Introduction: the Cowpastures

In June 1788, five months after the establishment of a convict colony in New South Wales, the colony's black cattle, consisting of five cows and a bull, strayed into the bush and disappeared without trace. Their loss was a considerable blow. They had been purchased at the Cape for a high price, and survived many difficulties on the passage out. Their sudden disappearance was a riddle, leading to much speculation about their fate, whether speared by the natives, or furtively eaten by convicts. Regret at their loss reverberated throughout the colony's early years. In 1792, the Deputy Governor remarked that livestock was the only item missing from the colony's bid for independence and self-sufficiency: 'Could we once be supplied with cattle, I do not believe we should have occasion to trouble old England again.'[1] It was not until the end of 1795 that the mystery of the cattle was solved, when their descendants were found more than twenty miles inland, at the place now called the Cowpastures. Having escaped enclosure in search of a better life, they had found their way inland to rich, well-watered land where they had multiplied ten times over, expanding from an original six to over sixty animals. According to those who first encountered them, they were in very good condition, surviving the inland heat by summering on the hill-tops. The high lands across which they travelled were places in which 'they seem to delight', cool spots where they could enjoy 'refreshing breezes'.[2]

The discovery of the Cowpastures, with its gratifying movement from loss to 'abundant recompense', stands as an allegory of a persistent utopian and Romantic strand of imagining about the shape of new world colonies in the late eighteenth century. The Cowpastures, with its happy herd, is an interior antipodean Eden, the cattle's populousness and sleek prosperity a story about finding the promised land – the desideratum, of course, of all colonizing enterprises. This longing, especially keen in the years following the American revolution, generated numerous fantasies about establishing colonies which might compensate Britain for its losses. The

colony in New South Wales appeared to be exactly this, with one young emigrant shipwright commenting in 1796 that it 'appears to have been formed as a Substitute for the loss of the American Colonies by erecting an Empire in the East'.[3] There was, of course, much agonizing over how and why the American empire had been lost, but the compensation model, based on the inevitable rise as well as fall of empire, was persistent from the mid 1770s onwards, encompassing all corners of the globe and all of Britain's needs, be they economic, social or political. For instance, the British parliamentarian Temple Luttrell, contemplating in 1777 'the *débris* of this once mighty empire, when America shall be no longer ours', in the same breath fantasized about the profits arising out of a trade in African goods in 'quantities beyond arithmetical calculation'.[4]

The principal subject of this book is visionary writing about new settlements, with colonization understood as a leap of the imagination as well as a leap in geographical space and time. Michel Foucault's identification of the colony as a 'heterotopia of compensation', whose role is to create 'another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled',[5] fits well with the great volume of conjecture, speculation, curiosity and blueprints about colonization in the 1770s and 1780s. The model was the American colony, exemplified in J. Hector St John de Crèvecœur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) where 'the spectacle' afforded by the 'pleasing scenes' of farming in the new world was held forth as 'more entertaining, and more philosophical, than that which arises from beholding the musty ruins of Rome'.[6] Pleasing this spectacle may have been in America, but across the Atlantic the contrast between a newly vigorous and rising civilization and an old, broken-down empire was not such a happy sight. In Edmund Burke's 1775 speech urging conciliation with the American rebels, he captured some of these anxieties in his declaration that the old world was increasingly being 'fed from the new'. With Britain annually importing ever larger quantities of American rice and corn, he illustrated this new dependency by grotesquely inverting the stereotypical image of nurturing mother country and dependent colony: 'The scarcity which you have felt would have been a desolating famine; if this child of your old age, with a true filial piety, with a Roman charity, had not put the full breast of its youthful exuberance to the mouth of its exhausted parent.'[7] Furthermore, rapid economic growth was matched by the extraordinary fecundity of this American child, with Benjamin Franklin arguing in the 1750s that the colonial population was doubling every generation. Angry with the British authorities for vetoing the colonies' laws on a range of issues, including the dumping of convicts, Franklin added to his

statistics the mischievous prediction that in another century 'the greatest number of Englishmen will be on this side the water'.[8]

The rejuvenation brought about through escape to Crèvecœur's 'great American asylum', the invention of improved, simpler laws and a new republican and metaphysical mode of living: these are familiar from the 1794 experiment in 'high-soul'd Pantisocracy', a scheme involving 'an abolition of individual property' to be conducted by 'Twelve gentlemen of good education and liberal principles . . . with twelve ladies'.[9] The American republic as Christ's republic on earth is a crucial context for this study, but it has on the whole been well served by scholars.[10] Shifting our sights elsewhere in the world brings the obvious benefit of fresh materials, while helping, incidentally, to contextualize more fully Crèvecœur's probing of the meaning of 'America' and 'American' in the late eighteenth century.[11] The two colonies at the heart of this book are 'Botany Bay' (actually Port Jackson) on the east coast of New Holland and, much closer to Europe, Sierra Leone, West Africa. These two settlements, one a 'Province of Freedom' in the midst of a busy slave-trading area, the other a remote convict colony, were established simultaneously during the height of the anti-slavery movement in the late 1780s. Intimately connected with each other in their founding years, they stood at the centre of revolutionary debates about the nature of freedom and slavery, and the meaning of terms such as redemption, repatriation, transportation and deportation, all processes which form part of the phenomenon called 'Romantic colonization' here. It has been argued that anti-slavery, and the evangelical aims to which it was connected, were only 'crests' on the larger wave of colonization occurring at the end of the eighteenth century.[12] Penal reform in the shape of Botany Bay might be considered as yet another crest, but the metaphor still begs the question: how did anti-slavery, penal reform and colonization come together to form that large wave?

Clearly the most seductive feature of new colonies was the licence they gave to their revolutionary creators for building anew on a simple and egalitarian foundation; it was believed, with some reason, that only unequal and therefore corrupt societies needed complex government. For disaffected or persecuted Europeans, the new world appeared to offer sanctuaries and refuges untouched by the decadence of Europe, with its religious persecution, political repression and rigid classifications of race, class and gender. Furthermore, in the 1780s, a number of penal reformers and anti-slavery campaigners looked to Africa and New Holland as sites where slaves and convicts might be re-birthed as free people. In the early part of that decade, Henry Smeathman, whose life and writings are the subject of

chapter 1, announced that his redemption and labour schemes for Africans in Africa would lay 'the foundation of liberty for millions of posterity', while transportation to Botany Bay was seen by many as yet another form of redemption – a reprieve from extinction on the gibbet. Transportation, a (supposedly) humane intervention, brought social benefits as well, for like the slaves in Thomas More's *Utopia*, there was of course more profit in convicts' labour than in their death.[13] Moreover, the belief that new situations make new minds was a persistent one, as applicable to sites of repatriation or banishment as to carefully selected spots, such as the banks of the Susquehanna. In 1793, musing on transportation and colonization in his *Principles of Political Justice*, William Godwin argued that transported criminals were 'in the direct road to be virtuous' as soon as they were freed from the 'injurious institutions of European government' and obliged 'to begin the world for themselves'. Whereas transportation to America had been banishment 'joined with slavery', the loss of these dumping grounds was construed as a boon to the British, who could now set about reforming old practices. Transportation to 'a country yet unsettled' appeared to be a 'most eligible' form of punishment, Godwin argued, obliging the colonist-convict to labour, not under 'the mandate of a superior', but out of the need for subsistence. This was the labour 'by which the untutored mind is best weaned from the vicious habits of a corrupt society'.[14] Although Godwin disapproved of Botany Bay on account of its absurd remoteness, it is possible that his relatively favourable comments on transportation and self-subsistence shaped the voices of Robert Southey's 'Botany-bay Eclogues', included in his *Poems* (1797). Here a cast of prostitutes and press-ganged soldiers and sailors congratulate themselves on being 'safe quester'd at Botany Bay'. Snug and settled, 'and safe from foul weather', life in the antipodes was preferable to being hung in England, or shot or drowned in their country's wars:

> To my mind we live wonderous well when transported,
> It is but to work and we must be supported.
> Fill the cann, Dick! success here to Botany Bay.[15]

Rousing as this cry may have been, Southey picks up on the controversial connection in his society between transportation and slavery by dedicating another section of his volume to 'Poems on the Slave-Trade'. He even conflates the figures of the convict and the slave in his character Frederic, a transported felon described as a 'poor outcast slave / Stamp'd with the brand of Vice and Infamy' (*Poems* (1797), p. 100).

SLAVE LABOUR AND FREE LABOUR

Labour schemes are crucial to understanding the tensions between slavery and freedom inherent in all Romantic colonization plans, especially those of plantation-scale proportions. In his landmark study, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (1975), David Brion Davis argued that many of the leading anti-slavery campaigners, including prominent Quakers like Dr John Fothergill and Dr John Coakley Lettsom, were less concerned with how emancipated slaves might express their capacity for freedom than with devising substitute schemes for the labour discipline of slavery.[16] The first three chapters of this book examine the dove-tailing of abolitionist and imperial thinking underlying the widely cherished ambition to make the transatlantic slave trade redundant by setting up free plantations in Africa. The aim was to undermine and eventually destroy the sugar islands' slave economy, but large commercial profits were also expected from crops such as sugar, cotton and tobacco, all of which required a huge labour force for their production. Accordingly, evidence taken at the Privy Council about how slaves were made and sold in Africa also extensively canvassed questions about the West African coast's potential for agriculture, trade and commerce.[17] Comparisons were frequently drawn between Africa and the West Indies, with abolitionists arguing for Africa's superior plantation potential on account of its more central location, its rich soil and a populousness which promised cheap labour for hire. Nor was this enthusiasm for Africa confined to the anti-slavery camp. Lieutenant John Matthews, who dabbled in slavery and published a well-regarded book on Sierra Leone in 1788, believed that 'if properly cleared and cultivated', the west coast of Africa 'would be equal in salubrity, and superior in cultivation, to any of the Islands in the West Indies'.[18]

If there is a common aim underlying the two principal colonization schemes canvassed in this book it is the abolition of slavery, but, as Davis has noted with delicate irony, anti-slavery is an 'elastic label', one which 'carries moral credit without any stigma of extremism'.[19] Anti-slavery's flexibility covered a range of ameliorative reforms in the late eighteenth century, some of which simply consolidated the institution of slavery, as evidenced in the plans for 'free' communities in Africa, a continent in which there was indigenous slavery. As we shall see in chapter 1, Smeathman's modelling of labour on the West African termitary entails a disturbing, futuristic vision of the needs and values of Britain's emerging capitalist order, complete with modern industrial standards of production such as specialization, and the division of labour. The termitary is also a formidable war machine

whose operations anticipate Pierre Huber's account in 1810 of the ants' slave-making instinct – an instinct later described by Charles Darwin as 'odious'.[20] The Swedenborgians of chapter 2, despite being great admirers of Smeathman, devised quite different labour schemes for Africa. Warmly recommended as potential colonists by Granville Sharp – '12 Swedish gentlemen of rank, great learning, and abilities' (no ladies were involved)[21] – they pictured themselves in Africa as independent farmers settled on small-scale holdings, although they were not averse to a bit of land-jobbing and commercial speculation once they had severed their connection with the Sierra Leone colony. In general, though, while Smeathman looked to the future, the Swedenborgians turned their gaze backwards, admiring Africa for its unreformed, feudal and 'romantic' features. Also unreformed was their apprenticeship scheme for black labourers, one which was blithely based on a master–slave model.

The Sierra Leone colony, the subject of chapter 3, was the only settlement in Africa to get beyond blueprint stage and exist for a few years (until razed by the French in 1794). Embroiled in controversy from the start, the colony was accused of contravening its anti-slavery charter by colluding too much with neighbouring British slave-traders. There were queries about the white personnel put in charge, as well as some complaints about the colony's labour organization, especially its resemblance to that of a West Indian slave plantation. But perhaps the oddest moment in the colony's early years was the brief rapprochement in 1791 between the Directors of the Sierra Leone Company and those involved in the African Association. This unlikely collaboration, between Clapham evangelical abolitionists and aristocratic members of a private dining club, most of whom favoured slavery, can only be explained through a shared mercantilist fantasy about the limitless resources of Africa.

Chapters 4 and 5 shift location, to the convict colony at Port Jackson, New South Wales, a settlement whose destiny was decreed by its first Governor, Arthur Phillip, to be 'anti-slavery'. Despite the colony's anti-slavery charter, there were many resemblances between slavery and the assignment system governing convict labour. Of greater interest to this study, principally because of the racial issues involved, is the extent to which the native people of New South Wales, living on land which the British deemed 'terra nullius', benefited from Phillip's anti-slavery decree. Ironically, his adoption of the violent policy of kidnapping adult Aboriginal men looked exactly like slavery to several observers, and in the years following Phillip's departure there were intermittent schemes to make slaves of the indigenous people. Notably, those who championed Aboriginal liberty in the early

years of settlement did so in the language and sentiment of the anti-slavery movement.

Davis has linked the first two decades of the anti-slavery movement in Britain to increasing domestic concern about the problems of underemployment, labour discipline and labour management. The defining social context for abolitionism included, he argues, the accelerating pace of enclosures, drifting populations of rural paupers, convicts who could no longer be shipped to America and, he might have added, displaced bands of black and white loyalists (Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, pp. 455–6). Apart from the practical question of where to send the convicts, and how best the American loyalists might be compensated for their losses, the damage done to the nation's imperial authority and prestige demanded some creative thinking. Developing the supposedly limitless resources of Africa was one solution, as we saw in the case of Temple Luttrell, a solution which later, in the 1780s, conveniently encompassed growing anti-slavery sentiment as well, commonly expressed in the desire to substitute 'legitimate' trade for the trade in human flesh. The ex-slave Olaudah Equiano, an enthusiast for the colonization of Africa, captured the link in 1789 in his popular autobiography when he extolled abolitionism as not just 'suitable to the nature of a free and generous government' but closely connected 'with views of empire and dominion'. The slave trade was, he argued, the only obstacle impeding the flow of 'an inexhaustible Source of Wealth' from a 'commercial Intercourse with Africa'.[22] The prospect of abolishing slavery also meant restoring prestige vis-à-vis the American colonies, mired as they were in a gross ideological contradiction between theory and practice. In the rueful words of one embarrassed American commentator: 'To contend for liberty and to deny that blessing to others involves an inconsistency not to be excused.'[23] In the meantime the British public could sit back and congratulate itself on the belief that slavery had been declared illegal in their country, thanks to Lord Mansfield's ruling in 1772, in which a slave-owner was denied the right to deport his slave, James Somerset, back to the colonies. Granville Sharp, who secured that legal victory, believed that the dividing line between slavery and freedom was so thin that, had he failed to win the case, Britain would inevitably have become 'as base, wicked, & Tyrannical' as its slave colonies.[24]

As the crisis of overflowing gaols and hulks deepened through the 1780s, both West Africa and New Holland were mooted as possible receptacles for unwanted convicts.[25] Initially the government favoured an African solution to the problem, with Botany Bay a possible destiny for displaced loyalist refugees, a number of whom petitioned Lord Sydney about their

transfer after 1783 to the freezing wilds of Nova Scotia, 'a climate to Southern Constitutions inhospitable, and severe'.[26] As white loyalists they had the wherewithal to request re-location to the Bahama Islands, a choice and option unavailable to their poorer black loyalist brethren in Nova Scotia, as we shall see in chapter 3. While the Home Office deliberated on where to send the white loyalists, several small consignments of convicts were sent from the hulks to the west coast of Africa, but the mortality was terrible, and those who survived harassed the natives and disrupted established trade. In the end, with all its African options ruled out, the government approved Botany Bay for the convicts.[27] Africa was then chosen to solve the (black) loyalist problem, the most conspicuous and disturbing manifestation of which was the influx into Britain of thousands of displaced blacks from America, many of whom had emancipated themselves from slavery through joining the British side during the War of Independence. These loyalist ex-slaves swelled the number of 'black poor' already living in ghettoes, particularly in areas of London, causing a growing mixture of concern and alarm throughout the 1780s, with commentators referring to them as 'swarming' and 'infesting' the capital's streets. Short-term charitable measures soon proving inadequate, Granville Sharp, together with other members of the 'Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor', decided that a self-governing colony for ex-slaves should be established at Sierra Leone, to be led by Henry Smeathman. No territory had been negotiated with the natives, of course, but this did not deter government from lending its financial support. Charity payments to the blacks soon became conditional upon signed agreements to go, and the first shipment of colonists was rounded up in 1786 from the London ghettoes.[28] Since the majority of those who sailed were men, a number of white women were also taken on board, 'chiefly women of the lowest sort, in ill health, and of bad character', according to a later report of the Sierra Leone Company.[29]

Instead of the seven hundred (mainly) blacks who agreed to go out to Sierra Leone, only four hundred and forty embarked in February 1787, the rest scared off by the fact that their ships were fitting out at the same time as the First Fleet for Botany Bay.[30] The other deterrent was Sierra Leone itself. With its estuary, deep channels and well-populated adjacent territories, it had long been a centre for British and other European slave traders. Two outspoken Africans, Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano, initially enthusiastic about Sharp's 'Province of Freedom', came quickly to question the motives of a government which simultaneously sanctioned slavery and sponsored an attempt to abolish it. They asked:

Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? . . . can it be readily conceived that government would establish a free colony for them nearly on the spot, while it supports its forts and garrisons, to ensnare, merchandize, and to carry others into captivity and slavery.[31]

The disturbances set up by the notion of the 'free black', and the eagerness of Britain to be rid of its black population, have long roots stretching back to the early Tudor and Elizabethan period, the most cited instance being Queen Elizabeth's request to the Lord Mayor of London that he expel the city's unsightly black population.[32] In the late eighteenth century it was the Mansfield decision of 1772 which renewed what is still the controversial issue of a 'multi-ethnic Britain',[33] with Edward Long, a West Indian planter and white supremacist, retaliating against the perception of slavery as 'odious' by boldly questioning what it meant to be a 'free-born English' citizen. As part of his anti-Mansfield and pro-slavery arsenal he mobilized fluid and suggestive analogies between warm, well-fed West Indian slaves and poor white English labourers and indentured apprentices. These invidious analogies were later to have an enormously unsettling impact on the abolitionist debates, with colonial slavery disconcertingly compared to a wide range of 'local' miseries, from the poor laws to child labour, to the living conditions of the rural poor and seamen, to the flogging of soldiers and seamen. The range and versatility of these analogies proliferated. Politicians argued the toss as to who had the most cubical feet of air to breathe: Africans on the middle passage or English soldiers in their tents? Were London's blackened chimney sweeps any better off than West Indian slaves?

Ever fertile in inventing justifications for the African slave trade, Long pointed out that there was no difference between the sale of convicts into America and the sale of Africans to the same place. He even recommended that European statesmen follow the model of African chiefs who regarded their sought-after slaves as '*staple products*, as much as wool and corn are to Great Britain'. Indeed, the greatly expanding trade in slaves offered African rulers 'a constant vent for all their rogues and vagabonds; and the transportation of them is so far from being a burthen to their states, as the case is with respect to the European nations, that it is highly lucrative to them. Thus they are relieved from their vilest criminals, with a large profit into the bargain.' Indeed, 'the African states have just as good right as any European power, to banish their criminals to other parts of the world that will receive them'. Slavery even had the edge over transportation in so far as slaves, unlike sold convicts, could never return to repeat

their crimes.[34] In the 1780s, as the abolitionist movement gathered pace, pro-slavery apologists quickly seized upon the establishment of Botany Bay as ammunition for their arguments. John Matthews argued that there was in essence no difference between enslavement and transportation – 'between the African condemned for some offence against the laws of his country, to be sold to a white man, and the English felon transported to a wild uncultivated country; for such Botany Bay is represented, and whose distance for ever excludes the hope of returning' (Matthews, *Voyage to the River Sierra-Leone*, p. 157). A year later Robert Norris, in his sensational and gruesome account of the King of Dahomey, circulated yet another equivalency between enslavement and transportation, arguing that Africans, in selling their countrymen, quite rightly 'never entertained any more doubt of their right to do so, than we do of sending delinquents to Botany Bay, or to Tyburn'.[35] Furthermore, the slave trade, like transportation, functioned as a humanitarian scheme, saving convicted criminals from execution. The middle passage was, according to some, a humanitarian escape from a 'house of bondage' to 'a land of freedom'. Any attempt at fine-tuning the analogy, such as considering how the convict might differ from the slave, only exacerbated the model's inherent instability, revealing white racism as its bottom line. In calculating the sum of pain suffered by the black slave as opposed to the white convict, Matthews argued for the greater suffering of his own white race: 'the affliction of the African at parting from his native country, very probably may be felt with redoubled force by the more enlightened European' (Matthews, *Voyage to the River Sierra-Leone*, p. 157).

The connection in the public mind between transportation and the slave trade was thoroughly cemented by its appearance on the opposite side of the debate as well, with abolitionists and penal reformers opposed to Botany Bay adding their voices. In 1794 there appeared, amongst the plethora of expensive and lavishly illustrated books concerning Botany Bay, a radical little book edited by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's friend, George Dyer, *Slavery and Famine, Punishments for Sedition; or an Account of the Miseries and Starvation at Botany Bay*.[36] Dyer's book trawled through all the recent Botany Bay publications for the most graphic and negative accounts of the colony, adding to descriptions of soil 'cursed with everlasting and unconquerable sterility' a more general picture of 'sickness, want of provision, hard labour, and loathsome disease' (Dyer, ed., *Slavery and Famine*, pp. 9–10). The book's conclusion was unremittingly bleak: Botany Bay was to be considered 'not merely as the land of slavery, but as the bourn, from whence scarcely any convicts have returned' (p. 38). That transportation