“Many imitated him, no one surpassed him”:
The critical reception of Jules Bastien-Lepage’s paintings in Britain and Australia in the late-nineteenth century

A thesis presented

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Tzu-Hsiu Su

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The greatest of our day, almost all Bastien-Lepage’s contemporaries have felt his power; many imitated him, no one surpassed him …

His men and women breathe air… – Norman Garstin (untraced)

Bastien-Lepage’s influence on all the young painters already so great, will become more powerful than ever… – Stanhope Forbes (1884)
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. The thesis comprises only my original work.
ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.
iii. The thesis is 30,000 words in length, exclusive of footnotes, tables, and bibliography.

Signed:

Name: TZU-HSIU SU

Student Numbers: 250953
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Introduction

Given the fact that *Season of October, The Potato Gatherers* (Fig.1) by Jules Bastien-Lepage was obtained by the National Gallery of Victoria through the generous endowment of the Felton bequests, this would suggest that the Australian art world has placed emphasis upon the works of art of the *plein air* Naturalism.¹ As was recorded in 1927, “*The Potato Gatherers* (Fig.1) stood out as a noteworthy achievement, a milestone, in the works of the *plein air* school of the period, and has exercised a widespread influence”.² A significant association of the historical background between this painting and Australia reveals that it was first purchased in 1897 from the artist’s representatives by George McCulloch (1848-1907), one of the contemporary Australian millionaires, who was “… dominating the small syndicate of station employees and adhered to the formalities of the mining regulations”.³ In 1913, *The Potato Gatherers* (Fig.1) was sold for three thousand and one hundred guineas.⁴ Thus, its subsequent return in 1927 to Australia manifests the Australian art milieu’s particular interest in Bastien-Lepage’s works of art. The purchase of this French master’s outdoor painting can reflect that local notice was drawn to the Newlyn execution of *plein-airism* as well. As *The Times* indicated,

*The Potato Gatherers* (Fig.1) was very important as a landmark in the history of painting, representing a phase that was reflected in the Newlyn School and in the earlier work of Sir George Clausen, R.A.⁵

Furthermore, it has been acknowledged that Bastien-Lepage inherited the artistic mode of Jean François Millet (1814-1875), featuring peasant subject matters and countryside scenes. These two artists were recognized as “the earliest and the latest of the French peasant painters” during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶ Millet’s *The Gleaners* (Fig.2), for instance, not only depicts the reality of everyday life activities of poor rural labourers

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¹ The Daily Telegraph, 21 October 1927, Melbourne Gallery, A Bastien-Lepage Purchased.
³ Pennay, Australian Dictionary of Biography Online – McCulloch, George.
⁴ The document from the Public Library of Victoria, 25 August 1927, The Potato Gatherers.
⁵ The Times, 1927, Exhibition at the Tate Gallery.
⁶ Clausen, 1888, p. 114.
but also projects a high-minded sense of pathos onto their dignity and toughness. The flowing motion of those three peasant women can be further viewed as evoking an expressive sense in this ‘naturalist’ portrayal. Armstrong, as a contemporary British art critic, declared that:

… Millet was affected by the romantic ideas of his time … no one can look at his face to say nothing of his pictures, without seeing that the troubles and passions of humanity must always have appealed to him.

In this sense, it is clear Millet’s peasant works of art are not merely limited to the category of pure realism, but also embrace a higher value of ‘immortality’ which connotes concepts of profound humanitarianism. Contemporary British art critics and artists often made a comparison and contrast between Millet and Bastien-Lepage’s modes of depiction. As Clausen asserted,

Millet’s art was intensely spiritual … in every case subordinating the facts of nature to the expression of sentiment … whereas Bastien-Lepage was commonly allowed to be a most consummate painter in his rendering of facts.

Due to my personal enthusiasm for peasant paintings, such as Millet’s *The Gleaners* (Fig.2) and Lepage’s *The Potato Gatherers* (Fig.1), this thesis aims to investigate the contemporary reception of Jules Bastien-Lepage’s Naturalist paintings techniques and their influence. The thesis will explore the extent and the manner in which the contemporary art worlds demonstrated concern for peasant motifs and rustic landscape paintings. In addition, this examination offers a broader perspective through which to appreciate one artistic manifestation of eclecticism of the late nineteenth century – the significant development of *plein-air* Naturalism.

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7 McPherson, Grove Art Online, Jean-François Millet.
8 Armstrong, 1895, p. 402.
9 Clausen, 1888, p. 114.
10 Ibid. Relevant sources can be traced in Armstrong, 1895, pp. 401-6.
11 Muthesius, Grove Art Online – Eclecticism. The term is sometimes also loosely applied to the general Stylistic variety of the 19th-century architecture after Neo-classicism.
To a further degree, to discover the nature of Bastien-Lepage’s influence occupies an important position in this thesis; this influence can be evidenced in his technical employment of subject matters, tonality and brushwork. The first chapter of this thesis will conduct a contemporary review to examine the manners in which Bastien-Lepage manipulated these techniques. It is also recognized that a group of contemporary British artists paid homage to his Naturalist style.\textsuperscript{12} Hence, an examination of their experiments with this comparatively progressive mode of depiction will be presented in chapter two. The discussion is mainly centred upon three of the most prominent painters – George Clausen, Henry La Thangue and Stanhope Forbes. Given the colonial relationship with the British Empire, the Lepage-influenced Naturalist practice was able to be spread to the Australian art world through the touring exhibitions from the mid-1880s to the early 1890s. As stated in the Australian contemporary press, in \textit{The Advertiser}, it demonstrated that the aim of these exhibitions was to “offer the Australian public an opportunity of becoming acquainted with English art of the time”.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, the final chapter will explore the ways, and the extent to which local art critics and painters responded to Bastien-Lepage’s artistic influence. To conclude, the thesis aims to explore the essence of this French master’s contributions to contemporary art worlds by examining the critical reception of his art and influence.

\textsuperscript{12} Weisberg, 1992, p. 108.

\textsuperscript{13} The Advertiser, 22 July 1889.
Chapter One

The contemporary reception of Bastien-Lepage’s art and techniques in Britain during the late 19th century

In studying the international reputation of Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-84), one of the more influential French artists of the late nineteenth century, it is worthwhile considering the picture *Season of October, The Potato Gatherers* (Fig.1) of 1878, as a starting point to introduce some of the key elements of his art. It can be claimed that it represents a truthful depiction of contemporary countrywomen’s agricultural activity, painted with a directness that makes the composition stand out in an individual artistic sense from the collection of nineteenth-century European works in the National Gallery of Victoria. The central figure’s strained posture, as she stoops in an effort to lift the half-emptied pannier of potatoes, with the earth still clinging to them, dominates the whole picture. A striking contrast exists between the Madonna-like purity of her facial features and her heavily soiled apron as well as her grubby hands that arrest the viewer’s attention. The abundant fertility of the land is also clearly expressed in the details of the foreground. Although these realistic features seem obvious or even obtrusive, Bastien-Lepage’s use of a soft toned palette breathes a gentle and even inviting atmosphere into *The Potato Gatherers* (Fig.1). Grayish halftones not only suffuse the painting but also play a role in harmonizing each element of the composition. This is evident in the tonal balance between the slate-tinted sky, the vast land streaked with brown and greenish hues, and the ordinary peasant costumes of quiet colors. The overall impression of honest and expressive qualities, in effect, encapsulates the distinctive naturalistic style of Jules Bastien-Lepage. Moreover, the presence of this work in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria touches upon another important aspect of the artist and his work – namely his popularity in the English-speaking world of Britain and her colonies.

In 1888, George Clausen (1852-1944), a significant British painter of the second half of the nineteenth century, observed that
… perhaps, no two men could be named whose works exercise a greater influence on painting at the present day than Millet and Bastien-Lepage, the earliest and the latest of the French ‘peasant-painters’.14

This account reflects the light in which these two French artists were regarded in Britain by contemporary artists. It is also shown that the “peasant theme” they chose to portray in their paintings was viewed as common to both artists. Nevertheless, after Bastien-Lepage’s premature death in the mid-1880s, he failed to receive the same degree of appreciation as has been credited to Jean-François Millet (1814-75).15

The likely reasons for this might be related to either his use of “flattened, tipped-up” compositions – a less conventional painting technique or his tendency to incorporate fewer “sentimental elements” into his so-called “naturalistic” landscape paintings.16 Bastien-Lepage’s fleeting moment of fame and influence among his contemporaries gradually diminished after the 1890s, to the point that he came to be regarded in the mid-twentieth century as one of the less prominent French artists of the period. This view continued until recently, when scholars such as Feldman, McConkey and Weisberg have tried to redefine his contributions to the artistic development of nineteenth century painting in Europe.17

In line with this scholarly reappraisal of his career, the thesis will seek to explore the critical reception of Bastien-Lepage’s art during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This investigation can provide insights into the extent to which the influence of his art played a role in shaping the development of landscape painting in both British and Australian art circles during this period of time. In 1886, Brownell stated that “… Bastien-Lepage is, at the present moment, considerably the most interesting [figure] … Nearly everything he has done has provoked controversy”.18 Hence, my arguments will also attempt to establish the basis on which the controversial aspects of his artistic style were founded. The first part of the thesis will thus focus on an examination of the reception of

14 Clausen, 1888, p. 114.
15 Wright, 1990, p. 100.
16 Morris, 2005, p. 65.
18 Brownell, 1886, p. 265.
his art and the critical consensus that developed in relation to Bastien-Lepage’s artistic techniques from the 1870s to the 1890s.

Before one touches upon the main body of the argument, it is necessary to introduce the central concept of his art as identified by his contemporaries. In his contemporary biography of Bastien-Lepage, Cartwright stated that “… a glance at Bastien-Lepage’s origin and at the circumstances of his life will help us better than many pages of criticism to understand the full meaning and intention of his works”.\(^{19}\) This assertion suggests art critics of the day favoured drawing a parallel between Bastien’s life and his art. They also tended to associate his simple-hearted personality with the prime principle of his art – the quality of truth. Bastien-Lepage was stated to consider that “… nothing is good but truth, people ought to paint what they know and love”.\(^{20}\) It can be further inferred this description suggests an association between Bastien-Lepage’s artistic belief in the representation of “truth” and his own personal nature, exemplified by “frankness” and “simplicity”.\(^{21}\)

Given this, it is arguable that the two virtues, frankness and simplicity, dictate not only a primary understanding of the intention behind Lepage’s Naturalist paintings but also his artistic insistence on precision and authenticity.\(^{22}\) This criterion provides an outlook on the techniques that the French master employed in order to create the most authenticity effect upon his portrayals of everyday surrounding scenes. In this sense, the extent to which contemporary criticism dealt with Bastien-Lepage’s precise mode of expression needs to be examined in same detail. Significantly, his emphatic attention to detail and realistic representation was credited as one of the hallmarks of his paintings.\(^{23}\) In his article entitled “The official Salon of 1880”, Joris K. Huysmans commented that “M. Bastien-Lepage is tremendously skilled, and he has his art completely at his fingertips”.\(^{24}\) Lepage’s paint brush was even likened to an engraver’s tool, which executed his images with “certainty”

\(^{19}\) Cartwright, 1894, p. 9.  
\(^{20}\) Cartwright, 1894, p. 17.  
\(^{21}\) Cartwright, 1894, p. 17.  
\(^{22}\) Crastre, 2007, p. 16.  
\(^{23}\) Crastre, 2007, p. 46.  
\(^{24}\) Holt, 1988, p. 215.
and “sharpness”. These positive comments illuminate the fact that the artist’s mastery of detailed and exact delineations is a key feature of his art.

On examining his *Hay Making* (Les Foins) (Fig.3), at first glance, the female figure appears to sit on the grass in a restful manner. Bastien-Lepage represents her as a simple peasant with vacant gaze, and mouth-open, staring into space in an arresting manner. Her wooden facial expression is accentuated by the clear depiction of her three-quarter profile: a highlight on the cheekbone emphasises the eyebrow’s shape and the curve of her slightly opened mouth. Even a random straw falling onto her hair draws the eye. A sense of clarity in the depicted details not merely enhances the credibility of the reality of *Hay Making* (Fig.3), but also suggests the artist’s spontaneous response and appreciation of the intrinsic peasant nature.

In the technical sense, the very precise quality of Bastien-Lepage’s *Hay Making* is evidence of both the meticulous linear delineation of his brushwork and the painting’s smoothly handled surface. This technical complexity offers an initial point for exploring the connotations of Feldman’s contention: “Bastien-Lepage was not exactly a contemporary pioneer because he still clung to the academic precepts in some aspects of his art”. As Boime declared, “… the entire nineteenth century witnessed the fact that ‘a moralizing criterion of the correct and painstaking execution’ dictates the academic appreciation of the aesthetic”. This statement clarifies the reason why Feldman associated Bastien-Lepage’s art with academic conventions. Furthermore, an underlying factor behind the appreciation of “painstaking” and meticulous efforts in the process of creation is related to the longstanding Academic emphasis on the draftsmanship.

Traditionally, linear modelling had been viewed as the concrete manifestation of a moral devotion to the virtues of labour and diligence. Drawing was much more valued than

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colouring and painting.\(^\text{29}\) That is because line, at a philosophical level, was associated with the functions of the “mind”, whereas colouring and painting were regarded as merely dealing with the “senses” and the common emulation of raw materials.\(^\text{30}\) As explained in Callen’s study of nineteenth century artistic practice, colour is literally “a real presence” of the minerals; however, line does not exist at all.\(^\text{31}\) Thus, when artists desired to master the presentation of line, they had to devote their intellectual power and conscientious effort to its creation. Such concepts had been widely espoused by artists during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. They believed that industry and conscientiousness could complete what Nature failed to supply.\(^\text{32}\) The Academy even advocated this approach as a relevant creed in the nineteenth century, that is, to express “a pictorial display of the assiduous application”.\(^\text{33}\) This brief introduction of the development of draftsmanship clarifies the fact that the Academy, during the nineteenth century, still insisted upon the beauty of accuracy in relation to technical virtuosity.

This academic emphasis of the nineteenth century provides an insight into the contemporary reception of Lepage’s art, in particular, the acclaim for his precise draftsmanship and his execution of refined surfaces. Although one exception is noted in the Portfolio of 1882 where there were unfavourable references to the “inconsistency of execution” in one of Lepage’s works entitled Le Père Jacques (Fig.4).\(^\text{34}\) Furthermore, it was claimed that the loosely–treated bodies, left in a hazy suffusion that has neither roundness nor substance, were disapproved of by the contemporary critics as well.\(^\text{35}\) None the less, this example is the exception to his otherwise very favourable British reception. In Cartwright’s accounts, it was recorded that:

\(^{29}\) Callen, 1982, p. 8.
\(^{30}\) Callen, 1982, p. 8.
\(^{31}\) Callen, 1982, p. 8.
\(^{34}\) Boime, 1971, p. 24.
… what surprised the critics who had admired some of Bastien-Lepage’s works was not only the delicacy and precision of his way of painting but also his exquisite finish recalling the Old Dutch and Flemish styles.\footnote{Cartwright, 1894, p. 23.}

The modern scholar, Alastair Ian Wright also pointed out that the British critics were taken by the carefully finished surface of Bastien’s paintings.\footnote{Wright, 1990, p. 95.} As for his draftsmanship, Crastre corroborated that the consensus acclaimed Lepage’s “clear and rigorous” manner of expression.\footnote{Crastre, 2007, p. 56.} This reception during the late nineteenth century makes it reasonable to look at Feldman’s claim. As he argues, the fact that the French master regarded an employment of “precise draftsmanship” and a “smooth pictorial surface” as his fundamental technique which manifests his reluctance to depart from the academic tradition.\footnote{Feldman, 1973, p. 274.}

Another frequently discussed issue in relation to Bastien-Lepage’s use of various techniques by contemporary critics is his particular attention to the depiction of minute details. In a general sense, this characteristic was recognized as highlighting the individuality of Lepage’s works of art.\footnote{Crastre, 2007, p. 56.} As Clausen claimed in 1888, “… a focus on the delineation of small things made the whole of Bastien-Lepage’s canvas embrace a new and living interest”.\footnote{Clausen, 1888, p. 114.} Clausen further pointed out:

… Of the many characteristics of Lepage’s work, perhaps the most remarkable is his sympathetic intimacy with his subject … although the human interest is always dominant, nothing escapes him – nothing is unimportant.\footnote{McConkey, 1982, p. 223.}

Similarly, Phillips made specific remarks on this issue in 1892: “Bastien-Lepage has refused to tone down or to relegate to its proper place all the essential detail of rustic surroundings”.\footnote{Phillips, 1892, p. 270.} He described Lepage’s painting as “the art of portraiture”, which can be
seen as another way of encapsulating how much Bastien-Lepage manipulated his audience’s attention onto his delineation of minute details.\textsuperscript{44} From his point of view, it can be inferred that Bastien-Lepage’s artistic emphasis was to reproduce rather “the individual” than “the style when he came to paint the landscape as well as human beings.”\textsuperscript{45}

This distinctive technical approach was employed to enhance the sense of living and vivid reality in Bastien-Lepage’s works of art. As seen in his \textit{Hay Making} (Fig.3) again, the tiredness of the central peasant woman can be felt through Lepage’s mastery in depicting her seated posture. It is most evident in the ways in which she positions her \textit{V}-shaped legs and relaxes her slumped shoulders. Furthermore, the naturalness of her slightly open palm is particularly well rendered. The fact that Basitien-Lepage draws one’s eyes to the particular idiosyncratic details sheds light on another important evaluation of his art – his identification with the Naturalist movement.

Huysmans asserts that “… the Naturalists go more deeply into the individual character they are portraying, if they wonderfully express his outward appearance, they also know how to make him give off the odour of the soil to which he belongs”.\textsuperscript{46} This statement provides an insight into the central concepts of Naturalism, a term, coined in 1863 by the contemporary art critic, Jules Antoine Castagnary (1830-1888). In light of his definition, the aim of Naturalist artists was to reflect reality and reproduce Nature not only by “conveying the tactile and visual truth but also mirroring the inner feelings of an individual and the influence of the milieu on that character”.\textsuperscript{47} Emile Zola (1840-1902) was recognized as a primary advocate of Naturalism and even placed great emphasis on the role the artist played in representing the reality of everyday life surroundings.\textsuperscript{48} His point of view triggered off the heated discussions of the mid-nineteenth century: “… whether or not the depiction of the ugly was any more realistic than the depiction of the good and the beautiful”.\textsuperscript{49} Such theoretical debates are important in providing a framework against which contemporary

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Phillips, 1892, p. 270.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Phillips, 1892, p. 270.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Holt, 1988, p. 203.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Weisberg, 1980, p. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Weisberg, 1980, p. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Holt, 1988, p. 204.
\end{itemize}
critics could critically appraise Bastien-Lepage’s unvarnished presentations of rural landscape scenes.

For instance, Brownell stated in 1886:

… Bastien-Lepage is not enough in love with beauty. He insists too much on what is ugly in Nature. Also, he is too uncompromising in his refusal to adorn in the slightest degree the most forbidding subject.\textsuperscript{50}

Lepage’s artistic insistence on the expression of un-idealised nature was also noted in Phillips’ account of 1892.\textsuperscript{51} For these reasons, it can be argued that the French master’s focus on a detailed depiction of the countryside reflects his artistic association with not only the academic background, but also with one of the artistic trend of the 1870s and 1880s – the Naturalist movement.

Zola declared that “Naturalism was, in effect, found throughout the gamut of French painting – among both the Impressionists and those who endorsed the Salon”.\textsuperscript{52} This statement suggests that artists such as Bastien-Lepage utilized the techniques of those two artistic approaches as representatives of the Naturalist movement. Furthermore, Crastre asserts that “… while the older schools of art delighted Bastien-Lepage, he followed with no less attention to the movement of contemporary painting”.\textsuperscript{53} Such claims support McConkey’s argument that Bastien-Lepage was viewed as a “Salon Naturalist”.\textsuperscript{54} Given this, it is necessary to examine the contemporary reception of Bastien’s use of techniques both in terms of their academic traditions and their progressive naturalistic elements.

When contemporaries and critics discussed Bastien-Lepage’s art in relation to the Naturalism, they were unanimous in acknowledging his clear predilection for using light colour, especially shaded gray tones. Certainly, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a critical transformation in the mixing and application of colour as utilised by

\textsuperscript{50} Brownell, 1886, p. 269.
\textsuperscript{51} Phillips, 1892, p. 268.
\textsuperscript{52} Weisberg, 2005, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{53} Crastre, 2007, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{54} McConkey, 1995, p. 13.
French artists. Rather than rigidly adhering to the traditional use of chiaroscuro, contemporary artists began employing “subtle half tones and shade”.\textsuperscript{55} An “overall luminosity” became the new emphasis to construct a painting.\textsuperscript{56}

As Callen asserts, one of the most notable means through which to achieve this effect of light through colour was to make use of the blending of opaque hues.\textsuperscript{57} Callen’s reference relates to the \textit{alla prima} (wet-in-wet painting) technique, which was specifically employed in French artistic circles during the second half of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{58} Kirsh explains that \textit{alla prima} is based on “a fair employment of opaque paints” and this technique emphasises the spontaneity of both design and brushwork.\textsuperscript{59} Unlike the multilayered painting process used in the traditional academic system, what was more important in this technique for artists of the second half of the nineteenth century was its “quality of non-repetition”.\textsuperscript{60} In other words, painters were able to utilise the \textit{alla prima} technique expeditiously to delineate the ephemeral effect of natural light and shade.\textsuperscript{61}

An overview of the features of \textit{alla prima}, an artistic movement that predominated in the second half of the nineteenth century, can provide an insight into the development of \textit{plein-airism}.\textsuperscript{62} Callen explains that the prevalence of \textit{plein air} landscape painting represents “the progress of democratization and modernization” occurring in those times.\textsuperscript{63} That is because the central ideas of \textit{plein-airism} prompted contemporary artists to abandon the shackles of the institutionalized conventions of the Academy, and to create art from the everyday surrounds of modern outdoor life.\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Plein air} artists began stepping out of the studio, and pursuing subject matter inspired by Nature and its surroundings. One of the most significant elements is, no doubt, that of natural light. Echoing the interpretations of other art critics, Callen defines \textit{plein air} painting as “the practice of sketching outdoors in an

\begin{footnotes}
\item[55] Callen, 1982, p. 22.
\item[56] Callen, 1982, p. 17.
\item[57] Callen, 1982, p. 22.
\item[58] Barrett & Stulik, 1995, p. 9.
\item[59] Kirsh, 2000, p. 121.
\item[60] Callen, 1982, p. 20.
\item[61] Callen, 1991, p. 602.
\item[62] Callen, 2000, p. 2.
\item[63] Callen, 2000, p. 2.
\item[64] Callen, 2000, p. 2.
\end{footnotes}
attempt to grasp how to observe and record the unity of natural light effects on specific landscape motifs”.65

Furthermore, in the accounts of 1883, Mallarme and Jules Laforgue defined *plein air* effects as the light effects that exclude the traditional concept of light in the Academy – “the static 45 degree window light, which preferably fell from a northern single source”.66 What matters for *plein-airists* is to express “the ambient, atmospheric light”. This characteristic is what Cezanne regarded as the “light reflection”, *the enveloppant*.67 In order to achieve this, Callen explains that artists needed to play down the use of “studio browns”, to lessen the contrasts of light and shade, and to employ a large amount of light colour, such as white and various ranges of yellow tones.68

These concepts of the *enveloppant* may shed light on the contemporary favourable critical response to Bastien-Lepage and his practice of the doctrines of *plein air* painting. As Zola asserted, “Bastien-Lepage was carried along by his temperament, and the open air does the rest although aware of his debt to Impressionist tonality”.69 Similarly, in his ‘Personal Reminiscences of Jules Bastien-Lepage’ of 1890, Karageorgevitch asserted that:

... all his landscapes were composed and painted from Nature out of doors in all kinds of weather, and even his largest canvases were painted from the first to the last touch in the open.70

There is a relevant account in Clausen’s *Six Lectures of Painting* of 1904 as well:

… Bastien, not like Millet, letting everything go for the sake of the expression, but painting for the sake of giving the true effect of people in the open air, with the light

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65 Callen, 2000, p. 8.  
67 Callen, 2000, p. 177.  
68 Callen, 2000, p. 177.  
70 Karageorgevitch, 1890, p. 84.
and actual colour of Nature; this became the dominant motive, and he has done this more beautifully than any other.\textsuperscript{71}

All these statements reflect the degree to which either art critics or artists of the late nineteenth century focused upon the artist’s efforts to express the effect of natural light and the outdoor atmosphere. This contemporary reception can be further adopted as supporting evidence of Astbury’s claim in 1985: “Bastien-Lepage’s most profound influence in the 1880s lay in the practice of open-air painting”.\textsuperscript{72} In 1979, Feldman also took the \textit{Potato Gatherers} (Fig.1) as instance to point out the \textit{plein-airist} features in Lepage’s art. As he stated, the artist “has constructed a sensuous envelope of \textit{plein air} immersing the peasant figures within their milieu and creating a vacuum around them” in his \textit{Potato Gatherers} (Fig.1).\textsuperscript{73}

Alongside Bastien-Lepage’s artistic insistence on \textit{plein air} painting, it is important to acknowledge another relevant point – the predominant role of grey tones in Bastien-Lepage’s palette.\textsuperscript{74} In the nineteenth century, art critics constantly pointed out this characteristic. For instance, Castre pointed out “the tints of the flesh” and “greyish folds of wrinkles” in Lepage’s delineations.\textsuperscript{75} Phillips stated in 1892 as well:

… how Bastien-Lepage worshipped it in every phase and detail, in winter as in spring and summer and chiefly in that sober, grey vesture, preferred by the votary of \textit{plein air}…\textsuperscript{76}

He further claimed that Bastien-Lepage, “like most \textit{plein-airists}”, preferred the even envelopment of grey daylight to the variety and suggestiveness of chiaroscuro”.\textsuperscript{77} Even in the late twentieth century, similar descriptions which refer to Bastien-Lepage’s use of a grey palette can be found:

\begin{notes}
\item\textsuperscript{71} Clausen, 1904, p. 107.
\item\textsuperscript{72} Astbury, 1985, p. 10.
\item\textsuperscript{73} Feldman, 1979, p. 6.
\item\textsuperscript{74} Weisberg, 2005, p. 9.
\item\textsuperscript{75} Crastre, 2007, p. 35.
\item\textsuperscript{76} Phillips, 1892, p. 269.
\item\textsuperscript{77} Phillips, 1892, p. 270.
\end{notes}
… keeping his landscape relatively bright and luminous, devoid of shadow, permitted Bastien free circulation of air and interaction of landscape and figures comparably enveloped in diffuse mists of grey.78

All these reviews suggest that Bastien-Lepage was an artist who could master the expression of subtle tonality. Not only did Crastre describe Bastien-Lepage as a “colourist” but he also claimed that “… few contemporary painters used colour with so much tact, such veritable mastery as he”.79 In referring to his skilful command of tonality, it is inevitable that one notices that contemporary art critics frequently discussed the sense of clarity and lucidness in Bastien-Lepage’s palette. As Crastre stated, “… his colour is always clear, always unmistakably employed to produce a sought-after effect”.80 In his accounts, Stanley also mentioned that “… the delight of seeing with what decision and precision Bastien-Lepage put on his colours, each in its proper place with its proper value”.81 Even in Cartwright’s biography of Bastien-Lepage, there is an acknowledgement in relation to this artistic quality: “Bastien-Lepage always prepared the exact tone of his colour on his palette, and never put it on the canvas until he was certain of the effect that it would produce”.82 Based upon this, Cartwright further claimed that “… his painting owns that peculiar crispness and freshness which has been often admired”.83

The abundance of positive critical responses to light and transparent colours in Bastien-Lepage’s paintings echoes an important movement of rejecting chiaroscuro in the second half of the nineteenth century.84 That is because the handling of chiaroscuro was associated with the artistic portrayal of “elevated moral truth and beauty” in accordance with the academic tradition.85 Thus, less emphasis on the contrasting light and shade suggested that “the noble ideals of painting’s moral social role were not weighed as much as were the

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79 Crastre, 2007, p. 35.
80 Crastre, 2007, p. 35.
81 Stanley, 1897, p. 54.
82 Cartwright, 1894, p. 36.
83 Cartwright, 1894, p. 36.
84 Callen, 1982, p. 27.
85 Callen, 1982, p. 27.
previous ages”. As well, it reflected a new artistic trend in valuing the “authentic modern light” under the banner of advocating the truth. In summary, a primary aim of most contemporary artists was to convey the reality of outdoor light.

As Feldman points out, Bastien-Lepage chose to concentrate on the depiction of “overcast brightness” of natural light, which was a characteristic of the area close to his native village, Lorraine. Weisberg also indicates that it was because of his excellence in conveying the sense of light and air, as seen in the Potato Gatherers of 1879 (Fig.1), that Zola praised Bastien-Lepage as “the grandson of Courbet and Millet”. This appreciation is again evident in Albert Wolff’s comments on the palette that Bastien-Lepage used to create the light effects in “Woman Harvesting Potato [The Potato Gatherers]”, which he describes as:

… ingratiating and discreet; not a discordant touch disturbs the beautiful harmony of this canvas, over which the silence of the open country has descended enveloping the obscure toil.

Notably, Bastien-Lepage’s sensitivity towards the fresh colours of Nature dictated the quality of immediacy and “vigorous originality” in his works of art. As Théophile Thoré declared in 1866, “… to paint in the open air, as one feels and as one sees, without thinking of anyone, either old masters or of the public, is without doubt the way to assure one’s own originality”. In discussing this aspect of Bastien-Lepage’s art, another significant characteristic of the artist that his contemporaries perceived as distinctive and innovative was his employment of square brushwork. Callen has argued at this time: “… modern originality was to be evidenced in the physical self-expression of the artist’s handling”.

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86 Callen, 1982, p. 27.
87 Callen, 2000, p. 136.
89 Weisberg, 2005, p. 63.
90 Crastre, 2007, p. 46.
91 Crastre, 2007, p. 44.
92 Bomford, 1990, p. 22.
Thus, an association between the concept of originality and the manipulation of brushstrokes was increasingly made.

Contemporaries like Karageorgevitch claimed that the bold touches of paint imbued Bastien-Lepage’s works of art with a fresh and brilliant quality. The use of a so-called “square brush” and the resulting “flat brush marks” clearly indicated that he had moved away from traditional techniques. Another writer, Stanley also acknowledged that the technical aspect of his art was Bastien’s primary preoccupation. Furthermore, “as he painted the mastery over his brush, he learnt how to make Nature serve him”. Certainly, the artist’s skilful command of brushwork not only laid the foundation for his personal influence on British art circles such as the New English Art Club, but it also provided an indication of his artistic development away from the academic conventions.

In effect, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed both shifting values in the expression of colour as well as revolutionary innovations in brush techniques – that is, the formal introduction of metal ferrule (flat-ferrule brushes). This style of brush produced a “flat, broad and evenly loaded stroke”, allowing artistic effects different from those that were made by round brushes. As Weisberg explains, the application of paint by a flat brush makes the canvas consist of several square paint blocks, each of which is set down and formed at an angle. By this means, artists found it easier to sketch, to “drag paint” (scumble) and to underscore the “actual brush marks”. Thus, the number of brushstrokes could be multiplied within a shorter span of time.

In light of the previous discussion, it could be argued that the metal ferrule was especially effective for use in alla prima, as this was a technique for applying paints. From this

95 Karageorgevitch, 1890, p. 84.
97 Stanley, 1897, p. 57.
98 Stanley, 1897, p. 57.
100 Bomford, 1990, p. 93.
101 Bomford, 1990, p. 93.
102 Weisberg, 2005, p. 65.
103 Weisberg, 2005, p. 65.
104 Ayers, 1985, p. 124.
perspective, it appears that these two technical innovations played major roles in fostering critical emphasis during the late nineteenth century on the “sketchy element” and on the vivid delineation of open air light effects. It is interesting to point out that although Bastien-Lepage chose the emphatic flat brushstrokes to construct his images, his loyalty to the legacy of academic style was still noticeable through the presentation of the finished surface in his works of art.

In effect, this further echoes Zola’s criticism that Bastien-Lepage’s artistic insistence hesitated between the contemporary revolutionary trend of Impressionism and the gradually diminishing tradition of the Academy. As Feldman claims, there are two features that associated Bastien-Lepage with Impressionism: one is his utilization of a light hued palette; the other is his obvious, sensuous brushwork. It is known that these two elements came to play a dominant role in “unifying the whole canvas” of most Impressionist artists during the late nineteenth century. Hence, the belief of some twentieth century scholars that Bastien-Lepage’s technical execution in terms of his tonality and brushstrokes – is evocative of Impressionist works can be appreciated.

The fact that these oppositional stylistic concepts – the innovative and the academic – is evident in Bastien-Lepage’s paintings, and also means that emphasis is often placed on the fact that his artistic style can categorised as “eclectic”. Feldman, for instance, argues that the artist’s eclecticism also reveals Bastien-Lepage’s flexibility and receptiveness to the changing artistic taste of those times. Alternatively, it could be said that the artist, simultaneously, limited himself to work within the stylistic parameters accepted by contemporaries. As Boime asserts, “… what the public appreciated could be the Impressionist manipulation of light and colour, as it is represented through more solid

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105 Callen, 1982, p. 17.
107 Feldman, 1979, p. 6.
draughtsmanship”.\textsuperscript{113} The proliferation of various artistic movements suggests that there was no specific, individual style predominating in Paris, particularly during the 1880s.\textsuperscript{114} In light of this background, Stevens even declares that “… so confused was the somewhat contradictory situation that painters painted with the palette of the Impressionists and drew like the old masters”.\textsuperscript{115} This perspective sheds light on the reasons why Jules Bastien-Lepage’s eclectic style was viewed so positively by contemporary artists and critics during that era.

One final element must be taken into account when considering the characteristics of Bastien-Lepage’s practice and that is the underlying connotations of his style. As Boime claims,

… [One] group of artists, such as, Bastien-Lepage, Roll, or Besnard, tended to satisfy the public taste for modernism combined with traditionalism by modifying the disquieting features of Impressionism and rejecting the polished technique of the academic painters.\textsuperscript{116}

The statement provides a broad foundation for the evaluation of Bastien-Lepage’s works of art; the ways in which he created his art oscillated between the ambiguous zones of several contemporary artistic styles. This manner of depiction was evidenced in not only Bastien-Lepage’s paintings but also those of other so-called juste milieu (the middle of the road) artists. Therefore, it is essential to discuss his artistic association with the juste milieu.

Boime explains that this group of artists, unlike the Impressionists, was characteristically reluctant to hold independent exhibitions. Similarly, their attempts not to rely fully on state patronage were noteworthy.\textsuperscript{117} Hence, “… confident of their official support and trust, they urged some progressive changes in the institutional structure”.\textsuperscript{118} In his Salon review of 1883, Gustave Planche, one of the contemporary critics, used the word, ‘conciliation’ to

\textsuperscript{113} Boime, 1971, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{114} Stevens, 1979, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{115} Stevens, 1979, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{116} Boime, 1971, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{117} Boime, 1971, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{118} Boime, 1971, p. 17.
define the connotations of *juste milieu*’s art.\(^{119}\) Interestingly, while Boime included Bastien-Lepage in the group of “middle of the road” artists, Feldman still tried to enhance his artistic value by claiming that “the scope of Bastien’s talents seems to go beyond the definition of *juste milieu* – the general context of a compromise”\(^{120}\).

In light of this, the contemporary claim that “Bastien-Lepage was not, as many have imagined, in conscious and defiant revolt against the artistic canons handed down by tradition” is far more convincing.\(^ {121}\) As for Bastien-Lepage’s motive in maintaining a distance from the Academic system, it was possible in his own day to make an association between his willingness to experiment with innovative techniques and his love for his native countryside. For instance, one of the British commentators, Phillips, asserted that Bastien-Lepage’s belief in the doctrines of *plein-airism* emerged from his great passion and sympathy for his own land.\(^ {122}\) According to this view, the reasons why Bastien-Lepage employed half tones of shaded gray, attenuated the contrast between light and shade, and chose the square brush to record instantaneous outdoor effects, can all be inferred as an attempt to depict as perfectly as possible what he saw in his own native province of Lorraine.

This general overview of the critical response that Bastien-Lepage and his art evoked from contemporary critics, writers as well as art historians of the twentieth century, offers a necessary basis upon which interpret his importance to and influence upon the British and Australian art world of the late nineteenth century. It is the reception of his art by the English-speaking world of the Victorian era that will be further explored in the following chapters.

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\(^{120}\) Feldman, 1973, p. 274.

\(^{121}\) Phillips, 1892, p. 268.

\(^{122}\) Phillips, 1892, p. 268.
Chapter Two

Bastien-Lepage’s British followers:
George Clausen, La Thangue and Stanhope Forbes

Naturalism:

From the late nineteenth century, even up to the present day, Bastien-Lepage has been acknowledged as one of the leading figures associated with the artistic movement known as Naturalism. It is acknowledged that one contemporary theoretician, Bellori, first employed this term, in 1672, to describe the characteristic features of the paintings of Caravaggio and his followers’ paintings. These features consisted of the emphatic delineation of “the details of nature, irrespective of whether they were beautiful or ugly”.123 It suggests that the word “Naturalism” embraces the concept that any minute detail is significant in the truthful delineation of the real world. Furthermore, “Naturalism”, during the nineteenth century, was adopted to indicate that “a work of art claimed its recording of the external world with scientific accuracy”.124 In relation to this, one important issue from that time needs to be brought out in passing: the extent to which Naturalist paintings were completed with the assistance of scientific apparatus such as the camera.

The fact is that since the mid-1880s, more and more painters not only acquired but also applied a knowledge of photography to their art making.125 Pointing to this, one contemporary British artist, Walter Sickert, commented disapprovingly “Jules Bastien-Lepage, as a Naturalist painter, was too much of a photo-realist”.126 Similarly, in the Salon review of 1863, Castagnary, as a key promoter of Naturalism, emphasised that:

123 House, 2007-2010, Grove Art Online – Naturalism.
125 Weisberg, 2005, p. 25.
126 Weisberg, 2005, p. 25.
The Naturalist school declares that art is the expression of life under all phases and on all levels, and that its sole aim is to reproduce nature by carrying it to its maximum power and intensity: it is truth balanced with science.127

This assertion was reinforced by Zola in 1868 when he addressed the “concept of objectivity” and declared that one could explicate contemporary Naturalist painters’ artworks by “eliminating any of the political significance”.128 “The political significance” that Zola mentioned is related to the fact that the Realists of 1848 were recognized as being motivated by incorporating or as tending to incorporate social and political awareness into their works of art.129 This can be viewed as a key difference between the concepts of underlying Naturalism and Realism. In effect, Naturalist painters attempted to convey their most direct and unvarnished reactions to what they perceived and experienced from their natural environments.130 In echoing this aim, such contemporary Naturalist artists as Bastien-Lepage became linked to the practice of plein-airism.

As Norman Gastin, one of the Newlyn painters, asserted in 1902,

The plein-airists were then in the ascendant in Paris of around 1880s … Millet and Manet with their palettes of revolt … Lepage with less revolt, but with a very clear open-air eye. The direct inspiration of Nature was the creed of the day.131

The statement not only underlines the dominance of plein-airism over the contemporary art world, but also suggests painters were able to create their works of art not merely in traditional studios, but also in outdoor natural surroundings. It is further acknowledged that the plein-airist concept was widely disseminated through the medium of the contemporary press.132 Given this, art journals, daily newspapers and exhibition catalogues of the day can be employed as major sources in any investigation into the significance of Bastien-Lepage’s reputation as an influential Naturalist artist.

127 Weisberg, 2005, p. 25.
128 Weisberg, 2005, p. 25.
129 Weisberg, 2005, p. 25.
131 Fox & Greenacre, 1985, p. 15.
132 Flint, 1984, p. 82.
The first chapter has already demonstrated that Bastien-Lepage’s perceptive employment of grey tones and square brush strokes was well received by his French and British contemporaries. In order to deepen the exploration, this second chapter will further draw attention to the manner in and extent to which British art critics and artists responded to these innovations. It is clear that the application of the square brush technique can reveal underlying meanings that go far beyond its superficial connotations. That is, a painter’s mode of depiction can be viewed as encompassing the specific meaning of an artwork.\textsuperscript{133} This is seen in McConkey’s argument that “… brush marks, handling and style were interpreted as indications of allegiance in the late nineteenth century”.\textsuperscript{134} Hence, it can be inferred that the square marks represented a crucial link in connecting Bastien-Lepage’s paintings with his followers. This distinct brush technique came to be seen as a key hallmark of Bastien-Lepage’s Naturalist style and played a role in cementing his influence with his contemporaries.

As McConkey asserts, “… Bastien-Lepage, this name signified a collective understanding rather than a simple master, pupil transmission of influence”.\textsuperscript{135} Given this, it can be assumed that any examination of Bastien-Lepage’s art and its reception in Britain will consider the frequency of critical reactions to his use of the brush technique. As is generally acknowledged, art critics often entered into heated debate about both “the meaning of a manner” and “the suitability of a particular subject matter” during the 1880s.\textsuperscript{136} According to McConkey, the former issue is usually associated with the use of brush marks.\textsuperscript{137} It will thus be significant to note the degree to which contemporary artistic opinion was projected onto those imitators of Bastien-Lepage’s brushwork.

The paintings of George Clausen (1852-1944), a well-known, English devotee of Bastien-Lepage, will be taken as a primary exemplar. An examination of his art will reveal the ways in which the contemporary English art world criticized his French-influenced execution,

\textsuperscript{133} McConkey, 2002, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{134} McConkey, 2002, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{135} McConkey, 2002, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{136} McConkey, 2002, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{137} McConkey, 2002, p. 133.
which had been so recently introduced from the Continent. When investigating the pertinent issues, it is necessary to point out that Clausen was one of the pioneering members of the New English Art Club, established in 1886, which offered an oppositional view to that of the Royal Academy and the other art schools.\textsuperscript{138} Most of its founders had gained experience through undertaking artistic training within the French atelier systems, and were particularly interested in Bastien-Lepage’s style and \textit{plein air} treatment.\textsuperscript{139} In this sense, it can be asserted that an exploration of certain paintings by members of the New English Art Club artists’ paintings has special relevance for this research.

Nevertheless, the New English Art Club members’ early acceptance of foreign artistic influences did not shake their belief in English conventions. The \textit{Pall Mall Gazette} showed that:

\begin{quote}
… the desire of the new club … is to vindicate the soundness of engrafting English feeling and sentiment upon what is known as the French technique.\textsuperscript{140}
\end{quote}

It will be argued in this chapter that this belief was exemplified in the works of art of H. H. La Thangue (1859-1929), who was one of the most representative and respected figures in the New English Art Club. As was declared in the \textit{Art Journal} of 1893,

\begin{quote}
Mr. La Thangue’s art is eminently the art which carries with it the sentiment of good breeding … If he does not always succeed in touching our sensibilities; he never fails to command our respect.\textsuperscript{141}
\end{quote}

For these reasons, the first section of this chapter will focus upon the founding artists of the New English Art Club, chiefly George Clausen and Henry La Thangue. This club is intimately connected to another important group, the so-called Newlyn School as well.

The aims and style of this artists’ colony, which was located at the coastal town of Newlyn, Cornwall, were highly acclaimed during the period from 1885 to 1895.\textsuperscript{142} Significantly, the

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item[138] Laughton, 1969, p.2.
\item[139] Lambourne, 1999, p. 476.
\item[140] Lambourne, 1999, p. 481.
\item[141] Little, 1893, p. 173.
\end{itemize}
distinctive mark of square brushwork plays a significant role in the contemporary recognition of Newlyn paintings.\textsuperscript{143} It can also represent an obvious connection between Bastien-Lepage’s artistic idiom and the Newlyn artists. In Fox’s catalogue, \textit{Artists of the Newlyn School, 1880-1900}, it is argued that the Newlyn School, in the eyes of many British critics, came to represent that “strengthening and multiplying French influence” during the 1880s. Some of these critics, nevertheless, held tentative rather than positive attitudes towards this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{144} For these reasons, the British reception to Bastien-Lepage’s paintings can be gauged by examining how the contemporary art critics reacted to the Newlyn artists’ assimilation of the French-inspired techniques.

The interest of twentieth century art historians in this group of artists is also noteworthy. For example, Rezelman claimed in 1984 that:

… until his study no one has seriously looked at Newlyn paintings to evaluate the true relationship and how a response to Bastien-Lepage’s subjects and techniques may have differed from colonist to colonist.\textsuperscript{145}

Rezelman also offers a particular viewpoint through which to analyse the pertinent issue of Bastien-Lepage’s reputation in Britain. He argues:

… the effect of Bastien-Lepage on the Newlyn work is a problem which is best dealt with painting by painting because no single artist can be justifiably considered a devoted follower.\textsuperscript{146}

Whether Rezelman’s statements are valid or not will be interrogated in the following sections of this chapter, which will examine works of the three relevant artists, George Clausen, Henry La Thangue and Stanhope Forbes. This analysis of their work will be conducted in order to demonstrate the similarities and differences underlying in the central ideas behind their naturalistic paintings. For these select examples, the ways and extent to

\textsuperscript{142} Hopkins, 2007-2010, Grove Art Online – Newlyn School.
\textsuperscript{143} Fox & Greenacre, 1985, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{144} Fox & Greenacre, 1985, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{145} Rezelman, 1984, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{146} Rezelman, 1984, p. 53.
which and the extent to which, British contemporaries responded to Bastien-Lepage’s influence will be inferred.

A primary focus will be placed on contemporary reviews of the Newlyn style and techniques appearing in the major British art journals circulating in the late nineteenth century, such as *Magazine of Art*, *Art Journal*, *Studio*, *Athenæum* and *Portfolio*. Furthermore, an examination of the nuances between Newlyn artists’ manners of depiction will be undertaken to provide a deeper insight into their reception of Bastien-Lepage’s style, as judged to be “audacious” or “eclectic” style and its concurrent influence on his contemporaries.¹⁴⁷

**The English Academy and French Ateliers:**

Certainly English artists were increasingly aware of the range of techniques and values that could be acquired from the French atelier system during the later nineteenth century. But, before one turns to the main body of the argument, it is essential to clarify the underlying motives behind the English artists’ willingness to pursue their artistic training abroad on the Continent. This exploration can provide a broader perspective through which to further interpret contemporary English reviews of the French Naturalist manner. It also sheds light on the range of techniques and values inherent in the French training which could well have been accepted by the English art world.

In Britain, several specific groups of artists were keen to escape from the formal shackles of the Royal Academy and the other recognized art schools. These men reacted against the institutions’ rigid rules with respect to taking courses and choosing supervisors.¹⁴⁸ As Laughton points out, students from the Academy were required to spend several years on the practice of drawing from casts in a meticulous, “stippled style with charcoal and

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¹⁴⁷ Feldman, 1979, p. 5.
¹⁴⁸ Laughton, 1969, p. 2.
It can be inferred that the more flexible teaching procedures offered under the French atelier system could have been a key attraction for English artists.

The fact is that many Parisian art schools such as Julian’s atelier permitted students to learn oil painting as a technique at a much earlier stage of their studies than that offered at the Royal Academy. Furthermore, students were allowed to choose to be the disciple of a specific French master. This meant that they benefited not only from more consistent direction when learning certain techniques but also had access to a master’s personal philosophy. This can be demonstrated in the exemple of Alphonse Legros, who served his apprenticeship with Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran, and learnt his master’s theories and lessons on memory drawing. It can thus be concluded that the contemporary French art world provided a comparatively open and attractive ambience for student artists. This is further endorsed by Lionel G. Robinson’s statement of 1886: “French training was characterised by more encouragement for the exercise of individual thoughts and aims than in any other country”.

In spite of this, Moore disapproved of such English artists and artists-in-the-making learning from the Continent, declaring that “… the art of our century is literally putrid with curiosity … which has been always a corruptive influence”. According to Robins, Moore’s opposition resides in his discontent with the mechanism of the French teaching system, which focused in its education on ‘easily reproducible techniques’. Such methods encouraged the creation of painting that was both methodical and quantitatively productive. On the other hand, works of art produced under this French system were inclined to lose the quality of their uniqueness. This argument clearly reveals one positive aspect of the conventional values upheld in the contemporary English art circle – the importance of each painting having a distinctive character.

149 Laughton, 1969, p. 2.
150 Laughton, 1969, p. 2.
151 Rezelman, 1984, p. 17.
152 Rezelman, 1984, p. 22.
153 Robins, 2007, p. 56.
Moore’s negative opinion was not powerful enough to suppress the large number of artists who were curious about the benefits of foreign study. It is significant that, during the 1880s, the ethos of “independence and originality” was said to suffuse the Parisian art world. Such an atmosphere, with its emphasis on French freedom of creativity can be thus viewed as playing a role in stimulating much of the interest in the phenomenon of Bastien-Lepage among his English contemporaries, especially those who came to enrol in the French system.

French artists were thought to place great emphasis on freedom of creation and on the openness of artistic imagination, whereas as Moore pointed out, some British art institutions tended to be constrained by commercial purposes. The Kensington schools, for instance, were considered by Moore to produce art that would appeal to wealthy customers, such as the design of furnishing and wall-papers. This commercial and industrial direction, he believed, made the Kensington schools turn their back on any proper training which would develop students’ painting skills. From this perspective, it could be inferred that the South Kensington artistic principles did not stress that art was about the presentation of real everyday life to viewers, nor did it advocate any particular moral values in students’ works of art.

Moore also provides various accounts from the 1880s with regard to the unsound aspects of the Royal Academy’s teaching system. He stated that part of its operations judged students’ works of art according to the market value: the higher the prices at which one’s painting was sold, the greater esteem in which he or she would be held. This system, to his mind, curtailed the creative possibilities of learners and forced the Academy to degenerate further into a mere “mercenary enterprise”. Moore highlighted the ambiguous motives behind the British training system and his negative reviews suggest why many contemporary British artists sought foreign inspiration on the Continent. It also explained why French-

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158 Moore, 1893, p. 99.
159 Moore, 1893, p. 99.
160 Moore, 1893, p. 63.
161 Moore, 1893, p. 99.
trained British artists determined to establish the New English Art Club and the Newlyn School in direct competition with the British establishment’s art institutions.

In spite of this, some British art critics continued to sit on the fence when evaluating the importance of introducing foreign artistic methods into the United Kingdom. They preferred to concentrate on upholding the essence of British artistic traditions. In *The Magazine of Art* of 1884, for example, the art reviewer Stevenson published a detailed account of French artistic methods, as viewed from a negative British position:

> French art has been accused of aiming at technique rather than at idea, of being rather clever than full of deep feeling, more coarsely strong than delicate, and aiming rather at crushing other work than at expressing a sentiment of its own”.  

Steveson’s analysis suggests that the French naturalistic style – a precisely realistic delineation of everyday life surroundings – was seen to some degree to conflict with established British aesthetic values that upheld narrative and sentiment. His arguments can be also viewed as providing a summary of the distinct differences between French and British painters’ artistic purposes, particularly during the decade of the 1880s. He felt it was clear that:

> ... the English wish beauty is to be something unattainable ... something connected with, but floating above the material of any art; a soul linked to a body, but quite different and independent, something transcendental.  

Given this, it can be claimed that the continuing appeal of an English ideal of beauty limited the reception of the French concept of rustic Naturalism. This established understanding of art’s purpose and limits also could have affected how the English art world responded to the New English Art Club and the Newlyn School’s paintings. The following sections of this chapter will therefore focus on the works of three artists: George Clausen, Henry La Thangue and Stanhope Forbes, because each painter was and is regarded as a representative member of either the New English Art Club or the Newlyn

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163 Stevenson, 1884, p. 466.
164 Stevenson, 1884, p. 466.
School. The contemporary reception of these three artists will be presented through individual case studies. This process will seek to provide a deeper insight into one of the most influential cross-cultural (British and French) artistic phenomena during the late nineteenth century.

**George Clausen (1852-1944)**

The English artist, George Clausen is acknowledged as one of the most accomplished follower of Jules Bastien-Lepage’s style of art. It is generally recognized that his interest in the rustic motifs of John Robertson Reid (1851-1926) and Léon Augustin Lhermitte (1884-1925) led to Clausen’s first encounter with Bastien-Lepage in 1880. Indeed, one of Reid’s typical works, *Toil and Pleasure* (Fig.5), 1879, depicts a country scene in which the artist masterfully integrates the inhabitants who are engaged in various rural activities. Reid is highly regarded for his artistic skill in celebrating the communion of men with Nature. Similarly, Lhermitte imbued his painting, *The Harvest* (Fig.6), 1874, with a sense of vividness by presenting the workers at their varied tasks. It can be inferred that it was his meticulous draughtsmanship that enabled *The Harvest* to gain official recognition in the Salon. This brief reference to the peasant paintings of the above named artists can facilitate the following examination of the influence of Bastien-Lepage upon Clausen’s artistic techniques and subject matters.

Not only did most of Clausen’s paintings of the 1880s reveal his admiration for Lepage’s Naturalist style, but also his contemporary writings were explicating and promoting the

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165 Phillips, 1892, p. 270.
166 McConkey, 2007-2010, Grove Art Online – Clausen, Sir George.
167 Hopkins, Grove Art Online – Reid, John Robertson. Reid was a Scottish painter, and a full-time pupil at the Royal Scottish Academy, under the direction of R. P. Chalmers and William McTaggart. A brief introduction to the painting, *Toil and Pleasure* can be found on the website of Tate Collection: http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=12347&roomid=1304.
master’s artistic theory, such as ‘Jules Bastien-Lepage as an Artist’ and ‘Jules Bastien-Lepage and Modern Realism’. These texts can be viewed as providing evidence of the ways in which he and his British contemporaries, such as La Thangue and Stanhope Forbes responded to Lepage’s doctrines. Nevertheless, it should also be recognized that Clausen developed an equally great appreciation of the artistic processes of Jean François Millet, as would become obvious in his paintings after 1890. For these reasons, this section aims to examine the ways in which George Clausen assimilated both Bastien-Lepage and Millet’s concepts of truth to Nature, by investigating the contemporary British criticism of Clausen’s rural landscape paintings. It will also offer an analytical contrast and comparison between Clausen and Bastien-Lepage’s art.

It is important to note that Clausen tended to focus on the foreground peasant figures of his rural landscape paintings, that is, he chose to arrange them against an unconventionally high horizon. Clausen’s employment of this dramatic compositional format played a significant role in demonstrating his connection with Bastien-Lepage. One modern scholar, Beechey labels Lepage’s compositional arrangement as “a special formula”. What matters in the “special formula” is that the painter conveyed a feeling of recessive space, from a meticulously detailed delineation of the flattened foreground subject matters “through a more broadly brushed middle distance to a diffuse and opaque horizon”.

In Bastien-Lepage’s painting Nothing Doing, 1882 (Fig.7), for instance, one barge boy, “… who would have controlled the horses pulling the barge and alerted the lockmasters of its imminent arrival”, is shown as dominating the image. His facial profile and the creases of his worn costume are clearly modelled. Lepage uses the olive-gray hues to create a sylvan atmosphere in the background, which serves as a foil for the highlighted figure. It

169 Rutherston, 1923, p. 18.
170 The text, “Jules Bastien-Lepage as an Artist” was compiled in Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art: a Memoir by André Theuriet in 1892. The other text, “Jules Bastien-Lepage and Modern Realism”, 1888 can be found in The Scottish Art Review.
171 Rutherston, 1923, p. 18.
172 Beechey, 2007, p. 503.
175 National Galleries of Scotland Online, Pas Mèche.
can be argued that such compositional features enhance the authenticity of the subject that Bastien-Lepage portrayed. Notably, George Clausen adopts a similar approach in his *Breton Girl Carrying a Jar* (Fig.8), 1882. A young country girl is presented as the foreground subject of the picture. The harmonious blend of green-shaded hues allows the central figure to stand out from the rustic background scene. Her direct look and the “hand-on-hip” posture seem to add a dignified aura to this unconventional composition.

Significantly, the art critic of the *Magazine of Art* gave an approving critique that acknowledged the artist’s sources when reviewing Clausen’s *A Girl’s Head*, 1886-7 (Fig.9). He stated that:

… the modelling of this young girl’s head is so entirely in the mode of Bastien Lepage’s “Rustic Idyll” – for instance, the light, over-bright greens of the background are so much those typical of the master … the same modelling is so firm and so masterly in its precision, there is expressed in the youthful face such pathos and such vitality, that criticism is almost disarmed … 

This account testifies to George Clausen’s devoted application of certain French techniques, including the emphasis on natural light and the use of precise modelling, in order to replicate the rustic ideal of Lepage’s Naturalist images. From the art critic’s point of view, Clausen’s careful rendering of the figure’s facial expression enhances the degree of realism in *A Girl’s Head* (Fig.9). It is important to single out the precision in the depicted foreground which dictates the shaping of Lepage’s “special formula” as well.

Clausen’s painting also echoes the idea that Bastien-Lepage portrayed rural life in accord with his own naturalistic, unvarnished vision, rather than presenting idealised images of everyday life. As Rosen declares, this French master desired to project “his interest of painting onto the scenes represented rather than its aesthetic merits”. Given this, it can be argued that the unattractive aspects of rural life, such as the dirty outfits of rustic peasants and the barren countryside environments, were not avoided or omitted in Bastien-Lepage’s

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177 Rosen, 1984, p. 118.
paintings. Instead, the artist included these elements to manifest the “flesh-and-blood” quality of his peasant figures, and further create the effect of “unaffected realism”.

The similar impression of an unfiltered revelation of everyday life can be seen in George Clausen’s art. Certainly, Beechey has claimed that a sense of “studied impartiality” can be noted in his paintings. Furthermore, Clausen’s artistic insistence on what he perceived is represented in his blunt depictions of rural subjects. In fact, one contemporary critic, Phillips roundly criticized in the *Magazine of Art*, 1885:

> For Mr. Clausen’s work there is no such justification. If it exists at all … it exists not as the expression of a certain view of nature or as the outcome of a certain sentiment, but as a mere record of observation … perhaps, to this purpose … his painting is excessively ugly and seems to have been painted for its ugliness’ sake and nothing else.

Phillips not only explained that the primary basis of Clausen’s art was his actual observation of nature but also linked it to his direct portrayals of figures and scenes. Those highly critical comments further assert that this style of art limited Clausen to depictions of merely “ugly” and unrefined images. Phillips’ disapproving attitude towards what he claimed were over-realistic works of art is in his use of the expression, “… painted for its ugliness’ sake”. It can be thus inferred that “the ugliness” refers to such motifs as the shabby apparel and dirty hands of the peasants. Similar negative reviews by other British contemporary critics can be found: *The Times*, in referring to George Clausen’s *Winter Work* of 1883 (Fig.10), complained that “… this painting was really too ugly and that it could give no pleasure”. The art critic of *The Morning Post* also claimed that: “… Clausen had made a mistake by drifting into ‘grim dreary realism’ with his depiction of a terrible old woman with her rugged weather beaten face”.

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180 Phillips, 1885, p. 134.
Pointing to Clausen’s advocacy of “objective Naturalism”, George Moore also commenced one of his fiercest attacks on the artist’s *Labourers: after Dinner* (untraced) of 1884. As Moore asserted, the “cold realism” did not accommodate to the artistic taste of the day. That was because, he argued, “the mission of art was not truth but beauty”. His criticism of the stark realism of Clausen’s composition is evident in the following statement as well:

> Until I saw Mr. Clausen’s *Labourers* I did not fully realise how terrible a thing art becomes when divorced from beauty, grace, mystery and suggestion.

Given this, another of Moore’s assertions that “the grossness, the ugliness and the meanness were inherent in Clausen’s subjects” becomes understandable. To a further degree, one strand of the contemporary British perspective on Bastien-Lepage’s Naturalism is made clear: an unvarnished depiction of peasant people and rustic scenes was felt to lack the suggestive and aesthetic elements that must exist to create a work of art. Nevertheless, Clausen offered the deference that Lepage had a great ability to embody his personages and views in their fullness without “the appearance of artifice”. From Clausen’s standpoint, the value of this French master’s art lays in the fact that his manner of painting provided a new outlook on rural landscape paintings: “… a picture should be the record of something seen, of some impression felt, rather than be formally constructed …” Any audience was thus able to explore “an immense gain of beauty in the work of art itself”, for the so-called sense of beauty was to be found in the truth of the portrayal.

This view sheds further light on the underlying motive behind Clausen’s artistic drive that “… he sought his art in the mean and the meaningless”. Arguably, the artist’s intention was simply to emphasise the reality of what he depicted. As one contemporary artist, Armstrong, pointed out when he asserted in 1885:

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183 Sloane, 1951, p. 78.
184 Rutherston, 1923, p. 15.
185 Moore, 1893, p. 117.
186 Moore, 1893, p. 120.
187 Clausen, 1888, p. 114.
188 MacDonald, 2005, p. 34.
189 Clausen, 1888, p. 114.
190 Moore, 1893, p. 118.
A subject attracts Clausen by actuality, and from the first touch upon his canvas to the last it is of its actuality that he tries to convince us … 191

It can be concluded that both Clausen and his French master, Bastien-Lepage painted with the aim of creating a true representation of surrounding daily life. Nevertheless, there existed another stylistic influence which dictated the artistic principles of George Clausen. That also allowed his art go beyond being categorized as Bastien-Lepage replicas. As Claude Phillips declared, “the mighty synthetic power of Jean-François Millet” occupied an essential position in encouraging Clausen to invest his rustic landscape paintings with an “ideal” sense. 192 It is further argued Clausen’s emphatic delineations of “largeness and a generalised truth” empowered his peasant pictures to be brought within “measurable distance of the ideal”. 193

For a further understanding of the so-called “ideal” aspects informing Clausen’s art, it is necessary to investigate the way in which Millet handled rural images. As Armstrong stated, “… what Millet adds to visible, superficial nature is the sense of infinity in the beings …” 194 This was particularly noted in the expression of figures involved in varied activities, such as sowing and reaping. Millet invested a passion or energy within the depicted figures, through which each individual gesture was able to become “a continuous pictorial movement” and thus leave a complete impression of what the artist sought to portray. 195 It is thus argued Millet’s manner not only tries to evoke a resonant feeling so as to communicate with viewers but also conveys the concept of continuity. For these reasons, the fact that Millet’s art has been recognized as “intensely spiritual” becomes understandable. 196 And, it is the evidenced of his influence that allowed Clausen’s paintings to be classified into the category of idealistic art by some contemporary critics.

191 Armstrong, 1890, p. 325.
192 Phillips, 1892, p. 270. This article, “Bastien-Lepage” was compiled in the Magazine of Art.
193 Phillips, 1892, p. 220. This article, “The Summer Exhibitions at Home and abroad – The Royal Academy and The New Gallery” was collected in the Art Journal, 1892.
194 Armstrong, 1895, p. 402.
195 Herbert, 1970, p. 46.
196 Clausen, 1888, p. 114.
This recognition of Clausen’s debt to Millet’s idealised peasants is significant in clarifying his artistic departure from the examples and doctrines of Bastien-Lepage. An appreciative oscillation between “subjective art” (Millet) and “objective art” (Bastien-Lepage) prompted Clausen to develop his own interpretation of French Naturalism in Britain.\textsuperscript{197} Clausen took inspiration from Millet’s expressive and emotional treatment of naturalistic depictions to further explore another way of representing truth in his paintings. Pointing to this, Armstrong acknowledged that Bastien-Lepage placed emphasis on precise delineations of minute details whereas Clausen relied on his mental conception of what he perceived. As Armstrong declared in 1895,

… George Clausen cared nothing for the smaller truths of detail, providing the general impressions were true to his mental image and his aim was avowedly to impose his mental impression on the spectator.\textsuperscript{198}

Bastien-Lepage’s paintings could be argued as being mere manifestations of his “visual impressions”.\textsuperscript{199} A meticulous portrayal of detailed parts highlighted the actuality of his concept of objective naturalism. Whereas Clausen, from being influenced by Millet’s privileging of the subjective motif, tried not to suppress his personal interpretation of what he observed to the same extent as Bastien-Lepage. He chose rather to focus on the wholeness of the portrayed scenes. McConkey, pointing to Clausen’s \textit{The Girl at the Gate}, 1889 (Fig.11), discusses how the artist presented it:

Clausen saw it altogether at one time and that the full field of vision presented within the frame revealed itself in all its completeness.\textsuperscript{200}

Thus, the mental impression that Clausen desired to impose on a rural scene can be understood as a generalisation of the truth. Furthermore, the ambiguous demarcation of Clausen’s assimilation between Lepage and Millet’s artistic modes was also inclined to

\begin{flushendnotes}
\textsuperscript{197} Armstrong, 1895, p. 404. \\
\textsuperscript{198} Armstrong, 1895, p. 401. \\
\textsuperscript{199} Armstrong, 1895, p. 401. \\
\textsuperscript{200} McConkey, 2002, p. 133.
\end{flushendnotes}
diminish the “unifying forcefulness” of his paintings. Nevertheless, it is significant that Clausen’s insistence on his art as being true to his perceptions led to him gaining increasing recognition within the British art world. As Charles Johnson proposes, even though “sincerity may go with eccentricity”, leading to a lack of the uniqueness, it is yet the essential element to emphasise continuity. The assertion can therefore be made that “the evident sincerity of purpose in all his paintings” that ensured the art of Clausen will live.

Henry Herbert La Thangue (1859-1929)

Henry Herbert La Thangue is one of the major figures of late Victorian art who occupied a prominent position in the emergence of the New English Art Club. It is acknowledged that the Art Club was established at the Marlborough Gallery in Pall Mall in 1886. A significant component of La Thangue’s reputation was his role within the New English Art Club in fostering the British public’s acceptance of contemporary French Naturalism, which departed from the perceived insistence of academic painting on “anecdotage” and “studio recipes”. Non-urban surroundings, such as peasant motifs and outdoor activities, came to be adopted as the new sources of inspiration for this group of artists. Furthermore, La Thangue was recognized as a key promoter of Bastien-Lepage’s square brushwork during the late nineteenth century. For these reasons, La Thangue and the New English Art Club came to be associated in the public mind with the promotion of a foreign palette and technique.

Pertinent evidence to support this can be found in the Magazine of Art of 1886. A critical review of the first exhibition of the New English Art Club (NEAC) observed that these artists were characterised by the fact they were “modern French in training and

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201 Armstrong, 1895, p. 402.
202 Johnson, 1932, p. 295.
203 Johnson, 1932, p. 295.
204 Armstrong, 1886, p. 252.
205 Constable, 1925, p. 57.
ambition”.\textsuperscript{207} It was also acknowledged that one emphatic principle of contemporary French Naturalism its aim to “observe the humble and the commonplace”.\textsuperscript{208} In addition, as McConkey has asserted, contemporary studio-based teaching programs, such as those adopted in the French artist, Gérômé’s atelier, empowered foreign students to realise the importance of “the shared bases of perception”.\textsuperscript{209} He emphasises that NEAC painters clearly assimilated these strands of French artistic thoughts, and were:

... Especially occupied with the rigorous application of a certain form of technique to the facts of observation, the NEAC artists strive to express the real appearances of things as seen by the eye, and not the deducted results of knowledge and further examination.\textsuperscript{210}

Thus, that whatever the NEAC artists perceived would dictate their artistic creations.

However, this section of the thesis not only aims to explore the ways in which Bastien-Lepage’s techniques were associated with La Thangue’s art making but also will argue that the latter’s paintings still retained his own personal aesthetic and interpretation of foreign French methods. This will be clarified through an examination of the contemporary British reception of La Thangue’s French-inspired paintings; which will in turn extend our understanding of the influential role that Bastien-Lepage’s example played in fostering the development of British rustic Naturalism.

Painted in 1885, \textit{In the Dauphiné} (Fig.12) was selected by La Thangue as his representative work to be sent to the first exhibition of the New English Art Club; and this history makes it an appropriate work to be singled out for further discussion. La Thangue’s employment of a blonde, washed-out palette imbues the whole picture with a sense of lightness. Viewers can also sense the hard day’s labour that has been done through the artist’s delineation of both the agricultural workers’ rounded shoulders and the female worker’s less energetic posture, with both of her arms carrying the heavy baskets laden with the day’s produce.

\textsuperscript{207} Magazine of Art, 1886, p. xxx. This article is in the section of Art Note – Art in May.
\textsuperscript{208} Treuherz, 1987, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{209} McConkey, 1978, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{210} McConkey, 1978, p. 7.
Furthermore, the two figures are depicted as a paired compositional element that dominates the picture’s foreground. Such technical arrangements immediately recall the influence of Bastien-Lepage’s imagery, as the French master’s Naturalistic style features the same aspects of tonality, composition and brushwork. Even a glance at *In the Dauphiné* makes clear La Thangue’s emulation of Bastien-Lepage’s manner. The contemporary British critic of the *Magazine of Art* expressed the view that this picture embodied the NEAC’s philosophy:

... In the painting – *In the Dauphiné*, broad and systematic in touch and high bluish and open-air like in colour, the characteristics of the school are most fully expressed...\(^{211}\)

According to the context of the original account, it is clear that “the school” here referred to the distinctive style of Bastien-Lepage’s art. Furthermore, the art critic recognized La Thangue’s mastery in manipulating those Naturalist techniques of the French master. From this perspective, La Thangue’s incorporation of various foreign elements can be interpreted as a decision to depart from British conventions, in particular the mid-Victorian manner of presenting rustic scenes.

In the general sense, mid-Victorian landscape and genre paintings feature the varied manifestations of British scenes from everyday life.\(^{212}\) Against the background of the industrial age, Victorian artists and their patrons, in particular those who were townspeople developed strong nostalgic feelings for the British countryside’s beauty, which came to represent the rural simplicity of a bygone era.\(^{213}\) In their eyes, the countryside was a symbol of the lost Arcadia which implied the essence of “purity, innocence and beauty”.\(^{214}\) It can be argued that such inclinations fuelled the production of rural landscape paintings that, to a degree, reflect the contemporary inner desire for a form of spiritual comfort as well as an escape from the industrialised life. Wood has underscored this pertinent argument in his varied texts, where he has asserted that:

\(^{212}\) Wood, 1995, p. 11.
\(^{214}\) Wood, 1999, p. 298.
Many men faced with the unpleasant conditions; they simply ignored them and preferred to … their own image of the countryside … where peasants went happily about their labours, children played on the village green …

Wood also cites one of George Eliot’s accounts in the *Westminster Review* of 1856 as supporting evidence, for this argument that landscape took on a heightened emotional significance in the mid-century.

The notion that peasants are joyous, the village matrons are usually buxom … are prejudices difficult to dislodge from the artist’s mind … The peasant is still under the influence of idyllic literature, which has always expressed the imagination of the cultivated and town-bred, rather than the truth of country life.

Her statement corroborates the significant extent to which an ideal image of bucolic life was meaningful in creating the concepts underlying mid-Victorian landscape paintings. It further indicates that the deep-rooted assumptions of cultured people about such bucolic scenes played a role in offering contemporary artists sources of inspiration. In their rural paintings, the majority of compositions tend to depict country life as pleasant, decent and orderly. They were viewed as representing an idyllic ambience which differed from the suffocation of real industrialised life.

This argument, in essence, is intertwined with the idea that “Man made the town, God made the country”. It can be again argued that some Victorian rustic paintings were invested with certain religious connotations. Eliot’s account is further evidence that the mid-nineteenth century upheld a prevailing belief in the British world: rural landscape paintings portrayed, and were seen to portray, an idealised utopia. However, whether this Victorian thinking was still influential within the British art world during the 1870s and 1880s is an issue that must be taken into account.

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What matters here is an understanding of Victorian taste and the outlook it provides on contemporary interpretations of rural paintings. This is helpful in examining the British public’s responses to La Thangue’s absorption of foreign French Naturalism. The fact is that Bastien-Lepage’s style, which encompassed the delineation of country life with unembellished directness, must have challenged many Victorian conceptions of the rustic landscape, for both the artists themselves and the art critics. As seen in Liverpool, England, of 1887, one art critic asserted that:

Lepage’s theory is not complete as a basis of art … because it is in the creation of art that the spectator seeks refuge, from reality, and even in the presence of nature herself it is the imagination which makes the picture.\(^{220}\)

Therefore, it can be argued that the French concept of Naturalism and plein-airism positioned La Thangue’s peasant paintings far from the Victorian taste for idyllic or bucolic beauty. With the assistance of the square brushwork technique, La Thangue was able to portray a moment in time, a transitory view of peasant workers and the natural rustic environment around them. His paintings thus tended to possess an arresting sense of spontaneity, which is in obviously in direct contrast to the polished mid-Victorian mode.

A study of some contemporary reviews of the painting, *A Study, in March*, 1855 (Fig.13) by John William Inchbold (1830-1888) can offer an outlook on such the traditional artistic quality which had appealed to the Victorian audience. The critic of the *Spectator* pointed out the purity and perfection of Inchbold’s subtle handling of soft colour.\(^{221}\) Every touch of colour is applied in a finished way. The *Athenaeum*’s writer also marvelled at the artist’s precise delineation that expressed “a feminine delicacy and an almost painful elaboration of the motive of every spot and speck in nature’s handiworks”\(^{222}\) These critically approving comments reflect the British appreciation of this highly finished aesthetic in landscape painting. It is significant to note that paintings that embraced a form of generalised Pre-Raphaelitism or Dutch-inspired realism would continue to dominate the British mind until

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\(^{220}\) Liverpool, England, “Naturalism in Art”, 1887.
\(^{221}\) Parris, 1994, p. 130.
\(^{222}\) Parris, 1994, p. 130.
the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This can be evidenced in the bucolic landscape paintings of Thomas Sidney Cooper (1803-1902), who enjoyed great popularity among the contemporary art collectors. In *A River Scene* of 1885 (Fig.14), both his tonal handling and treatment of the landscape and cattle reflect the inspiration of the well-mannered execution of Old Dutch Masters, such as Paulus Potter and Aelbert Cuyp. Hence, a clear separation existed between La Thangue’s naturalism, with its fatigued farm labourers carrying out their daily work, and the more historicizing or highly finished rural compositions of mainstream British landscape artists.223

The considerable differences between the technical execution of Cooper and La Thangue, indicate one of the reasons why art critics singled out La Thangue’s use of square brushwork for discussion. An insight into the contemporary connotations of the square brush technique is afforded by the writer Morley Roberts’ account in 1889:

… square brush is a technical method which puts paint on canvas in a particular way … Those who practice it in its simplest form leave the brush marks and do not smooth away the evidence of method, thus sometimes insisting on the way the picture is painted perhaps at the sacrifice of subtleties in the subject.224

His description underlines the unrefined character of the brushwork. Given this, it can be asserted that La Thangue’s utilisation of this French-influenced technique facilitated his creation of an alternative and distinctive category within Victorian landscape imagery. One contemporary art critic, Thomson, for example, pointed to the increasingly successful integration of the subject matter and the artist’s square brush marks when he declared in 1897 that:

… His technique was of the order of solid painting, well considered and worked in big square brushes … The execution of his square brush is better worked into the motive of the picture now than in those earlier days …225

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223 Tate Collection – Thomas Sidney Cooper.
225 Thomson, 1897, p. 168.
In other words, the artist shaped his own Naturalist subjects by incorporating a so-called audacious foreign element, yet, according to the same contemporary critic, without the foreign school’s “extravagant excess of emulation”. Arguably, it is his discretion in handling the square brush technique that allowed La Thangue to capture certain qualities of French Naturalism while still asserting his own personal mode of painting. This further ensured his position as a pioneering exponent of the French-inspired Naturalist style in the British art world. This is corroborated in Thomson’s approving remarks regarding La Thangue’s artistic contribution to his generation.

To a very extent the history of the Naturalistic movement in England is the history of Mr. H. H. La Thangue … La Thangue is the very type of the school … his esteem among painters has always been great, and has with the general public greatly risen during the last few years.

This account suggests that contemporary art critics tended to classify the painters who drew inspiration from Bastien-Lepage’s square brush technique as pioneers in the establishment of an emerging British art movement. For instance, Morley Roberts even “hailed La Thangue as the leader of the Square Brush School”. In 1893, Little acclaimed his achievement in the British art world as well.

No real or lasting reputation is created in this way, and H. H. La Thangue is all the more assured of a permanent place in the art of England … Among the men who have toiled as honest workmen to achieve a high place for England as the home of Art, it may fairly be claimed that La Thangue has played an important role.

Even George Clausen, La Thangue’s fellow artist, also positioned him as a positive catalyst within the British art system when he reminisced that:

No notice of La Thangue’s career can be adequate if it fails to put on record the great part he took about forty years ago (1889) … in endeavouring to reform the handling of

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226 Thomson, 1897, p. 168.
227 Thomson, 1897, p. 163.
229 Little, 1893, p. 175.
the Royal Academy Exhibition. His aim was to institute an elected jury as at the Paris Salon.230

This statement not only recognizes La Thangue’s significance but also demonstrates another distinctive aspect of his contribution to the contemporary British art world; he sought to introduce the French institutional system into Britain so as to reform the rigid procedures of the Royal Academy.231 It must be noted that French artists themselves began to elect members of the Salon jury during the period of the Third Republic (1870-1940). This change has been regarded as heralding the decline of the Academy’s predominance.232 In a reforming spirit, La Thangue advocated this democratic process for the selection of the committees of British art institutions, thus mounting a challenge to the Royal Academy’s rules.233 Of course the artist had experienced first-hand the benefits of the decision-making power of French artists both outside and inside the Salon, when he first studied in the French atelier system in the 1880s.234

La Thangue began attending the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts under the direction of Jean-Léon Gérôme in 1880.235 La Thangue’s skill and capability as a draughtsman and mastery of tonal painting was shaped under the systematic training of Gérôme’s atelier. Nevertheless, the contemporary Naturalist Salon painters also ignited his interest in French rustic landscape painting.236 In addition, it needs to be noted that La Thangue’s sojourn along the Brittany coast in 1881 and 1882 played a key role in beginning his association with the large group of French plein air artists established there.237

It was during this time that La Thangue had the opportunity to learn from Bastien-Lepage in person. Furthermore, he and his old school friend, Stanhope Forbes, began to develop a shared Naturalist manner in Brittany: the broader square brushwork and the brighter

230 Clausen, 1929, p. 11.
231 Robins, Grove Art Online – New English Art Club.
232 Favro, 2007-2010, Grove Art Online – Paris. The sources are found in the section of Académie des Beaux-Art.
233 A Modern Painter, 1907, p. 204-7.
236 Thomson, 1897, p. 168.
237 McConkey, Grove Art Online – Henry Herbert La Thangue.
tonality representing the indispensable components.\textsuperscript{238} This can be seen when one compares La Thangue’s \textit{The Boat-Building Yard}, 1881 (Fig.15) with Forbes’ \textit{A Street in Brittany}, 1881 (Fig.16).\textsuperscript{239} Both paintings are characterized by gradations of light blue colour, which enhance the feeling of an authentic natural ambience. Nevertheless, although a French-influenced palette of high tones was employed in this painting, La Thangue did not choose to emphasise the foreground figure, as did Bastien-Lepage in his Naturalist paintings. Instead, every compositional component is evenly arranged in \textit{The Boat-Building Yard} (Fig.15). It would appear that La Thangue was still intent on expressing his own vision of rural surroundings while simultaneously following the example of Bastien-Lepage’s \textit{plein-airism}.

In this respect, the artist’s paintings were not like the mechanical replicas of the French Master that some contemporary French ateliers were producing - according to British writers like George Moore. Moore, indeed, disapproved of English artists-in-the-making learning on the Continent because of what he perceived as the mechanism of the French teaching system, which focused its education on ‘easily reproducible techniques’.\textsuperscript{240} For instance, most students of the French atelier of Gérôme tended to follow an established formula when creating works of art, that is, in relation to the specific tonality, brushwork and composition. Thus, to some critics it appeared that French Naturalist painters of the later nineteenth century produced works of art that were mechanical and less intriguing.\textsuperscript{241} Which is why, in turn, some commentators interpreted La Thangue’s uniform handling of brushstrokes as a display of “mere technical dexterity”.\textsuperscript{242}

Nevertheless, it needs to be observed that La Thangue’s learning experiences in Paris played an important role in shaping his artistic emphasis on “the bases of perception”.\textsuperscript{243} As Beechey asserts, both Le Thangue and Forbes began to publically promote Bastien-

\textsuperscript{238} McConkey, 1978, p. 8. It is important to point out that both La Thangue and Stanhope Forbes had been pupils at the South Kensington School of Art, under the direction of Alphones Legros.
\textsuperscript{239} McConkey, 1978, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{240} Robins, 2007, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{241} Hamerton, 1891, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{242} Little, 1893, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{243} McConkey, 1978, p. 7.
Lepage’s doctrines of *plein-airism* after this time. However, La Thangue’s chosen subject matter of agricultural labours and the favoured grey palette are also related to what the artist perceived within his everyday surroundings. His conscientious endeavours to execute the concept as well as the manner of *plein-air* painting increasingly won La Thangue praise as the “English Lepage” and empowered him to occupy a critical position in the British Naturalist movement. For instance, in 1893, Little asserted that:

La Thangue sees nature through his own eye; it is true, but with a single-minded endeavour to suppress his individual outlook and to sink it in the larger individuality of nature.

From Little’s points of view, what matters for La Thangue is not only the representation of the authentic appearance of Nature, but also the expression of its distinctive essence. Therefore, the artist downplayed imaginative elements so as to paint from an unvarnished perception. In effect, this can be directly linked to the contemporary French thinking, as evidenced in the declaration of one eminent French critic, M. Albert Wolff:

… the French school lives in observation rather than in imagination so that the reality of things is the mark of contemporary art.

For some British critics, this idea was, however, considered to be undermining the higher role of art by discounting everything but its ability to present “mere facts”. The concern is related to whether artists would prioritise aesthetic value such as the originality and a sense of beauty, while also revealing the varied facets of everyday life. In other words, the ways and the extent to which artists were able to transcribe homogeneous scenes into distinct images were being carefully evaluated. Given this, one of the reasons for the particular British response to the technical aspects of La Thangue’s French-inspired paintings can be connected to moral and philosophical rather than simply nationalistic

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244 Little, 1893, p. 173.
245 Little, 1893, p. 173.
246 Hamerton, 1891, p. 55.
247 Hamerton, 1891, p. 56.
justifications. As a contemporary English photographer, George Davison’s account makes clear:

Naturalism is a revolt from the domination of conventionalism in composition and in colour, and has resulted in a school of thinkers and workers who gain their inspiration from nature, and charm us by giving us truth…\(^{248}\)

In respect to the contemporary discussion surrounding the technical aspects of La Thangue’s art, one point needs to be noted in passing, and that is the spotlighted portrayals of foreground figures that frequently appeared the work of proponents of British Naturalism. It was acknowledged at the time that some La Thangue’s painting techniques could be associated with his interest in early photography, and more specifically, the ideas of his friend, the photographer Peter Henry Emerson’s (1856-1936), who developed the concept of Naturalistic photography.\(^ {249}\) An important and influential figure in the history of photography, Emerson not only first proclaimed that “photography was an independent art in its own right”, but also demonstrated the extent to which photography, as a scientific apparatus, could benefit the school of Naturalist painting.\(^ {250}\)

From Emerson’s point of view, “sharp focus” in photography should be simply confined to the major subject of the composition. The rest of components should be allowed to blur away into the distance. This approach, he felt, enabled “the feeling of human vision” to be captured.\(^ {251}\) At the time, Emerson’s theory of Naturalism was recognized as echoing the New English Art Club’s insistence on similar concepts.\(^ {252}\) Of course Emerson’s personal association with La Thangue also raises the possibility that his theory of a Naturalist vision influenced La Thangue’s tendency to emphasise the foreground of his compositions.\(^ {253}\) Certainly it can be claimed that a parallel exists between Emerson’s photographic theory

\(^{248}\) Coe, 1989, p. 220.  
\(^{250}\) Newhall, 1975, p. 3.  
\(^{251}\) Turner & Wood, 1974, p. 20.  
\(^{252}\) Handy, 1989, p. 187.  
\(^{253}\) McConkey, 1989, p. 44.
and La Thangue’s painting technique: the emphasis on the foreground subject reflects both artists’s primary aim to create “without affectation, without undue mannerism”.254

Despite the fact that La Thangue’s paintings could be seen to draw upon the French Naturalist method as well as experiments in photography, they nevertheless were perceived as embracing a sense of individuality. The contemporary critics, Thomson and Little both acknowledged this belief, which they connected to his restrained manner of delineation. For example, Little argued that:

Mr. La Thanuge’s art is eminently the art which carries with it the sentiment of good breeding; the dignity and reticence which went with it from its inception are manifested in what we usually speak of as quality and style.255

In choosing the words, “dignity and reticence”, Little endorsed the opinion that La Thangue’s works were “free from extravagance”.256 His glowing endorsement can be taken as summarising a major thread within the English reception of La Thangue’s rustic Naturalism. Although the artist’s favoured combination of a light palette and peasant motifs were mentioned by several contemporary sources, most discussion focussed upon La Thangue’s controlled handling of his square brush marks. Moreover, some critics like Thomson argued that La Thangue had himself invented his own way of manipulating the brush technique, rather than emulating it from France.257 That sense of individuality empowered his Naturalist works and contributed to the approving response from many British contemporaries.

Thomson’s claim underlined the distinctive quality of La Thangue’s works of art and offers a significant perspective from which to assess the analysis of the contemporary French critic, Ernest Chesneau, who was critical of British art students’ adoption of French Naturalist manners in Paris. Chesneau complained that:

254 Little, 1893, p. 173.
255 Little, 1893, p. 174.
256 Little, 1893, p. 174.
257 Thomson, 1897, p. 168.
… British art students lost their infinitely precious national identity, in exchange for a few methods, dodges of doubtful value …  

But La Thangue’s practice appears to provide the exception with respect to Chesneau’s judgement. While La Thangue disseminated Bastien-Lepage’s artistic approach, he nevertheless insisted on impressing his own artistic personality upon his creations. This determination recalls Little’s claim that: “If he does not always succeed in touching our sensibilities, he never fails to command our respect.” Notably, it is the individuality of La Thangue’s French-inspired Naturalist works that endorsed his dominant role in the late nineteenth-century British art world. It was his dedication to painting Nature with unfiltered honesty that won him ultimately an approving reception in Britain.

**Stanhope Alexander Forbes (1857-1947)**

In the last section, it was observed that during the early 1880s when Henry Herbert La Thangue visited Brittany, he formulated a method of painting which exploited light tonalities. His friendly association with Stanhope Forbes in Brittany was frequently referred to as a noted component in the association between the Naturalist movement and the art world in Britain. Their artistic connection can be evidenced in Forbes’ painting, *A Street in Brittany*, 1881 (Fig.16), which depicts a street scene inhabited by local French peasant women. In the same mode as his contemporary, La Thangue, Forbes chose to present the scene without contrasting light and shade. The dominant figure, shown in the painting’s foreground, is another element that demonstrates the important connection between the art of Forbes and La Thangue – their admiration for the late nineteenth-century movement of French Naturalism. It is clearly significant that Stanhope Forbes attended the atelier of Léon Bonnat in the 1880s after his study at the Lambeth School of Art (1874-6) and the Royal Academy Schools (1876-8) in London. The two-year learning experience on the

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Continent fostered his enthusiasm for Bastien-Lepage’s artistic idiom.\textsuperscript{262} Furthermore, it can be argued that when he settled back in England, his involvement in the establishment of the Newlyn Art School represents his further practical advocacy of the French manner of painting.\textsuperscript{263} In the \textit{Liverpool Mercury}, 1892, it is recorded that:

\begin{quote}
All of the Newlyn artists were followers of the doctrines of Naturalism and admirers of the French artist Bastien-Lepage; professors of \textit{open air} principles...\textsuperscript{264}
\end{quote}

This account not only corroborates the argument that Bastien-Lepage’s French Naturalism played an influential role in the artistic creations of the Newlyn School, but also points out another essential conception, the role of \textit{plein-airism} in dictating the development of the Newlyn style.

The art critic of \textit{the Pall Mall Gazette} argued in 1890:

\begin{quote}
... the aims of the Newlyn School may be described as a movement, if one maybe allowed to put it so, is that it is a movement from the town into the country.\textsuperscript{265}
\end{quote}

Significantly, this group of painters actually settled in the remote countryside in order to produce their works of art in an outdoor setting, and the Newlyn School’s development was based upon this truthful portrayal of landscape motifs. Given these two contemporary supporting quotations, what becomes clear is the strong bond between the Newlyn School and the French Naturalism of Bastien-Lepage’s art and its championship of rural subject matters. It is thus necessary, when probing into the British reception of Bastien-Lepage’s art, to examine the relevant primary and secondary sources in regard to Stanhope Forbes and the Newlyn School.

A separate investigation of La Thangue and Stanhope Forbes’ works of art and their reception by contemporary critics and artists can provide key insights into the varied British responses to this cross-channel influence during the late nineteenth century. As was argued

\textsuperscript{262} Skipwith, 1979, p. 543.
\textsuperscript{263} Wood, 1988, p. 69. The official establishment of the name, the Newlyn Art School was in 1899.
\textsuperscript{264} Liverpool Mercury, “Walker Art Gallery”, 1892.
\textsuperscript{265} The Pall Mall Gazette, “The Newlyn School”, 1890.
in the previous part of the chapter, La Thangue was, without doubt, a key contemporary figure who challenged longstanding academic conventions and attempted to introduce foreign French methods in order to inspire his British contemporaries. Hence, it can be concluded that La Thangue’s paintings feature those distinctive French-inspired qualities, albeit with his own idiosyncratic interpretation.

While La Thangue developed Bastien-Lepage’s Naturalist techniques in his own individual direction, Stanhope Forbes, in contrast, could be seen to position the underlying concept of Naturalism closer to the Academy. Forbes, as the leader of the Newlyn School, did not play a forceful role in attacking the traditional system of the Academy. Although the Royal Academy was occasionally described by him as a “corrupt institution” and as being “universally and rightly detested”, yet Forbes acknowledged that “it perhaps will not be so hard a fight as we imagine”. 266 This statement suggests that while he recognized the limitations of the Academy’s traditional systems, he did not regard the institution as being beyond reform. Furthermore, even though he was noted as a follower of the French Naturalist style, it could be argued that in Forbes’ paintings there still remained traces of academic conventions.267 Similarly, this possibility of an interface between Naturalism and the Academy can be applied to interpreting the Newlyn School style. As the art critic of the *Pall Mall Gazette* remarked in 1886,

> The desire of the Newlyn School is to vindicate the soundness of emigrating English feeling and sentiment upon what is known as French techniques…268

Such an account indicates that Newlyn artists were believed to have retained certain components of the native British School while successfully absorbing aspects of the French manner of painting. Given this, it is necessary to examine the extent to which Forbes and his fellow Newlyn artists were considered as being “progressive” French imitators by their...
The Newlyners’ employment of square-brush techniques, for instance, underlines the comparatively foreign quality of their paintings. This was often observed in contemporary sources, as evidenced in The Pall Mall Gazette:

Newlyn artists painted with big square brushes; leaving the marks of the squareness of the brush most religiously ... the patterning of the brushwork was considered the perfection of technique.

The inclusion of the word, “religiously”, was included to suggest their dedication to the use of this technique. Furthermore, their masterful handling of square brush marks was met with mixed approval, as shown by this art critic’s further declaration that “the Newlyn School stood for the literalness of treatment”. In Fox and Greenacre’s catalogue of the Newlyn School in 1984, it is also recorded that contemporary critics often singled out “their consistent squareness of touch” when they first reviewed the Newlyn paintings. This feature is evident in Forbes’ A Street in Brittany, 1881 (Fig.16) and was noted by the contemporary ‘New Art’ critic, R. A. M. Stevenson who acknowledged the “judicious thoroughness” of Forbes’ manipulation of such brushwork. Certainly, the artistic bond between Newlyn artists and the French-influenced square brush technique was an important early talking point in the press.

However, a group of British contemporaries – the so-called New Art Critics – adopted a more negative attitude towards this stylistic trend of the 1880s. A recent appraisal by Robins in 2007 goes so far as to portray the Newlyn artists as “the victims to their [the critics’] pen”. This victimisation can be evidenced in one of the key figures of the New Art Critics, R. A. M. Stevenson, who asserted that “… the uniform squareness of touch

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269 Skipwith, 1979, p. 543.
270 Cross, 1994, p. 111.
273 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 20.
274 Stevenson, quoted in Robins, 2007, p. 163. Stevenson recognized that “squareness of touch .... must be just now a favourite maxim ... A study of this kind, brushed lightly and feather-wise into wet paint was for a time much in vogue in Paris”.
assumed an impertinent importance on Forbes’ canvases”\textsuperscript{276} As can be inferred, Stevenson is indicating that Forbes’ handling of brush marks was presented as too challenging, in too “impertinent” a manner, to be entirely orthodox. As we have already seen, a similar concern was raised by another key member of this critical coterie, George Moore, who censured,

… that plodding mechanical square brushwork which Forbes learnt in France … the brush must cease to build up … if he wishes to be a painter, he must sensitise his execution.\textsuperscript{277}

It is clear that Moore regarded the square brush technique as instilling Forbes’ productions with a mechanical quality, rather than endowing them with any aesthetic beauty or emotional expression. His criticism not only reflects one strand of the contemporary English interpretation of this brush style, but also suggests the limitations of the application. For the argument was made that a spontaneous yet blunt display of square marks made it more difficult to evoke viewers’ sentiments and communicate feeling. This view formed one part of the British critics’ response to Newlyn works of art, and it could be claimed resulted in a gradual diminishment in the use square brushwork, so that it did not in the end play an overly dominant role in Newlyn paintings of the 1890s.

In this sense, the artistic link between the Newlyn School style and more progressive aspects of later nineteenth-century academic painting must be noted. As the twentieth-century scholar, Peyton Skipwith argues “... all the artists of the Newlyn School still fall within the great narrative tradition of English painting”.\textsuperscript{278} A clue to corroborate this point of view is the narrative quality that was most visible in the grander sized Newlyn paintings that tended to recall their academic counterparts. For example, Skipwith points to Stanhope Forbes’ large canvas, \textit{A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach} (Fig.17) (120×154.9 cm) as evidence of this narrative dimension while Healy, in her thesis on \textit{The Newlyn School in Australian Public Collections}, emphasises that:

\textsuperscript{276} Robins, 2007, p. 164.  
\textsuperscript{277} Robins, 2007, p. 166.  
\textsuperscript{278} Skipwith, 1979, p. 543.
... the Newlyn painters’ penchant for producing large, ambitious paintings meant their relationship with the Academy remained steadfast.\textsuperscript{279}

Furthermore, the fact that Newlyn artists’ works were selected for display in the Academy’s regular exhibitions is a key indication of this relationship as well.\textsuperscript{280} As Healy asserts, “… the Newlyn success was a renaissance for the Royal Academy giving it a much-needed boost with the opportunity to show innovative works …”\textsuperscript{281} Rezelman also argued that Newlyn paintings served to “revitalise academic shows” and lessen the distance between the conservative opinion of the greater British public and the prevailing younger generation’s enthusiasm for French art.\textsuperscript{282} For these reasons, it can be inferred Newlyn artists had an influential role in mediating the reception of Naturalist ideas from the Continent and assisting in their acceptance by their conservative British contemporaries.

Such an association between the Newlyn School and academic conventions may further echo Rezelman’s argument in regard to the quality of their works of art, that is, “… paintings of the Newlyn School exemplify the middle-of-the-road approach to social realism”.\textsuperscript{283} It should be recalled that Bastien-Lepage was often classified as an artist from the middle-of-the-road, the so-called juste milieu during the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{284} As Léon Rosenthal defined this group,

... they do have in common the character of rejecting anything that was absolute or excessive, anything that might have been considered audacious or decisive ... if we examine a picture signed by a painter of the juste milieu ...\textsuperscript{285}

In a similar fashion, the Newlyn artists did not aim to represent a radical breakthrough in their modes of depiction. One possible reason for this can be attributed to the fact that they

\textsuperscript{279}Healy, 2005, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{280}Rezelman, Grove Art Online – Newlyn School.
\textsuperscript{281}Healy, 2005, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{282}Rezelman, 2007-2010, Grove Art Online – Newlyn School.
\textsuperscript{283}Rezelman, 1984, p. 330.
\textsuperscript{284}Rosen & Zerner, 1984, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{285}Rosen & Zerner, 1984, p. 117. Louis-Philippe provided a clearer explanation on the underlying meaning of juste milieu, that is, it was “equally distant from the excess of popular power and from the abuse of royal power”.
associated with those contemporaries who “steered a middle course between traditional academicism and the avant-garde”. This not only indicates that traces of academic style still lingered within Newlyn paintings but also suggests that the group of painters placed less emphasis upon the “unconventional” elements so as to increase the British public’s acceptance of their artworks. These more problematic features that puzzled British contemporaries included those compositions that focused predominantly on the subject in foreground and lacked pictorial depth. Both of these spatial components have been singled out by Wright as “unconventional compositions” that were not accepted by certain art critics and artists in the contemporary British world.

This is evident in Forbes’ A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach (Fig.17), where there is no particular emphasis on the foreground figures – which in works such as Bastien-Lepage’s The Potato Gatherers (Fig.1) was a device that had been employed to enhance the sense of immediacy. Therefore Forbes’ works of art should not be categorised as representing a revolutionary direction that sought to challenge the orthodoxy of British art. Certainly Skipwith is right to question whether the Newlyn School style should be considered as “progressive” alongside the work of other British contemporaries. A further assertion of this view is offered by another modern scholar, Tom Cross, who claims that:

... The emergence of the Newlyn School was not a revolt against academic conventions but rather an instinctive desire to work directly from the human figure in its everyday environment.

Not only does Cross’ statement reinforce the Newlyn School’s less revolutionary position but it also highlights an essential doctrine that dictates the most characteristic feature of Newlyn productions, that is, its artists’ commitment to plein-airism. Indeed, it could be asserted that Bastien-Lepage’s Naturalist approach played its most influential role in shaping the Newlyners’ practice of painting out of doors. Significantly, Fox and Greenacre point out that Newlyn painters’ concern for Bastien-Lepage’s art focuses primarily on his

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286 Rezelman, 1984, p. 56.
289 Cross, 1994, p. 60.
“sympathetic but impartial relationship with the depicted subjects” and his ambition to study the daily life of contemporary times. Stanhope Forbes, for instance, was recognized as the most representative figure who “executed Bastien-Lepage’s ideals of *plein air* paintings”. Even Forbes himself declared that the Newlyn School was “simply a body of artists who paint in the open air”. For these reasons, an exploration of how Newlyn artists applied the *plein-airist* concepts to their productions can be viewed as occupying a key position in understanding their reception of Bastien-Lepage’s art. Contemporary responses to the Newlyn practice of *plein-airism* can provide further insights into the French master’s influences upon the British development of rustic Naturalism.

In 1902, Norman Garstin recalled that a direct inspiration of Nature had been the creed among contemporary artists during the previous twenty years. It was “… a feeling of reaction from ... studio work as opposed to work on the spot ... and actuated most of the students”. His account underlines the key principle of *plein-airism*: out of doors, artists are prompted to paint in the open-air ambiance and to search for new sources of inspiration through exposing themselves to the Nature. Such a challenge to the shackles of the studio system can be interpreted as an underlying indication of the independent spirit of artists: they realised that they were unable to unravel the subjective facets of Nature unless living outdoors. Careful and sustained observation of the surrounding rhythm of life ensured the direct contact of the *plein-air* painters with the Nature. It also empowered them to experiment with various delineations of countryside scenes. This central doctrine can thus shed light on the life of the art colony at Newlyn.

One notable feature which needs to be pointed out is that the condition of weather dictates the artists’ execution of outdoor paintings. For Newlyners, the precision with which they recorded their experiences had to play a primary role in the works of art. Therefore, even though Forbes argued that contemporary *plein-airist* painters dedicated themselves to “a

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290 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 19.
291 Cross, 1994, p. 23.
293 Caroline & Fox, 1985, p. 51.
294 Caroline & Fox, 1985, p. 15.
very thorough study of all Nature’s changing effects”, the overcast weather, with less instantaneous changes, was recognized as their favoured working condition.295 As Cross explains, cloudy days allowed Newlyn painters to spend longer periods of time at a fixed location where they could observe natural features and delineate them authentically.296 Understandably, their preference to avoid the more fickle aspects of weather and climate sheds light on Rezelman’s assertion: “… the dominance of low-keyed palettes” marks the contemporary Newlyn identity.297 Given this, it can be inferred that the close relationship between Bastien-Lepage’s plein-airism and Newlyners’ Naturalist practice is found in their handling of subdued tonalities – a visual characteristic that immediately attracted the attention of contemporary critics.

British art critics and artists of the late nineteenth century tended to focus on grey-shaded depictions of the natural light in Newlyn paintings. This feature was felt to demonstrate the distinctive French influence upon this group of artists. In 1889, Alice Meynell asserted that Newlyn artists dedicated themselves to “the subtle study of light rather than to the obvious study of colour” so as to achieve their aim in the pursuit of truthfulness.298 Based upon this, it can be argued that Newlyn painters’ devoted study of natural light is manifested in their delicate depictions of “gray climate” and “diffused daylight”.299 For instance, Stanhope Forbes plays with the subtleties of understated tones, conveying an authentic record of the gray-day scene in A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach, 1885 (Fig.17). The reflections from the sky were, in particular, depicted with transparent lustre, and viewers could distinguish the difference between the foreground and the background under the homogeneous light effects. It is notable that even though a bright palette was not applied, a sense of luminosity, nevertheless, suffuses the whole image.

Arguably, the degree of lightness in Forbes’ practice of the French-inspired plein-airism is enhanced through the incorporation of such luminous tints that imbue every component of

295 Caroline & Fox, 1985, p. 15.
296 Cross, 1994, p. 60.
297 Rezelman, 1984, p. 223.
298 Meynell, 1889, p. 99.
299 Meynell, 1889, p. 98.
the painting and allow it to stand out from the picture plane. It is noted that the artist’s subtle manipulation of understated tonalities enriches *A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach* (Fig.17) and won approving comments such as “... who can forget its gradations of greys, its air of pearls ...” when it was displayed at the Academy in 1885.\(^{300}\)

Given this, it can be inferred that Forbes’ light palette, which is evidenced in paintings which reflect the natural ambiance of the Newlyn village, was generally accepted by the contemporary British public. To a further degree, it can be argued that because of their aptitude in expressing tinges of greyness, Newlyn painters were able to mark the British Naturalist movement. As Wilfrid Meynell recognized in 1892, “... if Newlyn has a hallmark at all, it is the grey glimmering pane of the room ...”\(^{301}\) The Newlyn style features subdued, grey tones. Claude Phillips also approved such direct yet understated Newlyn delineations of everyday life during the same period of time.

The Newlyners justly reign supreme in this branch of their art in virtue of a closer grasp of truth, a less melodramatic form of pathos than those of their forerunners.\(^{302}\)

Nevertheless, some disapproving voices on such a tonal quality of Newlyn paintings were still offered by some British artists and critics during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Those critical remarks can be viewed as another contemporary interpretation of Newlyn artists’ dissemination of French-inspired *plein-airist* ideas. As the art critic of *Liverpool Mercury* decried in 1892, “... when one Newlyn picture had been viewed all had been seen; that the colour was uniformly dull, the subjects chosen duller ...”\(^{303}\) This statement claims attention asserting that the less contrasting shades tended to evoke a sense of tediousness, therefore limiting Newlyn paintings to appear like mechanical productions. Such a review parallels the way in which the New Art Critics criticized the square brush paints manipulated by Newlyn painters, as seen in the previous discussion.

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\(^{300}\) Meynell, 1889, p. 68.

\(^{301}\) Meynell, 1892, p. 67.

\(^{302}\) Phillips, 1892, p. 220.

\(^{303}\) Liverpool Mercury, “Walker Art Gallery”, 1892.
Given this, it can be argued that one strand of contemporary British thinking tended to interpret the French-inspired, Bastien-Lepage’s painting techniques as producing a category of artworks which were seen to lack individuality and inspirational force. The fact that this British interpretation was applied to Forbes’ works of art is understandable for Stanhope Forbes has been eminent as a prominent follower of Bastien-Lepage, As George Moore critically claimed, Stanhope was like a copyist, presenting what he saw rather as “a handful of dry facts than as a passionate impression of life in its envelope of mystery and suggestion”. Moore’s use of the expression, “a handful of dry facts” suggests that some of Forbes’ paintings embrace an indifferent, ‘machine-made quality’; the inference is that the artist did not attempt to convey any profound thinking or to evoke a sense of lyricism.

Another dissenting voice is that of Walter Sickert, recognized as an exponent of Impressionism, whose artistic aim was to represent the pictorial qualities of “magic and poetry”. He manifested a hostile attitude in examining Naturalist scenes which were presented by Newlyn painters:

...we find canvases which have nothing to recommend them to the critic but a heavy travesty of the touch of second-rate French painters, praised for truth, which are full of untruths of value.

It is noted that Sickert not only criticized Newlyn artists’ multiplicities of factual renderings as merely conveying a negative value of art but also suggested his disdain for Bastien-Lepage and his followers’ Naturalist manners of expression. Both standpoints of Moore and Sickert provide a doorway to understanding some aspect of the disapproving British reception to such cross-channel artistic influence. They could also play a role in curbing the contemporary development of the Newlyn School.

Significantly, it must be acknowledged that the less audacious handling of Newlyn painters is attributed to not only their insistence on the *plein air* doctrines of depicting the natural light but also their subtle association with the British tradition of the Royal Academy.

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304 Moore, 1893, p. 116.
305 McConkey, 1989, p. 121.
306 Cross, 1994, p. 112.
Given this, the Newlyn School reflects one strand of English interpretation of such the contemporary cross-channel influence – Bastien-Lepage’s Naturalist manners. It can be concluded that Newlyners’ artistic vacillation neither being conservative nor progressive, successfully shaped the so-called art form of “Newlyn Naturalism”.

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Chapter Three

The critical responses to the influence of Bastien-Lepage’s works of art and techniques in Australia

Introduction:
The previous chapter examined the contemporary responses of art critics and artists to the naturalistic style of Bastien-Lepage within the British art world. As the key disseminators of this French inspired movement, the artists, George Clausen, La Thangue and Stanhope Forbes, were shown to have had the opportunity to associate directly with the French master, either in person or by attending the Parisian ateliers to study pertinent painting techniques. The art works produced in the Newlyn colony that was established by Forbes and his fellow painters in the early 1880s, revealed a great debt in their practical execution to Lepage’s *plein air* Naturalism. The conclusion of the last section asserted that Newlyn painters also retained a certain insistence on British conventions while assimilating the foreign approach to naturalistic depictions. Given this, the third chapter aims to continue this argument by examining the evidence of Bastien-Lepage’s pioneering ideas, notably his *plein-airism* – palette and technique – on Australian artists during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It will also explore the ways in which they became acquainted with the concepts of the French master, given their isolation so far away from the European artistic centre.

Abram Louis Buvelot (1814-88) was highly regarded as the ‘father of Australian landscape painting’ by his contemporary patrons, art critics and artists; in particular those who later formed what became known as the Heidelberg School, notably Tom Roberts (1856-1931), Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917) Arthur Streeton (1867-1943). Buvelot had been

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It needs to explain in passing that the term, the Heidelberg School did not emerge until 1891. That was used by the temporary visiting American art critic – Sydney Dickison to describe the contemporary largest grouping of artists emerge at Heidelberg. Initially, this group of artists, included only Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin and Arthur Streeton were the key members of the Box Hill Camp. The
trained in Paris and associated with such landscape painters as Camille Flers, who usually worked in the forest of Fontainebleau outside Paris.\textsuperscript{309} It is generally acknowledged that Buvelot was probably the foremost figure to begin disseminating the French \textit{plein air} method within Australian art circle during the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{310} He opened the doorway to the knowledge of contemporary French art practices and promoted the idea of painting outdoors among the local artist-students.

In the generation following Buvelot, a group of British immigrant painters, such as Julian Rossi Ashton (1851-1942) and Alfred James Daplyn (1844-1926) arrived in Australia during the late 1870s. They were recognized as key contributors to the shaping of the contemporary conception of outdoor painting as epitomised by the work of Bastien-Lepage.\textsuperscript{311} Presumably, they might have seen or emulated this French master’s paintings in person, during their temporary studies in France.\textsuperscript{312} For instance, Ashton, who attended the Académie Julian in Paris around 1871, was declared to have produced the first \textit{plein air} landscape painting for the Australian art world, \textit{Evening Merri Creek}, 1882 (Fig.18), the first \textit{plein air} landscape painting for the Australian art world.\textsuperscript{313} After he moved to Melbourne during the late 1870s, Ashton displayed some paintings he had previously produced in England in the local exhibitions and devoted himself to promoting \textit{plein-airist} ideas among the artist-learners. In 1883, he moved to Sydney and gradually formed a \textit{plein air} painting group with Daplyn and other contemporary artists.\textsuperscript{314} Daplyn also had the experience of attending the Ecole des Beaux Arts and of visiting the so-called ‘\textit{plein-air}’ resort of Brittany.\textsuperscript{315} It is asserted that his study in France contributed to the contents of his \textit{A Manual for the Students in Oil and Water Colours}.\textsuperscript{316} In this booklet, Daplyn recorded the essential concepts of \textit{plein-airism} and introduced the character and method of square

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\textsuperscript{309} Whitelaw, 1991, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{310} Clark, 1985, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{311} Astbury, 2007, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{312} Spate, 1990, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{313} Ashton, 2007-2010, Grove Art Online – Julian Rossi Ashton.
\textsuperscript{314} Clark, 1985, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{315} Topliss, 1992, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{316} Topliss, 1992, p. 69.
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This booklet can further shed light on the reason why contemporary Australian critics often pointed to his French-influenced method when they reviewed the outdoor paintings of Daplyn and the other immigrant artists.\textsuperscript{318} Relevant evidence can be traced to \textit{Table Talk} in 1888:

If these foreign artists who are settling in Melbourne have studied in European schools sufficiently to become masters of the style they adopt, their example to Australians is decidedly stimulative.\textsuperscript{319}

The dissemination of progressive European art practices by these immigrant artists laid a significant foundation for the further development of \textit{plein-airist} ideas. As Topliss argues, “Daplyn’s booklet was in effect a step-by-step recreation of the techniques of Roberts and his fellow artists in the 1880s and 1890s”.\textsuperscript{320} As a pioneering leader of the so-called Heidelberg School, Tom Roberts has been widely recognized as endorsing this stylistic movement in Australia.\textsuperscript{321} The paintings produced by the Heidelberg artists indicate their use of \textit{plein air} practices when depicting various outer suburban scenes.\textsuperscript{322} The active period of the Heidelberg School’s predominance over the Australian art world lasted from approximately the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s.\textsuperscript{323} The first part of this chapter will examine the significant role that \textit{plein-airism} played in the shaping of the Heidelberg School. Through a survey of the literary reviews, the ways in which various modern scholars have interpreted the correlation of Heidelberg artists with the foreign \textit{plein-airist} movement will be analysed. Based upon this, the character of the Australian reception of Lepage’s stylistic influence will be determined.

The chapter also aims to investigate the extent to which the previously mentioned British artists, such as Clausen, La Thangue, and Forbes, played a less obvious but still important role in fostering the \textit{plein-airist} movement in Australia. It will be argued that the local

\textsuperscript{317} Topliss, 1992, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{318} Astbury, 2007, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{319} Table Talk, quoted in Whitelaw, 1985, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{320} Topliss, 1992, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{321} Clark, 2007-2010, Grove Art Online – Tom Roberts.
\textsuperscript{322} Clark, 2007-2010, Grove Art Online – Heidelberg School.
\textsuperscript{323} Clark, 2007-2010, Grove Art Online – Heidelberg School.
public was able to appreciate their Naturalist paintings through several “touring exhibitions” to the colonies that occurred from the mid-1880s.\footnote{Inglis, 2008, p. 161.} In this sense, the Australian appreciation and understanding of the influence of Bastien-Lepage’s style can be reflected in their preference for these British artists. The second section will, therefore, scrutinize the contemporary criticism of specific touring exhibitions, which included in their display the works of art from the New English Art Club and the Newlyn School. A particular examination of two British artists, Henry Scott Tuke (1858-1929) and Thomas Cooper Gotch (1854-1931), will be the focus of the final section so as to offer a deeper insight into the appreciation of French-inspired British Naturalism in Australia.

**Literary Review**

Before one commences the main body of the argument, it is essential to provide an outline of the key points that various modern Australian scholars have made on the position that the Heidelberg School occupied in the Australian art world of the 1880s and the 1890s. Their discussion of its development is often linked to the term “Australian Impressionism”, \footnote{Whitelaw, 1985, p. 54.} and an association of the Heidelberg School with the French Impressionist movement has been occasionally proposed by certain scholars. Virginia Spate draws particular attention to the extent of the two movements’ correlation and tries to compare the contributions of the Heidelberg School with Impressionism within the international context.\footnote{Spate, 1990, p. 125.} As her following account makes clear, “… the Impressionism developed in Melbourne emphasizes the significance of Impressionism’s tendency to deny the past in the moment depicted in paint”.\footnote{Spate, 1990, p. 125.} Nevertheless, Jeanette Hoorn points to the fact that:

> Since none of the members of the group [the Heidelberg School] spent long periods in Paris during these years, it is unlikely that there was much first-hand contact with
French Impressionist painting, a fact which explains the absence of broken colour in their palette.\textsuperscript{328}

Bridget Whitelaw also supports this argument that the Heidelberg painters had scarcely any direct opportunities to assimilate the French Impressionists’ methods. Both visual and documentary evidence suggests that Tom Roberts’s contact with the French movement was minimal.\textsuperscript{329} Whitelaw further argues that the sketches painted by Roberts, Streeton and their fellow painters, in effect, embraced the qualities closer to the \textit{juste milieu} style than the Impressionist style.\textsuperscript{330}

Thus, the majority of Australian art historians place emphasis on the fact that the Heidelberg painters, such as Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Charles Condor (1868-1909) and Frederick McCubbin devoted themselves to the execution of \textit{plein-air} painting – which can be related to the influential dissemination of Bastien-Lepage’s style during the 1880s.\textsuperscript{331} The first major retrospective survey of the Heidelberg School was the \textit{Golden Summers} exhibition that was held by National Gallery of Victoria in 1985.\textsuperscript{332} One important essay, ‘Plein Air Painting: The Early Artists’ Camps around Melbourne’ in this catalogue was written by Bridget Whitelaw. She articulated the relationship between the \textit{plein air} practices of the Heidelberg School and the influence of Bastien-Lepage’s art. The significance of French stylistic tendencies was also emphasized by Ann Galbally and other scholars, including Helen Topliss and Leigh Astbury Contemporaneous with the 1985 exhibition, other scholars, including Helen Topliss and Leigh Astbury, who were investigating the practices of the Heidelberg School of the artists at this time.\textsuperscript{333} Topliss conducted research into an examination of the artists’ camps set up in the suburbs around Melbourne and provided a survey of the landscape paintings of the 80s and the 90s.

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\textsuperscript{328} & Hoorn, quoted in Topliss, 1992, p. 9. In Hoorn’s quotation, the broken colour is referred to the French Impressionist handling. \\
\textsuperscript{329} & Whitelaw, 1985, p. 54. \\
\textsuperscript{330} & Whitelaw, 1985, p. 54. \\
\textsuperscript{331} & Topliss, 1984, p. 7. \\
\textsuperscript{332} & Several leading scholars in this field contributed to this thorough investigation of the development of the Heidelberg School. Jane Clark provided a clear text which focused on the biographies of the major artists of that period of time. She also discussed ‘The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition’ which was organized by Tom Roberts and his friends in 1889. \\
\textsuperscript{333} & Topliss, 1984, p. 7. \\
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produced at these sites. Astbury examined the connotations of “national idealism” and the bush ethos as depicted in the Heidelberg School paintings.334

More than two decades later, another significant “Australian Impressionism” exhibition was held in 2007, which again assessed the ways in which Australians acquired knowledge of French *plein-airism* during the late nineteenth century. As Gerard Vaughan pointed out, the aim of this more recent exhibition was to re-survey the Heidelberg paintings, mainly focusing on the initiators’ works of art in the first camps at Box Hill, as seen in the works of Roberts, McCubbin, Abrahams and Streeton.335 Several writers in the catalogue addressed foreign influences; for example, Astbury asserted “… Tom Roberts’s paintings revealed a general debt to Bastien-Lepage”,336 while Terence Lane attempted to locate the *plein-airist* aspects of the Heidelberg School within an international context and highlighted the manner in which the Australians responded to this influential stylistic trend – which represented “a refusal of centuries-old studio practice”.337 Thus, this literary review demonstrates that there is a continuing interest amongst scholars regarding the contexts and the ways in which the Heidelberg artists assimilated the relevant knowledge of the *plein-airist* movement. With this background in place, one can turn to examine the extent to which the Australian artists reacted to Bastien-Lepage’s art and influence.

The Heidelberg School has been acknowledged as a major promoter of the *plein-airism* movement in Australia.338 Given this, it can be argued that Tom Roberts and his fellow painters had an impact on the contemporary Australian reception to Bastien-Lepage’s ideas and techniques. Roberts was, in particular, active in familiarising himself with the European art world. For instance, he attended the Académie Julian in Paris, as well as taking the student training program at the Royal Academy in London from 1881 to 1884.339 Such learning experiences were able to ensure his understanding of the essence of the French *plein-airist* doctrines. Relevant evidence indicates that Roberts would have seen

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335 Vaughan, 2007, p. 10.
336 Astbury, 2007, p. 50.
339 Whitelaw, 1985, p. 54.
Bastien-Lepage’s paintings in London in 1882. As seen in McConkey’s assertion, the British contemporaries had drawn much attention to Bastien-Lepage’s works since 1880. Therefore, it can be inferred that Roberts would be well aware of this French master and most probably went to see his paintings in the London exhibitions held in 1882 at both the United Arts Gallery and Tooths. In addition, the Newlyn paintings of the early 1880s could well have influenced Roberts’s understanding of Lepage’s style. Certainly, the Royal Academy provided a platform for the leader figure of this group – Stanhope Forbes – featuring his art in its regular exhibitions. The Academy also provided Newlyn artists with the “only suitable show place for their large-scaled paintings”. For these reasons, it is clear that Roberts’s overseas study of the modern French style and its interpretation in Britain contributed to the shaping of the Heidelberg School

It can be thus claimed that the Heidelberg School played a pioneering role in aligning Australian artistic practices with contemporary European practices and brought a new look to the production of outdoor landscape paintings. This point may allow the works produced by Roberts, Streeton and Condor to be referred as ‘Impressionists’, because in fact, few contemporary art critics offered a clear delineation between the Impressionists and the plein-airists during the late nineteenth century. In the main, their works of art were simply allocated into the so-called ‘progressive’, anti-academic category. As Whitelaw argues,

> The term ‘Impressionist’ was generally applied vaguely in … Australia, to a work which the critic regarded as either unfinished or as departing too far from academic convention.

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340 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 18. It is widely recognized that Bastien-Lepage’s Salon paintings of 1881, 1882, 1883 were shown in London in the early 1880s.
341 McConkey, 1978, p. 374. Presumably, it was due to the fact that Lepage’s most important outdoor scene, *Les Foins* was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1880.
343 Vaughan, 2007, p. 16.
345 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 28.
346 Lane, 2007, p. 16.
347 Vaughan, 2007, p. 16.
348 Whitelaw, 1985, p. 54.
What is clear is that the works of art by the Heidelberg School placed particular emphasis on unconventional processes, such as putting aside the studio system to seek more natural light effects. For instance, Roberts introduced the Australian public to the concept of ‘relative values’, which emphasized an employment of the palette of closely-related coloration. A further understanding of this technique can be gained from Daplyn’s statement that “… leaving black and brown in the studio, for Nature has no use for strong colours”. This emphasis on the harmonious tonality echoes the one central idea of Bastien-Lepage’s outdoor paintings – “Truth to Nature”, which was in effect a prevailing catch-cry across contemporary Australian art circles. Not only does Roberts’s advocacy of the plein-airist movement need to be re-emphasized, but also the French-influenced techniques employed by him and his fellow painters through their application of “closely related” tones. Topliss explains that these artists adopted the practice of using “half-closed eyes to harmonize the local colour into smooth transitions of tones”. This can be seen in such works as Roberts’s Wood Splitters, 1886 (Fig.19) and McCubbin’s The Lost Child, 1886 (Fig.20). It is significant that the muted palette of most early Heidelberg painters reflects the contemporary Australian reaction to plein-airism, in other words, to the international phenomenon of Bastien-Lepage’s style.

Roberts’s painting, The Artists’s Camp, 1886 (Fig.21) has been viewed as owing a great debt to this distinctive plein-air technique. Notably, the tonality that unifies the composition is not only similar to the tonal gradations in Lepage’s palette but the subtle combination of “blue greens, olives and ochers” demonstrates a desire to faithfully represent the native bush scene. Given this, one point needs to be addressed in passing. Apart from incorporating elements of Bastien-Lepage’s plein air techniques, Roberts seems to invest his landscape with a local authenticity. For example, Spate asserts that the painters from the Heidelberg school are now recognized as the forerunners in the depictions of real

350 Whitelaw, 1991, p. 3.
351 Whitelaw, 1985, p. 56.
352 Smith, 1945, p. 110.
353 Spate, 1990, p. 120.
354 Topliss, 1992, p. 68.
355 Spate, 1990, p. 120.
“Australian light”. This claim could be seen to reflect one way in which contemporary Australian artists responded to Bastien-Lepage’s influence; they reinterpreted this French model to give it an Australian emphasis.

Similarly, a sense of optimism can be seen in the artistic productions of the Heidelberg School that resonates with the progressive spirit of Lepage’s artistic idiom. The group of Australian painters not only renounced the shackles of traditional techniques but also desired to incorporate a feeling of inspiration into their outdoor paintings. Topliss declares that a sense of “contentment and optimism”, for instance, suffuses Roberts’s paintings, Sunny South, 1887 (Fig.22) and Shearing the Rams, 1890 (Fig.23). This may suggest both the Australian rural life and the contemporary social ethos – “a boom period of great optimism in the value of all things Australian” – were represented on the canvases through the modern, French-inspired approach. As Spate claims:

Australian Impressionist paintings have become immensely popular as images of a desired Australia, images whose visible techniques guarantees them as representations of the real … This would be … an arcadia, heir to European culture, without poverty or civil strife … but blessedly free of any scars which the exploitation of the earth might make.

Thus, it can be argued that one of the ways in which the Australian contemporaries, notably those of the Heidelberg School, reinterpreted Bastien-Lepage’s Naturalism, was to imbue their outdoor scenes with a particular emphasis reflecting Australia’s aspirations and values of the day. The local essence embodied in the works of art produced by the Heidelberg School was not overwhelmed but inspired by their adoption of a French-influenced manner.

The emergence of artists’ camps, such as the Box Hill Camp of 1885 also played a critical role in the contemporary Australian response to the predominant plein-airist trend. The local newspaper, Daily Telegraph christened Roberts, Streeton and McCubbin as the “trio

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357 Topliss, 1992, p. 3.  
358 Whitelaw, 1985, p. 54.  
of the Box Hill School” in 1888. They adopted the concept of the “artist’s camp” to carry out their *plein-air* doctrines, at the same time as they sought to depict a collective feeling of their communion with the land and Nature. Both Roberts’s *The Artists’ Camp* (Fig.21) and Louis Abrahams’s *Camp, Box Hill* (Fig.24) provide a contemporary record of their real life practices. The presence of the tent suggests the close interaction of the artists themselves with the outdoor environment and represents the bond of their comradeship. Whitelaw declares that *The Artists’ Camp* (Fig.21) is “a testimony to the friendship” of those three artists: McCubbin, Abrahams and Roberts; while also documenting a leisurely moment with McCubbin and Abrahams “grilling chops over the fire”. Such connotations surrounding the Box Hill Camp and expressed in Roberts’s *The Artists’ Camp* (Fig.21) can be clearly associated with the Newlyn colony, established by Stanhope Forbes in the late 1880s. As Fox and Greenacre assert, the “artists’ relationship is one of the vital and integral parts to the art of Forbes”. Furthermore, the exhibition of Forbes’ *A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach* (Fig.17), 1885 at the Royal Academy is recognized as the point at which the public became aware that there existed a group of artists gathering and working in the Newlyn. In this sense, Forbes’ contributions to the Newlyn colony are able to shed light on any investigation into Roberts’s role within the Box Hill Camp.

Indeed, a clear parallel is evident in the concept of the Box Hill Camp and the Newlyn School: both artistic groups can be viewed as embodying the contemporary painters’ admiration for the progressive spirit manifested in Bastien-Lepage’s *plein-airism*. Like the French master’s loyalty to Damvillers, it can be arguable that Forbes and Roberts conveyed their love of the local, non-urban landscape by developing artistic communities. Such practices allowed them to foster a closer relationship with specific environments, where they were able to observe and paint Nature for an extended period of time. From this perspective, it is obvious that Forbes and Roberts conformed to the French belief in *plein-*

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360 Astbury, 2007, p. 52.
361 Topliss, 1992, p. 65.
363 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 28.
364 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 53.
air Naturalism – namely that it was necessary to “live as much as possible as part of the life they painted”.\(^{366}\) This view is clearly seen in Stanhope Forbes’s declaration:

… under the spell of the genius … the more recent and living, Jules Bastien-Lepage, most of us young students were turning our back on the great cities, forsaking the studios with their unvarying north light, to set up our easels in country districts where we could pose our models and attack our work in sunshine or in shadow, under the open sky.\(^{367}\)

Forbes’s account demonstrates the contemporary British understanding of Lepage’s influence and the *plein-airist* movement. As an influential proponent of this modern thinking, Forbes regularly exhibited his plein-air productions at the Academy during the 1880s, such as *A Street in Brittany*, 1882 (Fig.16) and *A Fish Sale on a Cornish*, 1885 (Fig.17).\(^{368}\)

This context could be adopted as an important factor in linking Forbes’s assimilation of the French dogma to Tom Roberts’s practice of *plein-airist* techniques at the Box Hill Camp. As has been shown, Roberts gained admission to the Royal Academy in 1881 and he did not withdraw from the student program until 1884.\(^{369}\) His association with the Academy may shed light on the assumption that Roberts most probably would have attended the annual exhibition at the Academy, and have seen the works by Forbes. The degree to which Forbes’s ideas and interpretation of the *plein-airism* stimulated Roberts to promote this movement in Australia needs to be considered.

Furthermore, alongside Roberts’ experiences and example, his Australian artist contemporaries also had other opportunities to be exposed to Newlyn School paintings during the mid-1880s. This is due to the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists’ exhibition that was held in Melbourne in 1885.\(^{370}\) The contemporary newspaper, *The Argus* pointed

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\(^{366}\) Astbury, 1985, p. 10.  
\(^{367}\) Forbes, quoted in Topliss, 1985, p. 10.  
\(^{368}\) Graves, 1970, p. 135. Forbes’s *The Pool of Bethesda* was exhibited in 1880. *Mrs. Brayshaw of Stockhouse* was in 1880. *The Church of St. David* was in 1883. *Preparation for the Market* was in 1884.  
\(^{369}\) Topliss, 1985, p. 5.  
\(^{370}\) Astbury, 1985, p. 10.
out their subject matter – the fishermen of Cornish seaside life – and offered a positive critique of the Newlyn style. As seen in the critic’s comments, “… Walter Langley’s fishermen are real men and women, with warm blood in their veins, and with the glow of health or the ruddy stain left by sun on their wholesome faces.” It was also in 1885 that Roberts came back to Melbourne from Europe and began setting up the artists’ camp. For these reasons, the warm reception to the Newlyn works of art must have played a role in fomenting the plein-airist movement in Australia.

The shaping of the Box Hill Camp can be viewed as the Australian response to the French model of artists’ village, Brittany and Forbes’s Newlyn colony. All were set up for the same purpose to create a continual and intimate communion with the natural environments. If one examines Roberts’s painting, The Artists’ Camp (Fig.21), it is clear that the artists, nevertheless, presented themselves as the “visitors to the bush”. Even the figures depicted in the other Heidelberg paintings were invested with the parallel connotations. This manner is able to suggest that the Australian painters not only desired to convey a dependent relationship of men with the land but also placed great emphasis on Nature herself. It is thus concluded that the Heidelberg artists demonstrated respect for the natural surroundings on the basis of their execution of plein-airism.

A modern scholarly survey of the late-nineteenth century development of the Heidelberg School has been offered. The key points lie in the influence of the French plein-airist practice upon the Heidelberg artists’ landscape paintings and the extent to which the Australian contemporaries responded to Bastien-Lepage’s artistic idiom. Major evidence is related to their employment of the reduced tonality and their formation of the artists’ camps. However, this examination has argued that Roberts and his Australian fellow artists not merely absorbed the French recipes of the plein-airism, but also emphasized a distinctive, local sense in their outdoor paintings. In other words, the Heidelberg artists did not

372 The Argus, 26 October 1885, First Notice.
373 The Argus, 26 October 1885, First Notice.
374 Burn, 1980, p. 84.
relinquish the employment of art to convey Australian settings, views and values while they were influenced by the international stylistic trend.

**Touring Exhibitions in Australia**

The previous section previously been explored the trend of *plein-airism* which began to prevail over the Australian art world of the mid-nineteenth century due to the contributions of the British immigrants and the local artists, in particular those who were the founders from the Heidelberg School. The local responses to this contemporary movement espoused by Bastien-Lepage were argued as evident in the direct application of the low toned palette and the subsequent emergence of the artists’ camps. The first-hand experience of studying at the French art institutions was one of the ways through which these artists gained *plein-air* knowledge and techniques. The significance of such local disseminators as Tom Roberts and the English immigrant, Julian Ashton has established. The second part of this chapter aims to provide an analysis of the other avenues by which the Australian public was able to assimilate this strand of French Naturalist ideas. During the mid-1880s and the early 1890s, several touring exhibitions of British art in Australia played an important role in enhancing the contemporary ambience of appreciating fine art; those included the five exhibitions of the Anglo-Australian society of artists and the Grosvenor Gallery Intercolonial Exhibition in 1887.375 As acknowledged in *The Advertiser*, 1889,

> The objects of the society [the Anglo-Australian society of artists] is formed for the purpose of affording the Australian public an opportunity of becoming acquainted with contemporary English art and for the furtherance of the culture and promotion of the Fine arts in the Australian colonies.376

Given this, it can be assumed that the French-inspired flow of Naturalism which emerged within the British art circle of the mid-1880s, such as was seen in the New English Art

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375 The exhibitions were in Melbourne (1885), in Sydney (1889), in the three capitals Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide (1890). There were two held in Melbourne in 1892 and 1893.

376 *The Advertiser*, 22 July 1889.
Club, could well spread its influence to Australia through those touring exhibitions.\textsuperscript{377} This agency allowed more Australian painters to have the opportunity to see the \textit{plein air} productions by their British contemporaries. It could be assumed that the practice of painting outdoors adopted by Tom Roberts and his fellow artists from the Box Hill School was probably enhanced as well. In \textit{The Australasian}, 1885, the intention of Mr. William Ayerst Ingram (1855-1913) to organize the annual exhibition of the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists in Australia is clearly acknowledged:

> By bring the pictures of England and local painters into juxtaposition and comparison, a needful stimulus, and a wholesome spirit of emulation would be aroused. Higher standards of excellence, other schools of thought, and new methods of treatment would be periodically brought before them [the Australian painters] … just as British artists benefit by the exhibitions of Continental pictures which are now of an annual occurrence in London.\textsuperscript{378}

The account demonstrates the Australian press was closely aware of the concurrent events of the British art world. In this sense, they would well have noted that Bastien-Lepage’s exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery was well received in 1880 and had a great influence upon the Naturalist movement in Britain.\textsuperscript{379} It is thus inferred the art critic of \textit{The Australasian} conveyed the anticipation that Australian painters would probably have gained inspiration from that year’s exhibition of the Anglo-Australian society of artists. For instance, they could observe the manner of the British adoption of French Naturalism and \textit{plein-airism}. Given this, the Australian reception to the works of art at each exhibition can be adopted as a model to interpret the Bastien-Lepage influence upon Australian artists and art critics of those times.

Before exploring the core issues in regard to the Anglo-Australian touring exhibitions, a brief historical background for the formation of this scheme is necessary. One of the key

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\textsuperscript{377} Weisberg, 1992, p. 108.  
\textsuperscript{378} The Australasian, 17 October 1885, First Arts Section.  
\textsuperscript{379} McConkey, 1978, p. 374.
\end{flushleft}
promoters proved to be a British artist, Thomas Cooper Gotch (1854-1931). His most significant contribution is related to the fact that he and his wife came to Melbourne and displayed their paintings at Mr. Fletcher’s art gallery in 1884. It would appear that Gotch’s exhibition occupied a pioneering position in providing the Australian public with the examples of the ‘Newlyn style’ and authentic exemplars of the plein-airist treatment inspired by the French master, Bastien-Lepage. This assumption is based upon the fact that “the years from 1879 to 1887 represent Gotch’s courtship of the Newlyn village”. For instance, Gotch produced Mental Arithmetic (Fig.25) while he and his wife stayed in Newlyn in 1883, as evidenced in his employment of the Cornish fishermen as the subject matter. In addition, it would most probably be Gotch who explained the local audience that “… this painting depicted a scene at the bottom of the slip below ‘the cliff’ at Newlyn”. Forbes’s following statement also corroborates an association of the Newlyn village with Gotch’s works of art:

Thomas Cooper Gotch was closely associated with the Art Colony of Newlyn … I have known him almost from the beginning of his career when we both found our way down to Cornwell and began to work side by side.

In this sense, it is understandable that most of his paintings displayed in Melbourne were demonstrations of his representations of Newlyn scenes. Nevertheless, the Australian contemporaries would not be aware of the term, the ‘Newlyn’ style at that time, because it was not until 1886 that Forbes began to employ it to describe the paintings by a distinct group of artists who usually settled or gathered in the town of Newlyn. It is important, however, to explore the ways in which the Australian artists and critics formulated their

380 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 174.
381 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 174. T. C. Gotch is one of the prominent British painters who practiced the plein-airist doctrines and associated with the Newlyn artists in the 1880s. Relevant sources are also seen in Rezelman, Grove Art Online – Thomas Cooper Gotch.
382 Lomax, 2004, p. 11.
383 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 174.
385 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 11. In 1886, Forbes stated that “… the Royal Academy this year may best be described as the triumph of Newlyn”. 
understanding of the so-called ‘Newlyn’ practice of *plein-airism* through this exhibition of Gotch’s paintings in Melbourne. As seen in *The Argus*, 1884, Gotch himself stated that:

… the pictures by Mrs. Gotch and myself, now being exhibited, are in a style new to the Melbourne public … In effect, the work now on view is of the realistic school, at the head of which are Alma Tadema and Bastien-Lepage.  

In order to disseminate this modern artistic idiom for the Australian audience, Gotch chose to publish his letter titled *The Realistic School in Art* in the local press. It is noted that Gotch linked his works of art to Lepage’s ‘realistic’ style. He asserted that the French master’s key doctrine was to “… unmistakably represent the true characteristics of the subject matters depicted in his painting”.  

Furthermore, “… the outdoor scene shall have an outdoor light felt through the picture”. The French-inspired emphasis was to capture the authentic effect from the natural scenes. It is clear that Gotch conformed to Lepage’s adoption, as seen in the statement by the art critic of *The Argus* in 1884:

Mr. and Mrs. Gotch are students of the natural school … their productions at once impress one as being taken direct from Nature … their simplicity of treatment and sober colour must greatly please all lovers of genuine art.

This positive appraisal of Gotch’s works of art suggests Gotch’s Australian contemporaries could greatly appreciate his unrefined yet sincere manner of depiction. Their positive notices were, in addition, focused upon an employment of the ‘sober’ tonality. The Australian predilection for these French-inspired Naturalist qualities is further corroborated in the fact that one of Gotch’s paintings, *Mental Arithmetic* (Fig.25) “… found its way to the National Gallery of Victoria in 1884”. This painting was bought by his uncle, Mr. Gordon Gotch for presentation to the trustees. An initial impression of *Mental Arithmetic* (Fig.25) must lie in its dominant subject matter; Gotch recorded a street scene of the

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389 *The Argus*, 04 February 1884, Thomas Cooper Gotch.
390 *The Argus*, 22 March 1884, Notice.
391 *The Argus*, 22 March 1884, Notice.
everyday interaction between a country girl and a Cornish fisherman. His application of the light palette plays a role in enhancing the authenticity of these two figures. The minute details of their facial expressions and garments are clearly delineated. Gotch’s *Mental Arithmetic* (Fig.25) recalls Lepage’s *plein-air* treatments; the clear outdoor light, even the fresh air, is presented as if they were suffusing the whole image. In response to this, the art critic of *The Argus* stated that “… *Mental Arithmetic* (Fig.25) gives us sincere gradation to learn…” Another approving criticism was offered as follows: “… Gotch’s landscapes give you an agreeable impression of open air and sunshine in consequence”. As is indicated, the Australian critics were not only able to recognize but also appreciate the *plein air* handling. In this sense, it is asserted that the 1884 exhibition of Gotch’s art provided the Australian art world with an early understanding of the British interpretation of Lepage-inspired *plein-airism*.

In effect, what appealed to the contemporary Australian public was the ‘Newlyn’ practice of *plein air* Naturalism. Even though the so-called Newlyn stamp of outdoor paintings had not widely emerged during the mid-1880s, the local audience responded very approvingly to the works of art from the ‘Newlyn School’ at the first exhibition of the Anglo-Australian society of artists in 1885. Significantly, the staging of the Anglo-Australian exhibition was attributed to the fact that after his return to Britain, Gotch assessed the viability of launching another exhibition in Australia with his associate fellow, Ayerst Ingram, who then took charge, in his position as Present of the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists in 1889. As *The Sydney Morning Herald* acknowledged, “Mr. Ingram succeeded in establishing the society on a sound financial footing, a substantial guarantee to meet expense of shipment, insurance”. Ingram’s patronage was a key factor that ensured the society’s subsequent existence.

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392 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 174.
393 *The Argus*, 22 March 1884, Notice.
394 *The Argus*, 04 February 1884, Thomas Cooper Gotch.
In examining the reception to the 1885 Anglo-Australian exhibition, it is clear that the most favourable reviews on clear delineations of contemporary Cornish people as portrayed in the outdoor light by Walter Langley (1852-1922) can be, in particular, interpreted as an Australian response to Bastien-Lepage’s Naturalist idiom. Notably, the major outlets of the Australian press of those days elaborated upon the Cornish fisher girls and fishermen depicted in the landscape paintings of Walter Langley. The art critics noted that the *plein-air* treatment imbued a vigorous feeling throughout his works of art. In *The Australasian*, for example, it was pointed out that “strength and decision” marked Langley’s outdoor images in *What* (untraced) and *A Pensive Maiden* (untraced). This suggests that Langley’s precise handling of the *plein air* techniques – tonality and modelling – created a sense of determined energy suffusing the whole image. “Such a loyal truth to nature” was seen as determining Langley’s contributions to the exhibition. As the critic of *The Age* recognized, “… his painting, *What*, was an absolute masterpiece in terms of colour and texture”. It can be recognized that Langley was faithful to his employment of the *plein air* palette and subject matters. A more detailed review on Langley’s Newlyn depiction was provided in *The Argus* of the same year:

They are not elegant subjects – Cornish boatmen and sturdy young fishermen, but they are real men and women with warm blood in their veins … they are as faithful transcripts of character as any picture of people of the same class in Crabbe’s ‘borough’.

It can be assumed that approving criticism was echoed by the local public and painters, otherwise *The Daily Telegraph* could not have made the declaration that “… Mr. Langley’s paintings cannot fail to win universal appreciation”. Thus, it is inferred the positive ethos

397 Walter Langley (1852-1922) was recognized as the first major artist to settle in Newlyn during the early 1880s. His paintings mainly present the Cornish fisherman life scenes.
399 The Australasian, 31 October 1885, Fine Arts.
400 The Argus, 26 October 1885, Exhibition of the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists.
401 The Argus, 26 October 1885, Exhibition of the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists.
402 The Argus, 26 October 1885, Exhibition of the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists.
403 The Daily Telegraph, 27 October 1885.
imbued in the depiction of Cornish fishermen played a significant role in ensuring that Langley’s *plein air* practice left a great impression on his Australian contemporaries. It can be further asserted that the local viewpoint would probably interpret the “photo-realist” effect of Bastien-Lepage’s images as conveying a sense of vigour and energy, rather than as diminishing the aesthetic merits.\(^{404}\)

One further point needs to be brought out. The Australian press of those times not only significantly featured discussion on the *plein air* style, but also encouraged the local artists to emulate their British exemplars. As the art critic of *The Age* stated in 1885,

… If Langley’s painting, *What*, could be retained in Melbourne, where our young artists could get access to it, a careful study of its wonderful technique would be of incalculable benefit to them.\(^{405}\)

The ‘technique’ referred to in the above account was related to the *plein air* mode of painting. It is clear that such an account ensured the technical proficiency of contemporary Newlyn practice, which no doubt fostered the *plein-airist* development of the early stage in Australia. In responding to the great influence of these two exhibitions of modern British art in 1884 and 1885, *Obstruction, Box Hill*, 1887 (Fig.26) by Jane Sutherland (1855-1928) can be viewed as demonstrating a modest debt to the Newlyn models, notably Gotch’s *Mental Arithmetic*, 1883 (Fig.25).\(^{406}\) Although she did not incorporate a sense of brightness into *Obstruction* (Fig.26) as much as had Gotch, Sutherland still placed emphasis on the subtleties of the natural light. This female artist’s positive response to the concurrent *plein air* dogma can be evidenced in the delicate manipulation of her reduced tones. Furthermore, an adoption of the young girl as the subject matter could be additionally related to the inspiration of *Mental Arithmetic* (Fig.25). As Hollinrake singled out in her thesis, Gotch had particular interest in “choosing the female child as a model” of his early paintings.\(^{407}\) For these reasons, it is inferred that Sutherland’s *Obstruction* (Fig.26) reflected certain of

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\(^{404}\) Weisberg, 1992, p. 27. The description of the “photo-realist” was proposed by Walter Sickert.

\(^{405}\) The Age, 26 October 1885, The Anglo-Australian Society of Artists.

\(^{406}\) Jane Sutherland was a Scotland-born Australian artist. She was probably the best known and most professional of the women painters associated with the Heidelberg School, quoted in Clark, 1986, p. 27.

the Newlyn-tended features. Such visual resonances could be well attributed to the universal recognition of the contemporary local critics. This painting can be also viewed as an epitome; while the Australian painters shaped their own artistic manner, such as the Box Hill Style, they would have had a great opportunity to refer to their British exemplars. Their seeming emulation of the ‘Newlyn’ form could be viewed as a positive reception to the pervasive influence of Lepage’s *plein-airism*.

In effect, such local delight in Gotch and Langley’s outdoor paintings suggests that a British tendency towards the ‘rustic Naturalism’ could also be well accepted in Australia. The satisfying outcome of the subsequent exhibitions of the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists and of the Grosvenor Gallery Inter-colonial Exhibition played a role in providing significant clues for further examination of the ways in which the British rural scenes were received by the Australian art world. According to the contemporary press, it is acknowledged that the numbers of the artists who participated in the Anglo-Australian exhibitions, increased in nearly seven fold from 1885 to 1890. As Clark stated in *The British Courier*, the moderate success of the 1885 exhibition was a key factor in “leading to the extension of the society, which now (1890) numbered nearly 80 members”. The popularity of those exhibitions ensured the Australian public’s predilection for the paintings of certain British artists of the day, such as the “associates of the Royal Academy, of the New English Art Club, together with many regular contributors to the Grosvenor Gallery”. Significantly, the Grosvenor Gallery of the 1880s placed emphasis on the display of a series of the British rustic landscape paintings, most of which were created based upon the French Naturalist doctrines. This can be associated with the fact that Bastien-Lepage was invited to launch a small-scale retrospective of his paintings at the British summer exhibition. His English followers, Clausen, La Thangue and Forbes were all distinguishingly frequent contributors in promoting the concept of ‘rustic Naturalism’ at

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408 Needham, Grove Art Online – Naturalism.
409 The Argus, 03 March 1890.
410 The British Courier, 18 February 1890, An Art Gallery for Queensland.
411 The Argus, 03 March 1890.
412 Newall, 1995, p. 29. For instance, George Clausen sent the realistic works of art, *Gleaners* and *Winter Work* while Forbes and La Thangue sent the paintings inspired by Breton.
the Grosvenor Gallery. Due to the Inter-colonial exhibition of 1887, this trend was also shared with the Australian audience. *The Argus* demonstrated the intention behind the inter-colonial exhibition:

In encouraging the growth of art in the various colonies, Sir Coutts Lindsay, as the founder of the Grosvenor Gallery, proposed to the Victorian Government that there should be brought out each year a representative collection of paintings by British artists.\(^{414}\)

The great attention paid to La Thangue’s *The Runaway*, 1887 (Fig.27) at this exhibition can be seen as representing the Australian admiration for the British ‘rustic Naturalism’. Unlike the previously-mentioned Newlyn practice, it is argued that La Thangue incorporated an element of ‘pathetic fallacy’ to evoke the sentimental resonances with the viewers into his certain Naturalist paintings.\(^{415}\) *The Last Furrow*, 1895 (Fig.28) is a typical exemplar for this artistic attribute. It depicts a rural scene, in which an elderly peasant has passed away in the field, apparently owing to his overloaded labour. The point is that La Thangue manipulated the other compositions of this painting to create a specific sympathetic ambience for such a miserable aspect of real life. The white horse of this painting standing behind the old man is interpreted as playing a role of ‘mute sympathy’ in enhancing the sentimental atmosphere, so as to echo the pathetic happening.\(^{416}\) It is this handling which parallels the underlying connotation of ‘pathetic fallacy’; the artist invested inanimate objects or natural settings with human emotions to convey his personal reflections upon the motif.

An understanding of *The Last Furrow* (Fig.28) is able to shed light on La Thangue’s *The Runaway* (Fig.27), for this painting is untraced nowadays and few art critics and scholars have been able to conduct thorough research into the pertinent issues. According to McConkey, *The Runaway* (Fig.27) presents a farm girl lying among the tall grasses as if she were exhausted from work.\(^{417}\) Two male labours are, in addition, depicted as passing by and noticing the scene in the background of the painting. Given these compositions, it can


\(^{415}\) Needham, Grove Art Online – Naturalism.

\(^{416}\) Weisberg, 1992, p. 121.

\(^{417}\) McConkey, 1996, p. 141.
be argued that *The Runaway* (Fig.27) shared the visual resonance with *The Last Furrow* (Fig.28). An incorporation of the two figures overlooking the foregrounded subject matter of the girl represents La Thangue’s personal concern about the related rural phenomena of those times, such as the fact that “daughters could no longer be maintained on the land because they were required by their families to go into service”.\(^{418}\) Although *The Runaway* (Fig.27) does not aim to deal with the similar occurrence of the British countryside, it is clear La Thangue demonstrated artistic emphasis on the contemporary role of peasant women and projected so-called ‘heroic sentiments’ onto his depicted inferior female figure.\(^{419}\)

In effect, a use of sentimental elements to communicate with the viewers and transcend literal transcriptions of everyday life scenes did not prevail in the British art world until the 1890s.\(^{420}\) This could be one of the reasons why *The Runaway*, 1887 (Fig.27) was sent over to Australia after exhibiting at the Grosvenor Gallery in the same year.\(^{421}\) This exemplar of La Thangue experimenting with how to ‘combine symbolic purpose with realistic truth’ was nevertheless well accepted by the Australian contemporaries. On September, 1887, *The Argus* reported that “Mr. La Thangue, *The Runaway* (Fig.27), was a picture that attracted considerable notice in this year’s Grosvenor collection”.\(^{422}\) After one month, the critic of *The Argus* acclaimed this painting “occupied an excellent position” and even provided a detailed description of the image itself.\(^{423}\) As is shown,

The girl’s face is flushed with exercise and some mental trouble is signified by the contraction of eyebrows, and by a slight drawing down of the mouth at the corners … the lassitude of the sleeper’s position and the subtle indications of form beneath the lines of the drapery are among the good points of a picture that commands and almost compels attention.\(^{424}\)

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\(^{418}\) McConkey, 1996, p. 141.

\(^{419}\) McConkey, 1996, p. 132.

\(^{420}\) McConkey, 2002, p. 141.

\(^{421}\) McConkey, 1996, p. 141

\(^{422}\) The Argus, 17 September 1887.

\(^{423}\) The Argus, 26 October 1887, The Grosvenor Gallery Collection of Pictures.

\(^{424}\) The Argus, 26 October 1887, The Grosvenor Gallery Collection of Pictures.
It is clear that not only his ‘unmistakably faithful’ depiction of the girl’s facial complexion and expression was pointed out, but that La Thangue’s delicate handling of conveying her inner condition also gained the critic’s notice.\textsuperscript{425} Such close attention to \textit{The Runaway} (Fig.27) manifests a local inclination towards one of the British strands of rustic Naturalism, and that indirectly echoed with Lepage’s artistic association. Furthermore, it can be argued that La Thangue’s incorporation of sentimental elements into the \textit{plein air} treatment provided the Australian contemporaries with another outlook and source of inspiration on the landscape paintings of French-inspired Naturalism.

The great local interest in \textit{Mental Arithmetic} (Fig.25) and \textit{The Runaway} (Fig.27) facilitated the subsequent notice shown to one of the most prominent Newlyn artists, Stanhope Forbes. As seen in \textit{The Argus} in 1890, Forbes was “a leading light of the Newlyn School … the realism he gave saw everything in a view of places and people, the inner and the outer meaning also”.\textsuperscript{426} It is noted that the art critic, in 1890, already obtained the graphic conception of the ‘Newlyn School’ and employed it to categorise the characteristics of this mode of artworks. \textit{The Advertiser} of the same year provided a more detailed and appreciative account of the Newlyn style:

\begin{quote}
We have come right out of the gallery into the fresh open air of the little sea village of Newlyn in Cornwall … the artists who live about in the old boathouses and paint on the beach … never use a studio model, but press into their willing service all the old boatmen, and fishwives … Their motto is “truth” and their strength is “values” in colour and in tones. They are known as the Newlyn School and are very strongly represented in this year’s exhibition of Royal Anglo-Australian Society of Artists.\textsuperscript{427}
\end{quote}

Given this, the widespread Australian endorsement of the Newlyn practice of the \textit{plein air} values and techniques is clearly manifested. The purchase of Forbes’s \textit{Their Ever-Shifting Home}, 1887 (Fig.29) from the 1890 Anglo-Australian exhibition was a further response to the concurrent positive criticism. \textit{The Argus} critic identified “… the tone of the picture is

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[425]{The Argus, 27 February 1884, The Realistic School in Art.}
\footnotetext[426]{The Argus, 19 July 1890, The Summer Exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery.}
\footnotetext[427]{The Advertiser, 10 November 1890, The British Art Gallery.}
\end{footnotes}
sombre and the feel and distance are those of a dull wintry day”. Apart from a realistic demonstration of the real life scene, *Their Ever-Shifting Home* (Fig.29) embraces the feature of storytelling, which shared certain artistic traces with La Thangue’s *The Runaway* (Fig.27). As the contemporary Australian critic stated, *Their Ever-Shifting Home* (Fig.29) presented a scene that “… tells the simple life-story of one of those families who have their habitations on wheels, and who journey from village to village peddling their wares”. Forbes himself also recorded that:

… I have done the caravan and it quite makes the picture … it is very taking, this old van at the top of the hill, I have not yet got my gypsy people about but there will be a few tramping alongside. Notably, the artist chose a gypsy woman embracing her infant as the subject matter of the painting and invested a sense of pensive melancholy with this centrally-united composition. Forbes’s apparent intention of incorporating the sentiment into *Their Ever-Shifting Home* (Fig.29) is represented in the wandering gypsyism and a mother’s concern for her baby. It appears that the “grey silvery atmosphere” and the “diffused beamless light of a late autumn” serve a role in resonating against the pathetic feeling, seeming to console the unaccompanied woman. This mode of placing emotional emphasis upon the foregrounded female figure seems to parallel La Thangue’s technique and composition in *The Runaway* (Fig.27). Both paintings can be viewed as epitomizing British rustic Naturalism as derived from Lepage’s *plein air* doctrines.

The appreciation of the Australian public and critics of such a British reinterpretation of French Naturalism and their interest in the motif of female figures, variously depicted as young girls, single women and mothers are, for instance, represented in McCubbin’s *On the Wallaby Track*, 1896 (Fig.30). The foreground of the painting shows that a tiring mother reclining against the tree with the baby lying face down on her lap. This image actually

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428 The Argus, 17 April, 1890.  
429 The Argus, 17 April, 1890.  
430 Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 83.  
431 Free, 1987, p. 64.
suggests the poverty and the rigor of wandering Bush families. Arguably, McCubbin’s idea that the plein air painting is imbued with a sentimental connotation could be well inspired by La Thangue’s The Runaway (Fig.27) and Forbes’s Their Ever-Shifting Home (Fig.29). Nevertheless, the atmosphere of On the Wallaby Track does not appear as gloomy and miserable, for the artist projected a sense of lightness from the foreground of the mother and child to the deep background. As Whitelaw points out, “… a more optimistic connotation of the democratic, free life-style” is invested with the painting; McCubbin adopted a positive interpretation of the unstable life of itinerant workers. Given this, it can be asserted that the Australian artists tended to convey a contemporary value of local optimism in responding to the ‘pathetic fallacy’ of British rustic Naturalism.

Significantly, this section has examined the manners in which the touring exhibitions indirectly disseminated Lepage’s influential painting techniques to the Australian art world by introducing the British exemplars during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The typical Newlyn practices of plein-airism not only gained widespread recognition in Australia but also provided the local artists with a concrete model for understanding Lepage’s French treatment. Nevertheless, Australian purchases of The Runaway (Fig.27) and Their Ever-Shifting Home (Fig.29) manifested an appreciation for the British sentimentalised manner of presenting rustic natural scenes as well. Given this, the conclusion can be drawn that the local artists’ assimilation of British rustic naturalism represented one Australian response to Lepage’s theories.

**Varied Representation of French Naturalism**

The contributions of the exhibitions of the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists and the Grosvenor Gallery Inter-Colonial Exhibition to the Australian art world during the last two decades of the late nineteenth century have been discussed in the previous section. The

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434 Needham, Grove Art Online – Naturalism.
Newlyn style, as represented in Langley, Gotch and Forbes’ paintings, has been shown to have been introduced and well received by their local contemporaries through these touring exhibitions. It has been argued that the positive reception to the Newlyn practice of *plein air* Naturalism can be viewed as an Australian response to Bastien-Lepage’s influential painting techniques. Not only was this French master’s artistic influence evidenced in the pervasive employment of lightly reduced tones and square brushwork by his contemporary apologists, but it was also embodied in the prevalent establishment of such artistic communities, as the Newlyn colony in Britain and the Box Hill Camp in Australia. Given this, the final section of the thesis aims to demonstrate that Henry Scott Tuke (1858-1929), although a frequent associate artist of the Newlyn School, developed his own personal style in responding to the French-inspired *plein air* Naturalism. A parallel practice can be seen in the works of art of Australian contemporaries.

As McConkey asserts, “… the formation and dispersal of short-lived summer colonies was a consistent feature of the 1880s which contributed to tangling the skeins of development”.\(^{435}\) This movement can be interpreted as fostering the development of *plein-airism*. It is acknowledged that *plein-airist* exponents established artistic communities in order to “… bring to art new vigour and sincerity through personal encounter with nature”.\(^{436}\) Furthermore, contemporary artists were able to share with each other their examples of painting outdoors and the experiments on the natural light and shade. The genuine friendship between groups of artists, as the cohesive glue, was significant in bonding the whole art colony and enhancing the ethos of painting outdoors.

Given this, it can be claimed that the close friendship of Tuke with Gotch and Ingram may be one of the reasons why some Tuke’s paintings, including *The Bathers* (Fig.31) and *Basking* (untraced), were sent to Australia through the Anglo-Australian exhibitions.\(^{437}\) It has been acknowledged that Tuke and Gotch were very close friends at the Slade School, and both artists had an early connection with the Newlyn School.\(^{438}\) As with Ingram, Tuke

\(^{435}\) McConkey, 1989, p. 45.
\(^{436}\) Zubans, 1995, p. 31.
\(^{437}\) *The Grosvenor Gallery Inter-colonial Exhibition*. Exhibition catalogue. Melbourne. [1887].
\(^{438}\) Lomax, 2004, p. 41.
shared a similar interest in yachting; they owned their own boats and regularly organized coastal excursions with friends. Arguably, his separate friendships with Gotch and Ingram were underscored by their parallel preference for the French *plein air* Naturalism. Tuke’s practice of painting outdoors, nevertheless, appears to go beyond those Lepage-influenced doctrines which were adopted by Gotch and Ingram. His most important works of art feature a series of nude boys against a background of seaside or rustic scenes. As asserted in the following account,

… Tuke’s paintings seemed to open up fresh vistas, and certainly gave new interest to the study of the undraped figure, to depict it with the pure daylight upon it, instead of the artificial lighting of the studio.

From this perspective, it can be claimed that the art of Tuke, who had previously studied art and painted on the beach in Florence, did not strictly conform to the typical subject matter of rural figures which were advocated by Bastien-Lepage. Hence, he could well invest his outdoor paintings with recognizable Italian artistic traces. Since Cooper declared, “… Tuke worked outside the mainstream of art, with both his subject matter and his fresh use of paint, pursuing an unswerving determination to paint the nude in the open air”. That is, he chose a motif of the nude bodies to execute naturalist paintings, rather than depicting contemporary peasants or labourers. It has been acknowledged that, during the 1880s and the 1890s, artists began placing the nudes in outdoor surroundings. Thus, a traditional subject matter was made more challenging by being placed in a contemporary *plein air* setting. As is recognized, contemporary Victorians regarded the “naked human body as a matter of shame unless covered by the cloak of classical allusion”. Clearly, Tuke’s art did not conform to this convention.

In this sense, the reason for the strong rejection of Tuke’s *The Bathers* (Fig.31) by British contemporaries in 1886 can be inferred. As is recorded, it was Martin Colnaghi’s reaction

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439 Rezelman, 1984, p. 137.
441 Cooper, 1987, p. 5.
442 Smith, 2001, p. 250.
443 Cross, 1994, p. 64.
to the naked boys in *The Bathers* (Fig.31) that made him decide to withdraw financial support for the initial exhibition of the New English Art Club.\footnote{Wainwright & Dinn, 1989, p. 24. Martin Colnaghi had taken over the Marlborough Gallery in Pall Mall, and offering it free of charge to the group of artists in 1886.} Cross also points out that Tuke was very disappointed when the Royal Academy did not accept his paintings in 1883.\footnote{Cross, 1994, p. 110.} For these reasons, it is can be claimed that Tuke’s naturalist images tend to deviate from the category of the French-influenced form, as more conventionally represented in *Hiding from Granny*, 1883 (Fig.32) by his close friend, Gotch. As seen in the latter painting, a daily life scene shows that two women are in casual conversation, as two children hide behind a large receptacle, watching their interaction. Gotch uses a light palette to create an ambience of liveliness and further enhance the authenticity of his realistic portrayal. Nevertheless, it can be claimed that Tuke’s handling of bright tonalities tends to add a radiant sense to his nude images, which is clearly manifest in *Ruby, Gold and Malachite* (Fig.33). This manner empowers the dynamic boating activity of six youths, evoking a hopeful and inviting ambience.

One significant point which can explain Tuke and Gotch’s artistic differences is related to Tuke’s learning experiences in Florence from the end of 1880 to 1881.\footnote{Cross, 1994, p. 62.} Not only did he have the opportunity to study the works of art of Titian, Bronzino and Correggio but additionally the Florentine beach provided Tuke with the sources of inspiration to shape his idea of painting the nude.\footnote{Cooper, 1987, p. 7.} As the artist himself recorded, “… we have done several nude boys on the beach, at Pietra Santa, a coastal village some sixty miles from Florence, which is more useful to me than anything”.\footnote{Cooper, 1987, p. 7.} The statement suggests that Tuke employed the nude models to experiment with *plein air* practices. His primary artistic aim was, in effect, “… to paint the nude in the open air … there are quiet beaches, some of them hardly accessible by boat where one may paint from the life model undisturbed”.\footnote{Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 132.}
Touching upon this, it needs to be pointed out that Arthur Lemon (1850-1912), a British-born painter working in Italy for much of his career, in effect, had a great influence on Tuke’s understanding of plein-airism.\textsuperscript{450} As Cooper states, Lemon inspired Tuke to adopt the motifs from everyday life, instead of limiting his art to classical models.\textsuperscript{451} Tuke also admitted that “… I am going in heavily for naturalism now … It is a very odd thing that I have been much more influenced by Mr. Arthur Lemon”.\textsuperscript{452} As one of the associate painters of the Etruscan School in Italy, Lemon was celebrated for producing pastoral Italian scenes.\textsuperscript{453} A most important feature of the works of art from the Etruscan School was the representation of classical sentiment and a sense of divine inspiration.\textsuperscript{454} According to its artistic principle, both features should be gained directly from the Nature.\textsuperscript{455} Furthermore, the contemporary Italian art world adopted an interest in the natural light and shade, as well as placing emphasis on the expressive power of presenting those natural effects. A poetic quality, for instance, was able to be conveyed through the elaborate patterns of tonal nuances.\textsuperscript{456} It could be well this connection with the Italian painting techniques that ensured that some of Tuke’s outdoor paintings manifest a sense of connotative idealism. Given this, a significant point that marks his artistic departure from the very realistic depictions of Newlyn seaside scenes is clear.

To a further degree, even though Tuke shared the collective admiration for Bastien-Lepage’s influential plein air ideas and painting techniques, his art generally revealed an emphasis on either narratival or idealised elements.\textsuperscript{457} It can be claimed that Tuke blended the Italian quality of idyllic landscapes and the British tradition of storytelling to formulate a particular representation of “sophisticated naturalism”.\textsuperscript{458} For instance, a threatening sailing incident is recorded in his All Hands to the Pumps, 1888-9 (Fig.34) the dramatic

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{450}Wood, 1995, p. 312.
\item \textsuperscript{451}Cooper, 1987, p. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{452}Cross, 1994, p. 62.
\item \textsuperscript{453}Tate Gallery Collection – The Wooing of Daphnis.
\item \textsuperscript{454}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{455}Newall, 2007-2010, Grove Art Online – Etruscan School. The Etruscan School was a group of Italian and English landscape painters. It was formally associated in Rome during the winter of 1883-4.
\item \textsuperscript{456}Galbally, 2002, p. 60.
\item \textsuperscript{457}Cooper, 1987, p. 16.
\item \textsuperscript{458}McConkey, 1989, p. 33.
\end{itemize}
traces of which are represented in the varied facial expressions and motions, as well as in
the delicate manipulation of the dark gray palette. The artist employed the tonal techniques
to create an intense feeling suffusing the painting. It is obviously different from the
orthodox Naturalist handling which tends to represent such a scene through the use of a
clear, less dramatic palette. Tuke’s selection of the subject matter and incorporation of the
sentiments are evidence of his artistic individuality. For Australian eyes, it can be noted that
the Tuke painting of *All Hands to the Pumps* (Fig.34) resonates against Tom Roberts’
*Coming South* (Fig.35), painted two years earlier. While each composition features the
riggings or sails of the boats, the motions of the seas and figures on the boats, Tuke’s image
is actively narrative, presaging a possibly disastrous storm. Roberts’ *Coming South* (Fig.35),
in contrast, chooses a moment in time to represent the mood of disillusionment, apathy and
apprehension which the immigrants’ faces and postures reveal. Clearly, both artists
incorporated the narrative elements into their naturalistic portrayals of snap-shotting the
ship scenes.

As is acknowledged, Tuke had the direct experiences of interacting with Bastien-Lepage
during the early 1880s; he witnessed what he saw as ‘many things of surpassing beauty’
when visiting the French master’s studio. Furthermore, it is observed that Lepage
appreciated his application of ‘reduced grey-brown hues’ and ‘the theme of the semi-rural
simplicity’ at that time. These facts corroborate the extent to which the Bastien-Lepage
techniques influenced Tuke’s *plein air* productions. Nevertheless, a series of the nude
featured in landscape paintings, such as the most significant exemplar, *The Bathers*, 1885
(Fig.31) demonstrate his idiosyncratic approach; Tuke invested the white body of the nude
boy with a sense of idealistic beauty. Cooper asserts that the artist intended to “celebrate the
beauty of naked youths”, which was related to the pantheistic belief that “God was present
in Nature”. Hatt also points out the whiteness in Tuke’s nude paintings represents the
idea of virtue; an employment of the light palette plays a role in enhancing the pure and

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459 Wainwright & Dinn, 1989, p. 45.
460 Wainwright & Dinn, 1989, p. 45.
461 Cooper, 1987, p. 41.
idealised atmosphere which the artist tried to create.\textsuperscript{462} Given this, it can be argued that Tuke not only intentionally arranged real male models in the outdoor environments but also imprinted his personal ideals upon the depicted scenes. As McConkey declares, “… certain rustic naturalist painters moved from a strict adherence to the dogma of Bastien-Lepage to a more personal style …”\textsuperscript{463} This tendency was evidenced in Tuke’s outdoor paintings of nudity, since they embraced a distinctive mark and departed from the Newlyn representations of Lepage-influenced idiom.

Through the Grosvenor Gallery, Inter-colonial exhibition, Tuke’s \textit{The Bathers} was sent to Australia in 1887. Arguably, this painting could have been appreciatively noticed by Australian contemporaries. It is in part because Tuke’s \textit{A Sailor Yarn}, 1887 (Fig.36) was bought by the Art Gallery of New South Wales through the Anglo-Australian exhibition in 1889.\textsuperscript{464} The contemporary Australian preference to \textit{A Sailor Yarn} (Fig.36) which features a Newlyn-inclined, narrative quality and Tuke, this artist is evident. Thus, the arrival of Tuke’s \textit{The Bathers} (Fig.31) in Australia can be associated with the fact that the artists from the Box Hill Camp chose to feature bathing as an artistic subject choice in their series of outdoor paintings. Clearly, one of the reasons for the establishment of this artists’ camp is attributed to their admiration for Lepage’s \textit{plein-airist} studies.\textsuperscript{465} Like Tuke, they did not strictly focus on peasant rustic scenes, but experimented on varied specific motifs; they also chose the bather, for instance, as one of their options. The aim of Roberts’ \textit{The Sunny South} (Fig.22) was not to present a realistic portrayal of the bathers. Instead, a leisurely moment of the serene outdoor scene was represented through his incorporation of those distanced nude bodies. From the idealistic perspective, it can be claimed that an image of an eternal summer was created. As one turns to Streeton’s \textit{Evening with Bathers}, 1888 (Fig.37), this artist also depicted men bathing against the twilight backdrop. Violet traces of the skyline empower this outdoor picture with a feeling of poetic lyricism.

\textsuperscript{462} Hatt, 2006, p. 100.
\textsuperscript{463} McConkey, 1995, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{464} Free, 1987, p. 200.
\textsuperscript{465} Galbally, 2002, p. 62.
It is clear that the bathing paintings of Australian artists do not always strictly adhere to the category of naturalist *plein-airism* and yet also depart from the style of Tuke’s bathers. As Thomas points out, Roberts’ *The Sunny South* (Fig.22), to some extent, “aligns itself with just-emerging Symbolist art”. This claim could be well applied to interpret Streeton and Condor’s outdoor images of nude bodies. Given this, it can be argued that the development of the Box Hill Camp did not merely limit itself to the practice of Lepage-influenced painting techniques. Similar to Tuke’s exemplars, the Australian contemporaries adopted the *plein air* studies in responding to the sophisticated Naturalism.

Significantly, it is acknowledged that the artistic communities, which were established in the English-speaking worlds, during the 1880s, reflected the artists’ painting experiences from their student days in Paris. These communities similarly echoed the influence of Bastien-Lepage’s Naturalist dogma. Forbes’ establishment of the Newlyn colony and Roberts’ setting up of the Box Hill Camp demonstrate a great debt to this artistic heritage. As Topliss declares,

> In the later 1870s and the 1880s, young artists, such as Stanhope Forbes, took up the *plein-air* cause under the influence of the Barbizon School, Millet, Corot and Bastien-Lepage … Their example caused art students in Europe and Australia to forsake their studios and set up easels in the countryside.

In this sense, it could well be assumed that the *plein air* productions of each community embraced a similar artistic stamp. However, Tuke’s series of nude landscape paintings are a clear exemplar that differentiates from the Newlyn collective mode of depiction. An employment of the bathers seen in works of art by Roberts, Streeton and Condor also indicates the artistic departure of the Heidelberg School from Lepage’s orthodoxy of *plein air* Naturalism.

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466 Thomas, 2007, p. 87.
467 Weisberg, 1992, p. 108.
Conclusion

This thesis has examined the critical reception of Jules Bastien-Lepage’s art and influence in contemporary Britain and Australia. The discussion has focused upon Bastien-Lepage’s employment of a rural labour motif, a reduced tonality and square-headed brushwork in order to discuss the underlying characteristics and nuances of what Brownell defines as Bastien-Lepage’s clear originality and certainty of execution.\(^{469}\) As Brownell asserted, “… the French master’s art was so difficult to really get at and fix his individuality”.\(^{470}\) In other words, Lepage’s Naturalist paintings feature artistic traces of eclecticism. It is thus understandable that contemporary art critics drew particular attention to his palette and brushes. The approving comments centred on Lepage’s adoption of gray shades, which were used to capture the natural light in an authentic manner. As is recognized, the most significant dogma, which dictated Bastien-Lepage’s manipulation of the techniques, was “an absolute fidelity to Nature”.\(^{471}\) The second point of contemporary interest dealt with his use of square brushwork, as this provided an indication of his progressive artistic departure from the academic conventions.\(^{472}\) Nevertheless, some of art critics asserted that these two techniques were inclined to make his productions appear lacking individuality and “like mechanical productions.”\(^{473}\) Apart from this, Bastien-Lepage’s promotion for *plein-airism* played a significant role in examining the contemporary reception to his works of art.

As one contemporary Newlyn artist, Walter Langley acknowledged,

> The mild nature of the climate and good light being favourable to painting in the open air, with the picturesque occupation of the fisher-folk, soon attracted artists to the place … the favourable conditions enabled them to carry on the traditions of the

\(^{469}\) Brownell, 1883, p. 266.
\(^{470}\) Brownell, 1883, p. 265.
\(^{471}\) Fox & Greenacre, 1979, p. 18.
\(^{472}\) Beechey, 2007, p. 503.
\(^{473}\) Little, 1893, p. 174.
“Plein-Air School” then becoming prominent in France through the work of Bastien-Lepage and other French painters.474

Notably, Bastien-Lepage’s British followers applied plein air ideas and techniques to their Naturalist paintings due to the fact that they had travelled to Paris to study and had the opportunity to learn from this French master.475 Nevertheless, it has argued that even though they conformed to the French master’s precept, their works of art still presented their own imprint. While George Clausen’s artistic belief resided in “uncompromising realism”, his appreciation for Millet’s style projected his “mental impression” onto the realistic depictions of rural scenes.476 As for La Thangue, a controlled handling of square brushwork meant that he was recognized as “a leader of Square Brush School” in Britain.477 This assertion suggests that La Thangue developed a personal technique on the basis of Lepage’s inspiration. Stanhope Forbes fostered the dissemination of plein air concepts by his establishment of the Newlyn School in Cornwell. He and his fellow painters set up their easels in outdoor environments in order to establish as intimate an interaction with Nature as possible. In spite of the promotion of this progressive idea, it is noted that most Newlynners maintained artistic traces of Academic traditions as the narrative element in their paintings, as can be manifested in Henry Tuke’s All Hands to the Pumps (Fig.34).478 The artist, as a close associate with the Newlyn School, frequently featured narrative elements into his marine paintings. However, Tuke still shaped his own individual interpretation in responding to the French-influenced strand of rural Naturalism. To a degree, a series of idealistic nude boys in his outdoor images demonstrate Tuke’s artistic association with the contemporary Italian plein air manners.479

In Australia, it has been asserted that the touring British exhibitions, from the mid-1880s to the early 1890s, played an important role in providing the Australian audience with real

474 Little, 1893, p. 20.
476 Armstrong, 1895, p. 404.
478 Skipwith, 1979, p. 543.
examples of Lepage-influenced Naturalist paintings. As Whitelaw states, a group of the Heidelberg School painters, including Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton and Charles Condor, in effect, showed great admiration for Bastien-Lepage’s *plein air* Naturalism. Nevertheless, their selection of subject matters was not merely limited to rural adults, but also included female children and nude bodies. In this sense, it can be inferred that Australian contemporaries tended to develop varied representations of French Naturalism.

Given this examination of the French master’s reception in Britain and Australia, the conclusion must be drawn that Bastien-Lepage artworks and his techniques, although initially extremely influenced, did not have an enduring impact. The influence he did have, however, was to provide the inspirational foundation of Naturalist practices, upon which Bastien-Lepage followers were free to diverge and develop their recognizably related yet individualistic styles.

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480 The Advertiser, 22 July 1889.
481 Whitelaw, 1985, p. 54.
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Author/s:
Su, Tzu-Hsiu

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