interest. A lecture in January 1822 on the origins of the aborigines to the somewhat grandly named Philosophical Society of Australia largely rehearsed contemporary theorising, although his conclusion that those from New Holland and from Van Diemen's Land cannot be classed into 'two varieties' is in line with recent scientific thought.<sup>12</sup> His view that the aborigines were uneducable, uncivilisable, spoke 'a thousand Babel tongues', and persisted in being naked and unashamed despite 'twenty years of daily concourse with European ladies and gentlemen' (an opinion he revised later in the year when he visited Bathurst) would not now be acceptable, of course. Nevertheless, Europeans should continue to offer to the aborigines 'the chance of receiving the comforts of civilisation and the

blessings of religion, as an indemnification for the new vices and diseases which they imbibe from us too readily'. The paper ended with a bold adaptation and conflation of lines silently and apparently from memory borrowed from Wordsworth's 'Old Cumberland Beggar' (ll.67, 162–73, 183, 192–97). For example, ll.163–4 and 169–70 are made to read:

... while in that society, to which  
The tide of things has led him ...  
Still let him prompt the lib'ral colonials  
To tender offices and pensive thoughts.

'On the Rivers of New South Wales' was a lecture in July 1823 to the Agricultural Society on the Lachlan and the Macquarie, ending with a plea for pastoral expansion which invokes Milton's Lycidas: 'New Holland seems destined to be one day a great pastoral country; and cattle have a most insatiable curiosity after 'fresh woods and pastures new'. A presidential address to the Society, not recorded in *Geographical Memoirs* but preserved in the Mitchell Library, recommended the cultivation of olives, tobacco and flax.

Field's 'Journal of an Excursion Across the Blue Mountains',<sup>13</sup> in October 1822, when he followed the route of Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, is of greater interest. He found 'the eternal eucalyptus, with its white bark and its scanty tin-like foliage' to be monotonous and unpicturesque compared with the beauty and interest of the shrubs and flowers: 'New South Wales is a perpetual flower-garden, but there is not a single scene in it of which a painter could make a landscape, without greatly disguising the true character of the trees .... There is a dry harshness about the perennial leaf, which does not savour of humanity in my eyes'. Accordingly he objected to Dryden's defence of the evergreen laurel as 'For ever fresh and fair' (*The Flower and the Leaf*, 581–2); the first phrase was a contradiction, and what was forever fair was never fair; without January there could be no May. (One wonders if he had in mind too the foliage and figures of Keats's 'Grecian Urn', which could have reached him by 1822.) He appealed grandly to the 'dearest allegories of human life' bound

up with the seasons, which were as essential to the European poet as to the painter. Without deciduous trees he could 'hold no fellowship with Australian foliage', and agreed with Sir James Smith's view (in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*) that New Holland would hardly inspire a poet because there was 'no transition of seasons in the climate itself, to excite hope, or to expand the heart and fancy'.

As the party struggled through the crossing above Jamison's Valley Field's mood improved, and he shifted gear from eighteenth-century seasonal allegory to his favourite poet. The pass was 'very alpine and difficult, rocky, sandy, stony, flowery' but there was grandeur and sublimity in the prospect. "'The power of hills was on me", as Wordsworth says', he loftily misquoted ('For the power of hills is on thee', 'To — On Her First Ascent to the Summit of Helvellyn', l.33. The poem was written in 1816 and published in the four-volume edition of 1820, so either Field saw it in manuscript shortly before he left England or Wordsworth's new collection was sent out to him).

Field reflected that in thirty years the 'spirit of British government' had established an inland township 'to which the unarmed might travel as safely as from London to Bristol'. When the party began its descent from Mount York to the fertile Bathurst plains he felt he had arrived somewhere that was not arid; the hill 'should have been named Mount Pisgah, for it affords the first view of the promised land of Australia'.<sup>14</sup> Even the inland aborigines seemed to have 'advanced toward civilisation one degree further than the poor forked animals of the warmer [coastal] climate', who were the 'Will Wimbles' (the servant of several of the *Spectator* papers) of the colony.

Near Bathurst Field watched a '*corrobory*, or night-dance', and attempted to note down its melody,' the first that was ever reduced to writing'.<sup>15</sup> These aboriginals would never lose their 'exquisite relish for a fine fat grub,' like 'Poor Tom! that eats the swimming frog ... this philosopher', but they 'owed the worm no silk ...' (The allusions, like that in the preceding paragraph, are to *King Lear*, III, iv.) When the expedition pitched camp at Bathurst and explored its surrounds, Field could hardly believe

he was in Australia, 'so different—so English—is the character of the scenery'. It was no trifling experience to emerge from 'the eternal valley of the shadow of mountainous woods' (echoing the 23rd Psalm) to landscapes fit for European painters and to grazing land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus iii, 8; Jeremiah, xxxii, 22). Here, nature might seem to have been already ordered by God. He quoted Oxley's observation that the geology and botany seem to run in parallels of meridian, and asked 'How came the world planted and animalled, to say nothing of manned? Why planted in longitudinal furrows?'

While careful to observe the natural scene, Field was not slow to criticise the colonial government for failures in development and planning. There was no proper punt at Emu Ford, at the foot of the Blue Mountains, to cross the Nepean, the 'Nile of Botany Bay' (because of its flooding). This meant 'time and trouble ... difficulty and danger', and the loss of grazing stock. He suggested a bold scheme for a canal from Emu Ford to the head of the Parramatta River. Field would have experienced the development of the canal age in England directly; and perhaps envisaged aboriginal labour or convict labour. When one recalls that much of the produce of the area had to be brought to Sydney by ship, down the Hawkesbury and along the coast to Sydney, his scheme does not seem absurd.

Field proposed too that Australian wool should be exempted from English import duty, citing an older economist, Francis Bacon: 'Let there be freedom from custom, till the plantation be of strength ...' ('Of Plantations', *Essays*). Bacon's essay was also invoked in an argument against Macquarie's policy of excessive convict transportation: 'It is a shameful and unblessed thing to take the scum of people, and wicked condemned men, to be the people with whom you plant ...'. In any case convicts should be dispersed, not congregated in towns. Wordsworth's beliefs inform the remark, 'The solitary life of a shepherd, or a stockman, would gradually soften the heart of the most hardened convict'. Not that Field himself had any wish to be a settler beyond the Blue Mountains; he was 'possessed of no more sheep than a pastoral poet'. He added, 'Non hic colonus domicilium habeo; sed, topiarii



in morem, hinc inde florem vellico, ut canis Nilum lambens' ('I do not have a dwelling here as a settler, but like a fancy gardener I pluck a flower now here, now there, like a dog lapping at the Nile'). I cannot place the quotation; possibly Field either concocted it, or adapted it to give seeming authority to his attitude to Australia while reinforcing the 'Nile of Botany Bay' remark.

An expedition in October 1823 to the Shoalhaven area prompted Field to more reflections on the contradictions of the colony, on its botanical richness and variety, on the squandering of fine timbers, and on the habits of the aborigines. Not long after this expedition he was recalled to England, apparently because of his conflicts with Brisbane and others. He had already written longingly, in a poem added to the second edition of *First Fruits* in 1823,

... a ship is poetry to me,  
Since piously I trust, in no long space,  
Her wings will bear me from this prose-dull land.

and would have embarked gladly on the wool ship *Competitor* early in February 1824, not foreseeing the discomforts that followed.

The journal of the homeward voyage is briefer and less excitable than its counterpart. The ship took water almost constantly as it rounded Cape Horn, and until April passengers were usually imprisoned in cabins darkened by deadlights. Field recorded crossing the tropic of Capricorn on 12 April and seeing, for the first time in seven years,

the northern team,  
And great Orion's more refulgent beam,  
To which around the axle of the sky  
The Bear revolving points his golden eye,  
Who shines exalted on th'ethereal plain,  
Nor bathes his blazing forehead in the main.

He is quoting from Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad*, xviii, 561–6, part of the description of the shield of Achilles. (Field would have known Pope's note to the effect that whether or not Homer knew he was mistaken about the Bear was of no

consequence for the poetry, for he was aware of the contemporary debate about Bowles's edition of Pope, as the title of the poem quoted above shows: 'On Reading the Controversy between Lord Byron and Mr Bowles'.)

Making harbour at Brazilian-occupied Bahia gave Field the opportunity to call on the English consul and to meet the English merchants, whose manners he thought had been unreasonably criticised by previous travellers. Bahia was not so 'musical and romantic' as Rio de Janeiro, perhaps because the Portuguese were either 'away' (had fled) or imprisoned, so that 'the indolent guitar was silenced by the trumpet of freedom'.

The next stage of the voyage home was miserable. 'An infernal sulphuric stench came from the hold, and from the bilge-water', which with the smell of hides and of leaking oil-casks made between-decks uninhabitable. Field wrote vengefully about these conditions, determined to publicise them. But he was interested to see a lunar rainbow, and to observe in the tropics that the noonday sun meant 'Your form no darkling shadow throws Upon the vessel's deck' (Scott, *Lay of the Last Minstrel*). Dolphins and petrels appeared again, although no albatrosses.

The English coast was sighted on 15 June and two days later Field could go ashore after 131 days at sea. That this was three weeks less than the outward voyage did not reconcile him to 'the melancholy main', the happiest epithet that poetry has ever applied to the sea'. He would have been warmed, though, by the welcoming poem in the *New Monthly*, 'Epistle to B- F- Esq., in Imitation of Pope', signed 'H' (for Leigh Hunt). He quickly took up residence in Westminster and commenced practice again. His major scholarly work lay ahead, and the paradoxical colony behind.

#### Notes

- 1 Bruce Clunies Ross, 'Literature and Culture', *Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, ed. Bruce Bennett et al., Ringwood, 1988, p.6.
- 2 *Oxford History of Australian Literature*, ed. Leonie Kramer, Melbourne, 1981, v.
- 3 The following biographical summary draws on the fuller discussion in

- my *Barron Field's Memoirs of Wordsworth*, Sydney, 1975, 7–19; J. V. Byrnes, 'Barron Field—Recultivated', *Southerly* 21, 3 (1961): 6–18; K. G. Allars, 'Barron Field—His Association with New South Wales', *JRAHS* 53, 2 (1961): 171–95; and *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* and *The Dictionary of National Biography* (s.v. Field).
- 4 Hall's lines appeared in the *Monitor* for 6 March 1828 (quoted Byrnes, p.15: his title is a further example). Patrick White, *The Solid Mandala*, London, 1966, p.173.
  - 5 See *Memoirs* and my 'A Lesson in the Art of Poetry: Barron Field and Wordsworth's Later Revisions', *AUMLA* 46 (1976): 189–205.
  - 6 See Byrnes and Allars, op. cit.
  - 7 Byrnes, p.14, notes that the parallel was first suggested by R. G. Howarth.
  - 8 J. L. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, Boston, 1927, rev. edn 1930: Sentry paperback edn, p.206.
  - 9 See Lowes, 484–5, and Norman Fruman, *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel*, London, 1971, pp.271 ff.
  - 10 I am grateful to Mr Walter Boles, senior research scientist in ornithology, The Australian Museum, Sydney, for this information.
  - 11 The suggestion is made by Vaux's modern editor, N. McLachlan, Melbourne, 1964.
  - 12 I am grateful to Dr Peter White, Reader in Anthropology, University of Sydney, for this information.
  - 13 Included in *Fourteen Journeys over the Blue Mountains*, ed. George Mackaness, Sydney, 1965; surprisingly, not recorded in Chris Cunningham's *The Blue Mountains Rediscovered*, Sydney, 1996. An abbreviated version is given in the recent *Crossing the Blue Mountains: Journeys through Two Centuries*, David Foster et al., Sydney, 1997, pp.89–104.
  - 14 See Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Oxford, 1960, pp.181–8, on Field's reaction to the inland plains.
  - 15 See Roger Covell, *Australia's Music*, Melbourne, 1967, pp.65–7, on the success and value of Field's notation.