THE HEIDELBERG SCHOOL

AND THE RURAL MYTHOLOGY

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by

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is my own work and
that all source material used has been acknowledged.

[Signature]
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INTRODUCTION

Late nineteenth-century Australian culture was characterized by the making of myths and legends. None was more important and far-reaching in its influence than the rural mythology centred on the Australian bushman.

The rural myth permeated all levels of cultural endeavour, but perhaps found its most heroic expression in the large-scale pastoral figure subjects painted by the Heidelberg artists in the 1880s and 1890s. Their paintings of Australian bushmen 'on the wallaby track', pioneers, shearers, gold-prospectors and children lost in the bush, all demonstrate the strength and appeal of the myth in contemporary thought. A rural myth emerged simultaneously in Australian literature through the Bulletin writers such as Henry Lawson and 'Banjo' Paterson, and appeared in a more conservative form in the work of now largely forgotten writers like Douglas B. Sladen, Arthur Patchett Martin and Frances Tyrrell Gill. Nowhere is the appeal of the myth more evident than in the many illustrations of bush 'types' and themes in the illustrated newspapers. These illustrations were aimed at a popular audience and consequently provide a clear reflection of societal concerns and popular myths of the period.

The idea that the various manifestations of the rural myth can be conveniently grouped together under the one heading, 'The Australian Legend', is a proposition made attractive by its naive simplicity.¹ It could imply, for example, that a painting depicting a pioneer working the land held the same ideological meaning for a contemporary audience as another painting of the itinerant bush worker portrayed 'on the wallaby track'. Both artists and writers contributed to the rural myth, but it cannot be assumed that their rural subjects were intended to appeal to the same classes of society.
There were different elements or strands of the rural mythology, just as there were different types of nationalism during the period. The 'radical' nationalism espoused by many of the *Bulletin* writers must be weighed against the conservative, imperialistic nationalism that reached its height with the public celebration of Australia's centenary in 1888. If (as this thesis argues) the rural mythology was created by a predominantly urban-based society, then we might expect city audiences to be exposed to alternative, if not competing, urban ideologies. During the 1880s, for example, the Victorian faith in the march of material progress had an influence on popular thought equal to that of the rural myth. The fact that these alternative ideologies have now vanished from view does not diminish their original significance. Thus the idealization of the itinerant bush worker's existence in art and literature needs to be seen against the popular belief that 'independence' could be achieved through owning 'a home of one's own' in the city (see Chapter 5).

As Russel Ward has pointed out, nations have customarily sought to establish a sense of their identity in the creation of myths and legends:

> The dreams of nations, as of individuals, are important, because they reflect, as in a distorting mirror, the real world, but may sometimes react upon and influence it.\(^2\)

The rural myth in late nineteenth-century Australian culture was one such national dream. Here the pastoral figure subjects painted by the Heidelberg artists reflected the 'real world' of their society, but was the real world held up and reflected in 'a distorting mirror'? Why did Tom Roberts choose the figure of the shearer, or Frederick McCubbin select the pioneer, to express a national social ideal?

This thesis traces the origins and development of the rural mythology in late nineteenth-century Australian figure painting, and
attempts to place the pastoral myth in art against the social realities which gave rise to it. For what type of audience were these pastoral pictures painted and how wide was their appeal? Did artists share the dominant values and prevailing myths of contemporary society? Did they, for instance, embrace the nationalist ethos of the Bulletin writers? These issues can only be resolved by seeing the Heidelberg artists' figure paintings within their original social context.

Tom Roberts' figure painting, *Shearing the Rams*, has today assumed something of the status of an immediately recognizable cultural symbol. And yet it is surprising that there still exists a popular view of the 'Heidelberg School' as primarily a group of plein-airiste landscape painters. Like so many of the misconceptions surrounding the Heidelberg School, the origins of this view can be traced to accounts of the period furnished by the artists and their friends early this century. Writing in *Art in Australia* in 1917, Lionel Lindsay claimed for Arthur Streeton the role of 'discoverer' of the true Australian landscape:

The discoverer, the first to look into the heart of our landscape, as with the eyes of a child, and reveal its essential mystery, its truth and beauty ...³

Years later, when R.H. Croll compiled his book on Roberts in 1935, he gave it the prophetic title, *Tom Roberts: Father of Australian Landscape Painting*.⁴

The decision to concentrate upon figure painting in this thesis was not simply based on a desire to redress the balance in favour of figure painting. To a large extent the balance has already been restored by recent scholars of the Heidelberg School.⁵ Rather, the decision to focus upon figure painting reflects its contemporary role in the creation of the rural mythology. The thesis establishes the greater value the contemporary art public attached to figure painting
over landscape painting; from very early in their careers, the major Heidelberg artists (with the admittedly notable exception of Streeton) aspired to become figure painters. When artists wished to express a national, social ideal in the 1880s and 1890s, they invariably employed large-scale figure subjects. This does not discount the important role that plein-airiste landscape painting played in the formation of the rural myth. Indeed, it is argued that the figure's interaction with the landscape was instrumental in winning public acceptance for plein-airisme as a style.

The thesis is organized according to a thematic structure, rather than chronologically. The first three chapters trace the Heidelberg artists' gradual involvement with contemporary subject matter, as a necessary prelude to their paintings of nationalistic figure subjects. At the same time, each of these chapters tackles a specific problem in art historical interpretations of the Heidelberg School.

Chapter 1, 'Melbourne in the 1870s: the Formative Years', takes issue with the traditional interpretation of the 1870s as a period when the Heidelberg artists were struggling 'in the dark', before their 'sudden breakthrough' in the mid 1880s. The chapter emphasizes the early desire of the Heidelberg artists to become figure painters. When placed against the wider artistic milieu of the 1870s (as historians have generally failed to do), their ambition is seen to accord with the dominant aesthetic tastes of the time.

The next chapter, 'The Heidelberg School and the Popular Image', shows the impetus that popular imagery gave to the Heidelberg artists' painting of contemporary urban and rural subjects. It is argued that the specifically Australian nature of their pastoral paintings has its origins in local popular imagery in photography and black and white illustration. The relationship these paintings bear to earlier
colonial traditions in art has been virtually ignored by historians. The popular image provided the vital link.

If the sources of the Heidelberg artists' pastoral subjects lay in popular imagery, then they still had to learn their artistic vocabulary as figure painters. Chapter 3, 'George Folingsby: Australian Narrative Painting', shows how a 'national' school of figure painters emerged under Folingsby's academic training at the National Gallery of Victoria. His students' figure paintings met the cultural expectations of Melbourne's public during the 1880s. The standard interpretation of Folingsby's influence has, on the other hand, been baldly stated by Bernard Smith: 'They [the Heidelberg artists] rebelled against the conventional teaching of G.F. Folingsby at the National Gallery of Victoria'.

Chapter 4, 'The Social and Cultural Background of the Rural Mythology', as its title suggests, attempts to broaden the scope of the thesis by placing the Heidelberg artists' pastoral subjects within a wider social context. The chapter emphasizes the urban consciousness of rural life in the late nineteenth-century Australia, and underlines the discrepancy between the pastoral ideal and the urban and rural realities from which the myth derived. In particular, the chapter challenges the thesis of Russel Ward that the 'Australian Legend' emerged as the culmination of a radical popular tradition. Instead, the chapter proposes that there were two, not one, popular traditions of the bushman in Australian culture, and that the second more conservative tradition had a greater influence upon the portrayal of the bushman in Australian art.

The remaining chapters of the thesis choose four major themes of the rural mythology, and are mainly centred on the paintings of Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin. Chapter 5, 'Freedom and Independence
"On the Wallaby Track"", suggests the appeal of the itinerant bush worker's existence to urban audiences. It places this rural ideal against a complementary urban 'imperative': the aspirations of the average urban dweller towards economic independence. Chapter 6, 'Tom Roberts: "Strong Masculine Labour"', examines the 'egalitarian impulse' that underlay the idealization of the Australian bush worker. For an urban public, the idea of attaining economic independence was a leitmotif of the rural dream. Chapter 7, Frederick McCubbin: the Spirit of the Pioneers', looks at a further aspect of this popular longing: how a man might achieve 'true independence' through working and owning the land. Even the theme of the final chapter, 'The Lost Child: Nature's Enticing but Treacherous Beauty', might be viewed as an acknowledged cost of conquering the land and achieving ultimate independence.

The choice of four major rural myths for discussion in the concluding chapters of the thesis assumes that there was not one 'Australian Legend' but several. Under these headings it has been possible to include nearly all the important pastoral figure subjects painted by the Heidelberg artists in the late nineteenth century. One can, of course, be accused of neglecting other significant expressions of the rural mythology in figure painting. From at least the late 1880s, the desire to populate the Australian Bush with symbolist figures, nymphs and satyrs, was an aspect of the rural myth which culminated in Sydney Long's art nouveau allegories at the turn of the century. However, Long's Bush allegories, attractive as they may be to today's public, have their origins in the more restricted 'l'art pour l'art' attitudes of the fin du siècle. The rural themes in this thesis have been chosen because of their widespread popularity in contemporary thought.
While a thematic approach has the advantage of isolating the
dominant strands of the contemporary rural mythology, it can also
have certain shortcomings. By avoiding a strict chronology, it can
ignore or gloss over the development of individual artists and minimize
the inter-relationship of their different rural subjects. However,
 Chapters 2 to 7 of this thesis place the emergence of the rural myth
against the materialistic values evident in the cities during the
1880s 'Boom Years'. In the final chapters we see how the rural
dream was deepened by the onset of the economic depression of the 1890s;
in both art and literature an idealized rural past was contrasted with
a bleak present.

There are also woven into the fabric of the various chapters a
number of important secondary themes. Foremost amongst these is the
relationship which the Heidelberg artists' figure paintings bear to
popular imagery in photography and black and white illustration. As
we shall see, distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art were still of
vital importance to both contemporary artists and their critics. The
political 'message' of the Heidelberg artists' paintings must therefore
be weighed against their debt to a wider European artistic tradition.
Their portrayal of the Australian Bush was often influenced by a
reverence for Nature that stemmed from prevailing European art
philosophies. Thus the nationalistic meaning of their pastoral
subjects might differ from the 'up country', national ethos popularized
by the Bulletin writers.

A final note should be added regarding the use of the term
'Heidelberg artists' and, less frequently, 'the Heidelberg School'.
The term has been employed as a matter of convenience, rather than in
an historically precise manner, to define those artists who took part
in the original Heidelberg camps in Melbourne during the 1880s. The
term is used to describe artists of a more 'progressive' tendency
working in Melbourne and Sydney during the 1880s and 1890s. (As we shall see, the idea of a local 'avant-garde' is inappropriate to late nineteenth-century Australian art.)

This is not to say that 'regional differences' were insignificant in the creation of the rural mythology. In particular, the thesis isolates three areas where regional differences between Melbourne and Sydney were crucial: the greater influence of illustrative work in Sydney in the 1880s and 1890s (Chapter 2); the important role of academic figure training under Folingsby at the National Gallery of Victoria in the 1880s (Chapter 3); and the differing role of public patronage in the two cities (Chapter 4). However, the question of whether individual artists could have been said to form a distinctive 'Heidelberg School' was not relevant to the basic concerns of the thesis.

Patrick McCaughey has recently commented that the problem with the 'new historians' is that their

... determination to embed the Heidelberg painters in their age keeps the eye more firmly trained on the documents, on the 'context' out of which they came and less on the paintings themselves.¹²

He may well be right. Yet it still seems a step in the right direction.
NOTES TO INTRODUCTION


2 Ibid., p. 211.

3 Lionel Lindsay, 'Arthur Streeton', _Art in Australia_, No 2, 1917.


6 The importance of black and white work during the Heidelberg era had been discussed at length by William Moore, _The Story of Australian Art_ (Sydney, 1934), and later historians have followed his lead by referring to it. However, until very recently, historians had failed to establish the role of popular imagery as a 'transmitter' of earlier colonial themes in art. Possibly the first historian to suggest the link was David Thomas, 'Frederick McCubbin', _ART and Australia_, vol. 7, No 1, June 1969, p. 72.

7 Bernard Smith, _op. cit._, p. 127.

8 Russel Ward, _op. cit._


10 Charles Conder's painting, _Hot Wind_ of 1889, presents an early example of a distinctively Australian theme treated in the guise of a symbolist figure subject.


Chapter 1

MELBOURNE IN THE 1870S: THE FORMATIVE YEARS

1

The dominant myth surrounding the Australian Heidelberg painters entails the story of a group of rebels who reacted against academic tradition and prevailing taste in the 1880s, in order to create a 'new school of Australian painting'. The Heidelberg artists, so the story goes, became the 'discoverers' of the true Australian landscape.\(^1\) This popular interpretation of the significance of the Heidelberg School has survived virtually intact in writings on Australian art to the present day.\(^2\)

As recently as 1973, Geoffrey Serle could unselfconsciously provide a stark outline of the popular myth:

The Heidelberg painters of the late 1880s achieved a remarkable breakthrough in quality, style and range of painting ... Much of the painters' inspiration and what they had to say was clearly a reflection and product of the ferment of national idealism of the day ... The four major figures of the Heidelberg school [Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton and Charles Conder] were young radicals in revolt.

To emphasise his point, Serle adds that Tom Roberts

... was in total revolt from the prevailing aesthetic assumptions.\(^3\)

An important element of the national myth of the eighties may be found in the customary treatment of the previous decade, the 1870s. The struggle of the young Heidelberg artists to overcome the inadequacies of their artistic training in Melbourne dominates nearly all accounts of their early years. Later accounts corroborate the view that Melbourne in the 1870s was something of an artistic wasteland. It was a belief that leading Heidelberg artists like Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton and Charles Douglas Richardson enthusiastically espoused in their own recollections, written in the
early twentieth century. When they had become established artists, they looked back on the period of the seventies and eighties with all the advantages of hindsight.

It was perhaps natural that they should wish to substantiate their own role in the formation of a new school of painting. In a letter to Frederick McCubbin in 1912, Tom Roberts summed up his attitude to their early years in Melbourne:

Prof we ought to have had just the little help in our early days - of seeing things being done - just a little direction, and the idea that we could do anything anyhow and so come through.4

Roberts thus saw their 'early days' as a period when they were struggling 'in the dark', before their eventual 'breakthrough' in the 1880s. With the upsurge of nationalistic sentiment during the First World War and the years immediately following it, Roberts' opinion indeed became the prevailing interpretation of the Heidelberg era. For both the original members of the Heidelberg group and for writers on Australian art, the 1880s and 1890s became 'a golden age' of national idealism in Australian painting. As a consequence, the 1870s were conveniently relegated to an earlier stage in our artistic development, when Australia was little more than a 'cultural backwater'.5 This patriotic interpretation of the Heidelberg era, given impetus by the First War, has coloured nearly all later accounts of the period. In particular, it has obscured the significance of the 1870s as a formative experience upon the future Heidelberg artists.

The 1870s have come to be seen as a period of cultural impoverishment in Australian art largely by default, since the Heidelberg artists did not 'discover' the 'true' Australian landscape until the middle and late 1880s. This popular view of the Heidelberg artists as a
school of landscape painters overlooks the fact that, as students in Melbourne during the 1870s, their overriding ambition was to become figure painters. In turn, the over-emphasis on landscape painting has led to a comparative neglect of the 'academic' figure subjects painted by Melbourne students during the 1880s - works which were commonly praised by the contemporary public for their nationalistic content. Far from being 'rebels' against an academic tradition and 'prevailing aesthetic assumptions', the desire of the young Heidelberg artists to become figure painters mirrored the main artistic values and tastes of Melbourne society during the 1870s and 1880s.

Two institutions founded in Victoria in 1870 profoundly affected the experience and aspirations of the future Heidelberg artists. The National Gallery School of Victoria was established in 1870, and McCubbin, Roberts and Richardson were amongst its first students. The Victorian Academy of the Arts, Melbourne's society for 'Artists and Amateurs', was also founded in 1870 and held regular annual exhibitions until 1887. The V.A.A. exhibitions, in which both McCubbin and Richardson participated, presented a background of artistic endeavour and taste against which these young artists were to formulate their own values and art. This chapter, therefore, explores the interaction between the experience of artists at the Gallery School and their wider awareness of artistic taste as exemplified in the V.A.A. exhibitions.

Shortly before the Gallery School was established in 1870, the Artisans' Schools of Design provided an early opportunity for Melbourne's potential artists to gain elementary instruction in art. Tom Roberts, Fred McCubbin, Charles Douglas Richardson, Peter Kirk, R.W. Bugg, John White and Louis Abrahams were all future Gallery School students who began their training at the Artisans' Schools. One need not
overestimate the significance of these schools in the development of the Heidelberg artists. Rather, the Artisans' Schools presented one of the few available avenues for artistic training in Melbourne at the time. Later accounts suggest that their influence was limited, if not minimal - an old pupil is quoted by William Moore as saying, 'The instruction was of the slightest kind; still, it awakened in the young people a desire to go further.'

The Artisans' Schools of Design were established in 1869 with the aim of fostering general technical and industrial art education in the colony. It was the inclusion of figure and landscape drawing in the curricula, alongside the mechanical and technical subjects, which attracted the artistically inclined student. At the Trades Hall School, founded in May 1869, Louis Buvelot and Thomas Wright instructed in landscape painting and Thomas Clark in figure drawing. Charles Douglas Richardson later described how 'these names proved attractive to the ambitious student' and it was at the Trades Hall School that Richardson met Tom Roberts, Fred McCubbin and Louis Abraham. Clark and Buvelot also taught at the Collingwood School of Design, where Roberts and John White were pupils.

Although the Artisans' Schools fortuitously brought together for the first time the young members of the future Heidelberg School, the effect of their teachers at these schools remains unclear. The schools were only open for an hour or two one evening per week, and the instruction given by Clark and Buvelot was narrow in scope. McCubbin recalled that he spent his first evening at the Trades Hall School copying an outline drawing of a head which Clark himself had just executed. He was then given a lithograph to study and copy at home before the next week's class. McCubbin continued to make 'copies of copies' in further classes until he advanced to the stage of drawing simple casts of fruit and like objects.
The teaching in the schools was of a very elementary and circumscribed kind, if one can judge from the few available details of the curriculum taught by Clark and Buvelot. Later anecdotes (though admittedly suspect as evidence) certainly support this interpretation. Charles Douglas Richardson recalled: 'I can remember on first joining the school asking if I could learn oil painting. This created a mild stir among the officials at the secretary's desk'. Of more significance are the first signs of interest in figure drawing shown by artists like Richardson and McCubbin. McCubbin recalled asking to join the figure drawing class on entering the Trades Hall School. Richardson similarly remembered that he 'eventually settled down under Thomas Clark in the Figure Class' and he subsequently won the prize for anatomical drawing in 1873.

McCubbin and Richardson may have shown an early preoccupation with the academic notion of the drawing of the human figure as the basis of training in art. But it is more probable that figure drawing represented the most artistically advanced class one could choose from a restricted curriculum. Given their enthusiasm to be practising artists, it is natural that they should choose it. Their interest in figure drawing was, however, to become more clearly pronounced and decisive at the Gallery School.

Despite the meagre level of instruction at the Artisans' Schools, several of the future Heidelberg artists lingered on at the schools for some years. Tom Roberts, for example, remained at the Trades Hall School until 1874, the year in which he won a prize in the landscape division of their exhibition. His prolonged stay may be a general measure of the students' respect for the teaching and artistic reputations of men like Clark and Buvelot. Similarly, it may be seen as a measure of a youthful enthusiasm and a desire for artistic
training when there were few alternatives available in art education in the colony. One senses the initial enthusiasm of the students in McCubbin's claim that 'it would be impossible to express the joy' with which he executed his first copy of an outline figure drawing at the Trades Hall School.\textsuperscript{14}

Enthusiasm alone was insufficient to sustain the interest of ambitious students in the instruction offered by the Artisans' Schools. Referring to his fellow students, Richardson remarked:

They, I think, had drifted much in the same manner through the various classes. The technical schools were soon exhausted as a means of satisfying the artistic hunger of these students.\textsuperscript{15}

The role played by the Artisans' Schools of Design in the early development of the Heidelberg artists was relatively insignificant - the Schools proved an opportunity for young artists to gain some elementary art instruction from competent artists like Clark and Buvelot; they were the occasion for the fortuitous meeting of artists like McCubbin, Roberts, Richardson and Louis Abraham; and they 'awakened in the young people a desire to go further'.\textsuperscript{16} A beneficial side-effect was the spread of the Artisans' Schools to country centres; John Longstaff, for example, received his first lessons in art at the Clunes School.

It was inevitable that more ambitious students would transfer from the Artisans' Schools to study at the National Gallery School of Victoria after its establishment in 1870. Richardson was a student at the Gallery School from its inception; McCubbin, on the advice of Thomas Clark, became a student in 1871; and Tom Roberts was a student by 1874. Their initial expectations of superior instruction at the Gallery School were, however, sadly disappointed.
Later, when artists who had attended the school during the seventies reflected on their experiences, they emphasized the inadequacy of their teaching. Their judgements were factually based, but nevertheless the seventies were formative years. At the Gallery School a new group consciousness emerged, as the more talented students began to formulate their tastes and artistic values. They measured their aspirations against the available teaching practices, and generally found the latter to be wanting. What emerged from their shared dissatisfaction with the school was both an attempt to supplement their training and an increasing awareness of art practice outside the School.

The National Gallery School was originally divided into two separate institutions - a School of Painting and a school of drawing with the title School of Design. While the drawing school had two evening classes per week, the painting school held classes during the day. Students like Roberts, Richardson and McCubbin, who worked during the day, were forced to spend a prolonged period in the drawing school. This was one reason why the Painting School, under Eugène von Guérard, was less influential upon these future artists than their experience in the drawing classes.17

Von Guérard, a gifted landscape painter who had trained in academies overseas, was master of the Painting School from 1870 until his retirement in 1881. His teaching was limited by his rigidly-held view concerning the role of the Gallery School and by his low estimation of the calibre of his students. During his eleven-year term, von Guérard confined his students' endeavours to one academic practice: that of repeatedly copying the pictures in the Gallery's collection. This practice necessarily thwarted the aspirations of those students wanting to paint original compositions. A student later described how:
Painting ... was confined to copying the pictures in the rather meagre national collection, the class being attended chiefly by young lady students, some of whom made good financial use of their opportunities by turning out frequent imitations of such popular works as The Poultry Vendor or The Fern Gatherer.

Von Guérard regularly defended the practice of copying to the Trustees on the grounds that original artists could only be trained in the Academy with 'an adequate number of professors in the different branches of instruction'. The expense of such an Academy to the small population of Victoria would not be justified in terms of the results. Von Guérard held true to an early conception of the Gallery and its school as an institution 'established principally with the object of fostering good taste in art'. All that could be hoped for under the circumstances was the moral endeavour of 'educating a number of students to see and feel correctly what the productions of Art are, without claiming to be self-independent artists'.

Von Guérard had trained at the Dusseldorf Academy and had experience of overseas academies and studios. In his letters to Melbourne's Gallery Trustees, he consequently espoused the academic principle of the primacy of drawing in the training of the artist. At the same time, he held such a low opinion of his students' artistic ability that none was ever considered able enough to progress to the stage of original composition. His students in the Painting School included individuals who were later to establish considerable reputations as artists – Tom Roberts, Fred McCubbin, Alexander Colquhoun, Emmanuel Phillips Fox, Thomas Humphreys, Bertram Mackennal and Rupert Bunny. As late as 1880, von Guérard still maintained that

Up to the present moment ... I have not seen any composition or had the opportunity to encourage in that direction, as nearly in all cases the knowledge in
drawing is so deficient that any composition would be the most ridiculous.\textsuperscript{20}

His statement may be measured against that of Thomas Clark, the drawing master, who spoke of the 'vast amount of taste and talent' displayed by his students. If von Guérard's teaching did not retard the development of his students, it certainly did nothing to encourage it.\textsuperscript{21}

It was in Thomas Clark's drawing classes that a central preoccupation of the leading students became apparent: their desire for a full academic curriculum based on the study of the human figure. Although Clark fostered his students' desire to become figure painters, his teaching was severely handicapped by ill health. McCubbin recalled that he

\ldots was partly paralysed, he could only speak in the faintest whisper and he was that feeble he could hardly hold a crayon - so we youngsters did what we pretty well pleased.\textsuperscript{22}

Clark's role was therefore an ambiguous one: his actual teaching in the Gallery was restricted by his physical disabilities, but his personality, artistic reputation and teaching innovations still had a formative effect on his students.

During his term as drawing master from 1870 to 1876, Clark's students included McCubbin, Roberts, Richardson, John White and Louis Abrahams. Alexander McCubbin, relying on his father's testimony, remarked that 'here at the Gallery, a serious interest in drawing for its own sake characterized the majority of the students'.\textsuperscript{23} The seriousness with which Clark's students pursued their interest in drawing demonstrates how they conformed to, and positively expected, a traditional academic art training.
Clark appears to have exerted a strong personal influence on his students, despite McCubbin's later criticism that they were simply left to their own devices. Part of the personal respect which students felt for Clark was due to his considerable reputation as a figure painter. Clark had trained at the Royal Academy Schools, where he won a medal for his proficiency at drawing from the living model. McCubbin later admitted that he was a 'very able man especially at life drawing'. Students were well acquainted with Clark's painting, *Ulysses and Diomed capturing the Horses of Rhesus, King of Thrace* (Bendigo Art Gallery), which hung in the life-class room at the Melbourne Gallery in the early seventies. This melodramatic painting, with its classical subject matter and its reasonably competent command of figure and animal drawing, strongly appealed to their taste and imagination. As McCubbin recalled, 'We thought everything of it'.

Clark's teaching partially met some of the leading students' central aspirations; he provided them with the vague semblance of an academic art training, as well as giving practical encouragement to their ambition to create original compositions. His teaching thus formed a marked contrast to the repetitive copying of pictures in von Guérard's painting classes. Since students in the School of Design could, in most cases, only attend the gallery in the evening, Clark allowed his students to paint. Von Guérard saw this action as a breach of the purpose of the School of Design, which he believed should confine itself to teaching students the fundamentals of drawing. Students who could not attend the painting school must have welcomed the opportunity to practice painting in Clark's classes.

There is a discrepancy between what Clark claimed to have taught his students and what contemporary and later accounts describe as the actual situation in the School of Design. According to his annual
reports to the Gallery Trustees, Clark attempted to guide the School towards an academic art training programme. He claimed, in his report to the Trustees for 1872, to have tested his students 'at drawing and painting from the antique, the living model, anatomy, perspective, modelling'. Practical difficulties, his ill health and the large number of students, hindered his efforts to institute an academic course. He made frequent requests to the Trustees for 'good plaster casts, more especially of hands and feet and geometrical solids'. The modelling class made only intermittent appearances in Clark's time, because of shortage of space.

Clark's most far-reaching innovation lay in his encouraging students to work directly from nature. In 1875 he claimed that his students were 'constantly exercised in figure drawing' and that he had established a class for drawing from the living model. Students worked directly before the motif in drawing classes - 'natural flowers and foliage were drawn daily when in season'. By 1874 Clark had established a sketching class with a view to facilitating the pupils in composition, and [I] have occasionally taken the most advanced students out to sketch from nature'. These more advanced aspects of his teaching were to be carried on independently by the students after his retirement in 1876; Clark's teaching thus lent a sense of direction to students wishing to become original artists, as opposed to copyists.

Unfortunately, Clark's ill health severely limited his personal supervision of students and his ability to institute an academic programme. Alexander McCubbin later described the situation:

A new student could start work on the hardest cast in the Gallery (and very often did), and flounder away for weeks without anybody attempting to put him right. Occasionally some mild words of criticism would be proffered by the master, but these were rare and far between.
The scanty instruction offered by both Clark and von Guérard, and the increasing maturity of ambitious students like McCubbin and Roberts, hastened a new sense of group spirit. Roberts later remembered how 'I became acquainted with McCubbin and we gathered together a knot of men who used to work together'.\textsuperscript{33} Students developed their own resources to supplement their inadequate teaching, and by the mid seventies their attention turned increasingly to art practice outside the school.

Within the studio atmosphere of the Gallery, they began to formulate their own artistic theories and preferences. Charles Douglas Richardson recalled 'not gaining much from the instruction, but reading books on art ... and discussing theories of art with the other students'.\textsuperscript{34} The apparent insularity of the Gallery School and the colonial art scene must be compared with the aspirations and interest of the students; as McCubbin later put it, 'we were nothing if not ambitious'.\textsuperscript{35}

Students in the seventies became involved, on a theoretical level, with the latest movements overseas. The famous Ruskin versus Whistler libel case took place in 1877 and, according to an anecdote of Richardson's, engaged the students' attention:

... in one of our latest discussions on the 'Ruskin versus Whistler libel case' [we] stated our opinions freely. McCubbin said 'I do not believe in schemes of colour symphonies or arrangements of colour in pictures and rooms, but paint your picture and let it come out what it will'. I had laid down the law that artists should paint what was around them, and select incidents from Australian explorers and subjects of a local nature. Tom Roberts replied 'Art should be universal', and he did not agree with me.\textsuperscript{36}

Richardson's anecdote suggests an awareness of overseas trends which
modifies the insularity attributed to the Gallery School. More importantly, it shows the artists' early involvement in the debate about the relative importance of the subject in art. Even at this early stage, the demands of 'high art' and the supposed 'universality' of the subject appear to have been weighed against the artist's debt or allegiance to his local environment.

Whatever knowledge students may have gleaned of current art movements in the seventies, they nevertheless felt a deep respect for established reputations and traditional values in English art. McCubbin and Roberts particularly revered the art of the English painter, William Etty. Etty had died in 1849 and was no longer a leading influence on English art by the 1870s, but he was still highly regarded in English art circles for his sensual paintings of the nude. McCubbin and Roberts learned what they could of Etty's working methods from an elderly student at the Gallery School, W.H. Horne, who had studied at the English Academy schools in his youth.37

McCubbin later summed up the aspirations of the ambitious students as 'dreaming of Historical pictures and vague longings to attempt the same'. Consequently one can appreciate their enthusiasm for Thomas Clark's Ulysses and Diomed, which is a rather mediocre and unremarkable example of an historical genre relatively old-fashioned in English art by the 1870s. But the picture would have appealed to students as a 'history' painting, emphasizing the respected academic qualities of draughtsmanship and command of human and animal forms.

The practical measures taken by students to supplement their inadequate training serve to underline their commitment to conservative academic practice. McCubbin, for example, began a systematic study of the plaster casts of antique statues in the School of Design; he copied outline engravings after Flaxman's drawings of human anatomy;
and read standard nineteenth-century art instruction manuals, as well as the art criticism of John Ruskin. With Roberts, he attended anatomy lectures at Melbourne University, where they studied and drew from the human skeleton.

A subject sketch class was established by the students, perhaps carrying forward a similar class first instituted by Thomas Clark. Here the students' original compositions of Shakespearean, biblical and pagan subjects revealed their literary interests and their aspirations to become history painters. McCubbin wrote that 'our ideas were all for History painting, sepia drawings of Bible subjects, then Shakespeare's plays. I think [they] were the two great sources of our inspiration'.

A life class for drawing from the living model had been held under Clark's supervision. When Clark retired, Tom Roberts, Fred McCubbin and several other older students established a life class of their own. A more radical venture was their later establishment of a nude life class. Alexander Colquhoun described how Roberts, Richardson and McCubbin had formed the class:

These three formed, not without opposition, a life class at the Gallery, where they drew from the nude in a somewhat furtive and conscious fashion, for the public mind had not then been educated up to the point of nice discrimination in such matters.

The students' earnest pursuit of opportunities to study the living model brought them into closer contact with the Victorian Academy of the Arts. The Victorian Academy opened a life school in 1876 under the supervision of three of its members: sculptors J.S. Mackennal and James Scurry, and a figure painter, Chester Earles. In the absence of an official life class at the Gallery School, its interested students attended the V.A.A. classes. Richardson joined the V.A.A.
in 1876, and by 1878 was a council member. In the following year he gained approval for students to use the V.A.A. Gallery for a life class on two evenings of the week. Students at the V.A.A. also worked at set subject pictures with topics like 'Retribution' or 'The Sick Shepherd', thus encouraging them in original composition.

The Victorian Academy of the Arts provided, to some degree, an alternative training ground for young artists. Before leaving for overseas in 1881, Tom Roberts wrote to the V.A.A. Council thanking them 'for the many benefits he has received from the institution of a life class'. McCubbin continued to study at the V.A.A. until 1882, the year he won a prize for his study of the nude male figure in the Academy Life School.

The training that students received at the Gallery School and the V.A.A., together with the various activities they organized themselves, were typical of conservative art training in nineteenth-century English and French academy schools. Thomas Clark, for instance, had taken his students sketching in the open air, an accepted and traditional academic practice in the nineteenth century. It was probably Clark's example that influenced McCubbin to sketch regularly in the open air on his spare Saturday afternoons in the late 1870s. Rather than displaying an early enthusiasm for plein-airisme as an artistic creed, McCubbin was attempting to further his direct study of nature. He had read John Ruskin's Modern Painters and later remembered how Ruskin's 'enthusiasm for nature made us look [at] it with more reverence'. Ruskin was still a tremendously influential figure in the seventies, but his criticism was conservative and often directed against the most recent trends in art. Advocating the direct study of nature was in fact a traditional dictum by the seventies and eighties. The practice of copying pictures which von Guérard encouraged amongst his
students was criticized by the contemporary press. 'One of its worst results', said a critic (The Argus, 25 March 1882), 'is that it renders them [the students] impatient of the slow, laborious study of nature'. McCubbin's sketching in the open air was not a decided reaction against an academic art training: it formed a parallel to his keenness to study nature by working directly from the living model.

In summary, the experience of the future Heidelberg artists at the Gallery School in the seventies was a formative one. Leading students sought an academic training based on the mastery of the human figure and, as a corollary, developed a pronounced ambition to become figure painters. They widened their artistic interests to include an awareness of overseas trends, and their inadequate teaching at the Gallery ironically served to increase their involvement in the local art scene.

Only through a closer examination of Melbourne's art scene in the 1870s (which previous writers on the Heidelberg School have ignored) can we realize the extent to which students' aspirations at the Gallery School mirrored prevailing aesthetic assumptions. As opposed to the popular myth of the Heidelberg artists' sudden 'break-through' in the mid 1880s, we are able to trace a more gradual diversification of their artistic interests in the late 1870s and early 1880s to include contemporary themes and the 'life around them'. An involvement with contemporary themes and subject matter formed a vital stage before their creation of large-scale figure paintings focusing on the Australian rural mythology.

II

Students at the Gallery School in the seventies turned their attention not only to the Victorian Academy of the Arts classes, but also to the
annual V.A.A. exhibitions. Both Richardson and McCubbin exhibited at the V.A.A. in the late seventies and early eighties. To what degree, then, did they measure their own artistic efforts and preferences against the background provided by local productions at the V.A.A. exhibitions?

A coherent view of the significance of the V.A.A. can be obtained from three sources: press criticism, exhibitions catalogues, and the paintings and illustrations which survive today. Press criticism seems particularly apposite, because it provides a contemporary viewpoint of a highly critical kind.

The annual exhibitions in the seventies were dominated by landscape paintings. One of the contributory factors remarked on in the press was the large number of amateur artists allowed to exhibit. The two most gifted landscape artists in the colony, von Guérard and Louis Buvelot, were only infrequent exhibitors with the V.A.A. The profusion of paintings by amateurs accentuated the generally poor standard of the exhibitions, and the quality of exhibitions was noted to decline over the years.

In 1874 the Argus critic (30 July 1874) kindly remarked that

Like their British prototypes, our Victorian painters evince a decided preference for landscape art, and in its study and practice they are chiefly found to succeed. [He noted that] out of the 277 items in the catalogue no less than 200 consist of landscapes in oils and watercolours. By 1875, the Age critic (29 June 1875) found a 'regrettable absence of painting by artists whose ability is of a most pronounced and promising character'.

Von Guérard and Buvelot failed to exhibit in 1876, and the Age critic (10 April 1876) wrote that 'the absence of figure subjects' and
'the large increase in the number of amateur contributors' was evident. He continued:

Landscape painting seems to occupy almost exclusively the attention of colonial artists ... [The result was that the] first impression received is the showroom of the 'pot boiler' manufactory, the eternal blues and greens ... glare out from the walls on every side ... Why is it that landscape is so much affected in these exhibitions? Is it less laborious? Is it the only department that can be satisfactorily pursued under existing circumstances, or does it pay better?

From this rather vitriolic attack it would seem that no further deterioration in the standard of paintings in the V.A.A. exhibitions was possible. However, critics in the eighties noted a further 'decline' in the quality of V.A.A. exhibitions. For instance, the reviewer of the 1881 exhibition (The Argus, 16 March 1881) accused the V.A.A. exhibitors of 'abiding ... in a self-complacent mediocrity'. By the time of the 1885 exhibition, the Argus critic (28 March 1885) could only reflect on the

... present state of pictorial art in this colony ... three fourths of those who practise it are scarcely qualified to obtain a respectable livelihood in other countries as sign painters.

Many of the landscapes exhibited at the V.A.A. conceived Australian scenery within the English picturesque convention. Landscapes by established artists like J.W. Curtis, William Ford and Henricus van den Houten were reproduced as photographs for the Art Union of Victoria, and their work exemplified this dominant trend. The landscape was typically arranged according to a picturesque formula, with 'pleasing' vistas, winding tracks and quiet streams. Rustic details such as an old bridge, cows or a horse and cart are the complement of craggy rocks or the silhouetted gum tree. Human figures, if included, are
typically smaller in scale and provide a point of interest by portraying people engaging in rustic pursuits, such as loading a horse and cart or looking for stray cattle.

It became increasingly evident to critics, at least, that such a conception of the Australian landscape could become a stale and monotonous formula. The Argus critic, reviewing the 1878 exhibition (The Argus, 27 April 1878) outlined his objections:

As usual, the landscapes are very numerous; and as the same subjects are presented over and over again, they are becoming rather monotonous. There seems to be quite a run upon gum trees, and fern tree gullies, and bush tracks ...

The 1882 exhibition elicited a similar comment from the Age critic (The Age, 28 March 1882):

There is a want of variety in the subjects, and a tendency to fall into an annual repetition of, with slight difference, the same scenes. We should like to see Victorian art make an altogether fresh start.

The reaction of press critics against a clichéd formula for the Australian landscape was probably an attitude shared by younger artists and students who aspired to the more 'elevated' pursuit of figure painting. Critics voiced opposition to the 'gum tree school' of Australian art; at the 1877 exhibition the Age critic (19 March 1877) found that there was

... scarcely an aspirant to honours as an artist but has been absorbed with the inimitable beauties of the scraggy gum tree ... it may not be wrong to suggest that scenes of a more domestic character may often appear more touching to the heart and sympathies of man. Cultivated fields and homesteads, towns and suburbs, ports, harbours and shipping are not without their interest to mankind in general.
These words are peculiarly prophetic of subjects that McCubbin and Richardson were to take up in the late seventies and early eighties.

The relationship of figure and landscape was to become crucial in Australian subject painting by the mid eighties. The picturesque conventions in landscape painting of the seventies, however, tended to confine and restrict both the scale and activity of the figure in relationship to the landscape setting. A typical product of the picturesque landscape, from the 1878 exhibition, was described by the *Argus* critic (28 April 1878). A certain Emile Ulm showed *An Australian Prospector* ...

... who has pitched his tent not far from the edge of a creek in the forest primeval ... It is a beautiful gully ... the sylvan surroundings are as picturesque as they are true to nature. It is not exactly the place we fancy, in which a prospector would think of sinking a hole for gold, but the solitary tent and the digger lend a human interest to the utter solitude of the spot.

Here the human figure served as an embellishment to the picturesque convention of landscape, a role characteristically assigned to the figure in innumerable landscapes painted in the seventies. Figures and motifs were sometimes identifiably 'Australian' - stockmen on horses, herding sheep or cattle, or solitary swagmen wending their way along bush tracks - but they were small in scale. Their significance was obviously intended to be secondary to the dominating impact of the landscape itself.

Against the poor quality and repetitious formulae of most landscape paintings shown at the V.A.A. exhibitions, Louis Buvelot stood out as a landscape artist of the highest calibre. Buvelot was typically praised by critics for his capacity to locate and render the picturesque in everyday life. In the words of the *Argus* critic
(1 December 1870), 'in the most commonplace motifs M. Buvelot continues to find picturesque materials'. It was this capacity which appealed strongly to younger artists like McCubbin, Roberts and Richardson, who began to paint 'local' subjects inspired by his example.\textsuperscript{54} The popularity of Buvelot's work with both critics and aspiring artists lay, not in any rejection of the picturesque convention of landscape painting, but in the exploitation of the 'picturesque' drawn from the familiar and the commonplace. Roberts and McCubbin later acknowledged their artistic debt to Buvelot in these very terms. In Roberts' opinion, Buvelot 'began the real painting of Australia'; McCubbin praised Buvelot at the expense of von Guérard and Chevalier, who 'went in search of mountains and waterfalls for their subjects, Buvelot interested himself in the life around him'.\textsuperscript{55}

Buvelot's landscapes encouraged amongst younger painters a shift in perception regarding the possibilities of the subject.\textsuperscript{56} This perceptual shift entailed a movement away from the grander and more contrived aspects of the picturesque towards the homely and familiar life about them. McCubbin wrote in his memoirs of Buvelot's

... natural sympathy for the life of the people as seen in this to him new environment that his pictures quickly became characteristic of the features - Australian every-day life as seen on road or old farm - buildings and fences and picturesque and wayward gum trees.

McCubbin remembered how Buvelot influenced him to see afresh the landscape around Studley Park:

... a long time ago I watched the sunset glowing on the trees in Studley Park and it was through Buvelot['s] interpretation I saw the beauty of them.\textsuperscript{57}

The arrival of Julian Ashton in Australia in 1878 gave further impetus to young painters and students to explore their immediate
environment for artistic subjects. Ashton had left England to accept a position as artist on the Illustrated Australian News in Melbourne. His art and opinions had an immediate influence upon younger Melbourne painters. He evidently met McCubbin soon after his arrival, but he must have had much wider contact with art students, for in 1881 he was temporarily enrolled as a student in the National Gallery's drawing school.\(^{58}\) Around this time, Ashton supposedly found McCubbin engaged in painting *The Death of Semiramis* and asked him why he bothered 'about a lady so long deceased ... why not paint the life about you?'\(^{59}\)

Closely allied with his espousal of contemporary subject matter was Ashton's role in the early development of *plein-airisme* in Australia. At the close of the Franco-Prussian War in 1874, Ashton had left England for Paris, where he studied at a private atelier, the Académie Julian, for two years. Julian's was renowned for its casual atmosphere and 'free' curricula, but Ashton may have learned there something of the role of the rapid open-air sketch painted prior to the completion of the academic landscape in the studio.\(^{60}\) More importantly, Ashton would have left Paris with a general knowledge of the French *plein-air* movement. When he wrote his autobiography many years later in 1941, he was keen to emphasize this first-hand experience of French *plein-airisme*. Of his arrival in Australia, he wrote: 'I had but lately come from France with all the enthusiasm of the *plein-airists*, who denounced any picture that was not painted out of doors'.\(^{61}\)

It was the *plein-airiste* qualities of Ashton's style which appeared new and perplexing to Australian critics when he first exhibited at the Victorian Academy of the Arts in 1879. The *Age* critic (12 April 1879) commented that:
J.H. [sic] Ashton has several paintings of a school which is quite novel so far as this colony is concerned. Well drawn figures, with striking effects of light and shade, are the peculiarities of this artist. The light in some instances seems altogether excessive in its brilliancy...

But critics like the Age writer were forced to admit that 'there is great merit in his pictures ... figures are all well drawn'.

Ashton's A Quiet Cup of Tea, 1879 (National Gallery of Victoria) was one of the works he exhibited in the 1879 V.A.A. exhibition. Although this small picture is tightly controlled in its application of paint, the casual poses of the two women, the organization of the composition as an 'informal' view through the foliage, and the rendering of the bright sunlight, were sufficient for the Argus critic (12 April 1879) to maintain that the picture ought to be regarded as a 'sketch'. However, within this critical framework, the picture was conceded to be 'clever'.

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Ashton's plein-airiste paintings often presented strong light effects while retaining well-drawn, large-scale figures in the landscape setting. Through Ashton, students like McCubbin thus became acquainted with the theories and practice of plein-airisme and a more 'informal' means of organizing their compositions. In this respect, Ashton's work and personality anticipated the later influence of Tom Roberts after his return from abroad in 1885. Roberts was certainly a positive and decisive influence upon his contemporaries in the mid and late 1880s, but Ashton's pioneering role in introducing plein-airisme to Melbourne during the late 1870s enjoys only a secondary place in the 'popular' history of the Heidelberg School. The idea of Roberts' 'momentous' return to Australia, bringing with him the gospel of plein-airisme
and 'relative values', better suits the myth of the Heidelberg artists' sudden 'breakthrough' in the mid 1880s.

Admittedly, in his autobiography Ashton also attempted to lay claim to his own unique place in the development of an Australian national school of painting. He emphasized the close knowledge of French plein-airisme he brought to the country and, like a number of his contemporaries, claimed to have completed 'the first picture painted entirely out of doors' in Australia.62

During the early 1880s, Ashton was instrumental in broadening the range of subjects treated by the future Heidelberg artists. At the 1880 V.A.A. exhibition, he exhibited six water-colour drawings of shipping scenes on the Yarra River and Melbourne Harbour. These shipping scenes earned the praise of critics on grounds similar to those for which Buvelot was generally praised. The Argus critic (3 April 1880) commented that 'the artist has succeeded in exhibiting comparatively commonplace objects under a poetical aspect'. At this exhibition, McCubbin showed two plein-air oil paintings of harbour scenes, View near Fisherman's Bend and View of the New Dock, both of which were almost certainly painted under Ashton's influence.63 View of the New Dock was similarly commended by the Argus critic: 'a commonplace subject is so presented as to assume an eminently picturesque aspect'. Richardson, too, exhibited a small shipping scene entitled Smoko (Queensland University Art Gallery), which depicted a small craft anchored alongside a pier, while the crew 'indulge themselves with an afternoon pipe of tobacco' (The Age, 5 April 1880).

By drawing attention to the picturesque aspects of Melbourne's harbour and waterways, Ashton thus encouraged young artists to embrace contemporary life as a source of artistic subjects. His espousal of plein-airisme and the close study of nature acted as a counter-influence
to the Gallery School students' strong commitment to historical painting. According to an article in Table Talk (26 April 1889), Ashton advised McCubbin against painting subjects such as The Death of Semiramis; instead, he suggested that McCubbin should paint 'an onion and a jam pot, and leave off his wild attempts at representing episodes in the lives of heathen deities'. McCubbin possibly took his advice; he exhibited a still life, Study of a Gallipot, at the 1882 V.A.A. exhibition. To quote the Argus critic (18 March 1882), 'Mr Fred McCubbin ... addressed himself in all humility to the "Study of a Gallipot" with entire success'.

The Victorian Academy of the Arts exhibitions in the 1870s and 1880s reveal a marked absence of a strong figurative tradition. However, Melbourne art students in the late seventies and early eighties maintained their interest in historical subjects, while simultaneously absorbing the influence of both Bavelot and Ashton. The students' continued involvement with figure painting may at first appear difficult to reconcile with the relatively small number of figure subjects shown locally at the V.A.A. exhibitions.

Newspaper critics regularly noted 'the paucity of figure subjects' (The Age, 24 March 1873) at the annual exhibitions. Chester Earles and Oswald Rose Campbell were the two main exponents of what little figurative painting was exhibited at the Victorian Academy. Earles was President of the Academy for many years, until its final demise in 1887, and consequently enjoyed some prestige in the colony's art circles. He had trained at the London Royal Academy schools in 1842 and later exhibited figure subjects with the Royal Academy. Campbell, who had preceded Earles as the first President of the Victorian Academy, was Drawing Master at the Melbourne Gallery School from 1876 until his enforced retirement through ill health in 1886. He had
extensive experience of overseas academies, having trained at the
Trustees Academy in Edinburgh, the Royal Academy School in London,
the Liverpool Academy and the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin. Like
Earles, Campbell had also exhibited with the Royal Academy."66

Earles and Campbell were thus steeped in an academic tradition of
figure painting and this is reflected in their paintings exhibited with
the V.A.A. Their subjects were commonly drawn from three main sources:
the Bible, English literature and history. At the first V.A.A.
exhibition in 1870, Campbell showed The Man with the Muckrake, which
typified his attempts at the elevated history painting. The picture's
subject was drawn from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress; a bald, bearded
old man, dressed in classical draperies, appeared holding the muckrake
in the foreground, while an allegorical female figure floated above him
in the clouds.67 At the next exhibition in 1872, Campbell exhibited
a subject drawn from Shakespeare's Richard III, The Arrest of Hastings
in the Tower of London, which according to the Argus critic (15 March
1872) was 'well composed and dramatically treated'. Such historical
and literary subjects belong to a genre which reached the height of
its popularity in mid-Victorian England, but was to decline fairly
rapidly in importance by the last third of the century.68

In the pictures he sent to the Victorian Academy, Earles appears
to have specialized in subjects drawn from Shakespeare's plays and
from the English Romantic poets. He also produced genre subjects such
as his painting, Stripping Feathers (1876, Australian National Gallery,
Canberra), which depicts two young peasant women stripping poultry.69

William Ford's The Children's Hour of 1870, was another example of the
dramatic genre picture which sometimes appeared at the V.A.A. exhibitions;
it portrayed a grandfatherly figure sitting by a fireplace with three
little girls gathered around him. Typical of the literary tastes of
the 1870s, Ford found his picture's subject in Longfellow's poem of
the same name.\textsuperscript{70}

Both Campbell and Earles occasionally exhibited classical subjects,
conceived in a linear, neo-classical style. Campbell's The Greek
Fountain, 1881, is self-consciously 'classical', with its group of
idealized Greek women and youths dressed in classical draperies, its
simple, unadorned classical fountain, and in its clear, linear treat-
ment of the theme.\textsuperscript{71} Critics evidently found Earles' neo-classical
paintings less than successful. Of his Roman Lady at her Bath,
exhibited in 1881, the Age critic (19 March 1881) commented 'the
painter who had the intrepidity to exhibit this work ... must be a man
possessed of an infinite capacity for heroic self sacrifice'. One
could attribute Earles' and Campbell's choice of classical subjects
to the 'classical revival' that took place in English art during the
1870s and 1880s through the work of painters like Frederick Leighton,
Alma-Tadema, E.J. Poynter and Albert Moore. Given the fact that Earles'
and Campbell's historical and literary pictures were relatively old-
fashioned for their day, it is more likely that their classical subjects
looked back to earlier English exponents of the classical genre, such
as William Dyce and Benjamin Robert Haydon, who had already established
their reputations by the middle of the century.\textsuperscript{72}

It was largely through the efforts of Earles and Campbell that
figurative painting survived in local Melbourne exhibitions during the
1870s and early 1880s. Nevertheless, for aspiring young painters the
paucity of figure subjects shown at exhibitions, and the dubious quality
of Earles' and Campbell's work, were of less consequence than the high
value which both critics and the public placed upon figure painting.

Critics evaluated figure paintings according to two main standards:
first, the general conception of the subject, its literary or historical
accuracy, or the appropriateness of the artist's rendition of his theme; and second, the artist's command of drawing. Critics actively encouraged the notion that it was more adventurous and ambitious for an artist to attempt figure subjects, a proposition made more attractive by the many appalling landscapes shown at the V.A.A. exhibitions.

The critics' encouragement of figure subjects may be seen in their assessment of two figure paintings which Charles Douglas Richardson exhibited at the 1878 V.A.A. exhibition. One of Richardson's pictures, *Adrastus imploring Croesus to take his life for having killed Atys*, derived its subject from a classical source in Herodotus, while the other, *The Prisoner of Chillon*, found its subject in Byron's romantic poetry. The *Age* critic (27 April 1878) singled out Richardson's work for praise: 'Laudable ambition has been shown by Mr C.D. Richardson in his choice of historical subjects for his paintings'. He found 'great faults' in the Herodotus picture, 'but the artist in treating the subject gives great promise of being able to do much better in the future'.

Richardson's 'ambition' was again praised by the critics when he exhibited *Oedipus Slaying his Father* at the 1879 exhibition. The painting is now lost, but a contemporary description in *The Age* (12 April 1879) suggests close compositional and iconographical similarities to Thomas Clark's *Ulysses and Diomed*:

> The encounter takes place on a plain, the combatants and their horses and the chariot of Laius being thrown into bold relief against a landscape represented in an indistinct mass.

With characteristic emphasis on correct drawing, the *Age* critic concluded that 'the figures are creditably drawn'.

[^73]
McCubbin's comparable enthusiasm for classical and Shakespearean themes found expression in a work he exhibited at the 1880 V.A.A. exhibition entitled Sketch from Antony and Cleopatra, which portrayed Cleopatra sailing down the Cyndus. McCubbin recalled that it was 'an historical idea built up from a sky study I had made from a window and the buildings I introduced from photos I copied of ancient Thebes by Capt. Abney', a strange admixture of pictorial sources that typifies the diverse interests of McCubbin and his fellow students. In a telling comment, he revealed his awareness that 'the subject was ambitious, as usual with our sketch Club'.

McCubbin's and Richardson's desire to become figure painters becomes apparent in their figure subjects exhibited with the V.A.A. Their choice of historical and literary themes finds a parallel in similar subjects exhibited by the two main local figure painters of the 1870s, namely Earles and Campbell. There was thus a close connection between the activities of students at the Gallery School and their pictures exhibited at the V.A.A., for it was at the subject sketch class at the Gallery that students had first begun to illustrate biblical, historical and pagan themes.

Critics of the V.A.A. exhibitions during the 1870s and early 1880s encouraged the 'ambition' of painting figure subjects, but stressed the necessity for good drawing. In 1880, when Richardson exhibited his The Princess (illustrating lines from Tennyson's poem of the same name), the picture provoked criticism from the Argus writer (3 April 1880) on the grounds that Richardson

... ought to have mastered the art of figure drawing before attempting such an arduous undertaking as this ... to endeavour to rival Mr Long [the British Royal Academician] on his own grounds without having undergone the same academic training ... is extremely rash.
The Gallery School students' formation of a life class of their own demonstrates their adherence to the same belief in good drawing and the close study of nature; their desire for a full academic curriculum, based on the study of the human figure, evidences their general agreement with contemporary critical opinion.

Two major trends emerge through examining the inter-relationship of students at the National Gallery School of Victoria and the Victorian Academy of the Arts during the 1870s. Both trends upset the popular view of the Heidelberg artists as a group of 'rebels' who achieved a remarkable 'breakthrough' in the mid 1880s to establish a 'national school' of Australian painting.

First, the future Heidelberg artists in the 1870s were receptive to and aspired towards what they saw as 'culturally advanced' values in art. There was a large measure of agreement between the judgements of critics expressed in contemporary newspapers and the values of students: the high value placed on figure painting, the emphasis on good drawing, the admiration for Buvelot's work, and the recognition of Ashton's innovative style in the late 1870s. Second, in the limited cultural climate of Melbourne, the aspirations and 'rebelliousness' of the Gallery School students was indebted to a conservative view of art and its practice. The fact that students so often equated conservative artistic values with 'culturally advanced' taste provides a further ironic comment upon the popular myth of their 'rebellion' from the prevailing aesthetic assumptions.

The Heidelberg artists liked to look back on the 1870s as a period when they were struggling alone 'in the dark'. The period is more accurately seen as one of their cautious beginnings and only gradual experimentation as the decade progressed. Their artistic interests
became increasingly diverse; they included figure painting, particularly historical subjects, a limited awareness of overseas art trends, the art of Buvelot and Ashton, *plein-airisme* and, by the early 1880s, a developing awareness of contemporary life as a source of subject matter. Certainly the Heidelberg artists' involvement with figure painting, *plein-airisme* and subjects from contemporary life were to become crucial for Australian art by the mid 1880s. But the pattern of their artistic development was a more prolonged and more cautious one than is usually accepted in the popular accounts of the Heidelberg School.

The students' ambition to become figure painters reflected the 'high art' values of a cultured section of Melbourne society during the 1870s. Because of these 'high art' aspirations, their choice of figure subjects usually excluded distinctively Australian themes. Instead, the students' figure paintings of historical, literary and classical subjects looked towards artistic genres already established in English art by the middle of the century. Towards the end of the 1870s, however, the influence of Buvelot's picturesque view of local scenery and Ashton's *plein-airisme* served to counteract the students' historical leanings by concentrating their attention on contemporary Australian life.

An involvement with contemporary themes formed a necessary prelude to the Heidelberg artists' paintings of nationalistic, rural figure subjects in the 1880s and 1890s. The next chapter examines how popular imagery in black and white illustration and photography lent impetus to their portrayal of the Australian rural mythology.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1 A claim made by Lionel Lindsay for Streeton's landscapes, see Lionel
Lindsay, 'Arthur Streeton's Place in Australian Art', Art in Australia,
op. cit.: 'The discoverer, the first to look into the heart of our
landscape as with the eyes of a child, and reveal its essential mystery,
its truth and its beauty ...'.

2 Cf. Ann Galbally, 'Mythmaking in Australian Art', La Trobe Library

3 Geoffrey Serle, From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in

4 Letter from Tom Roberts to Frederick McCubbin dated 30 June 1912.

5 Leigh Astbury, 'The Art of Frederick McCubbin and the Impact of the
First War' in La Trobe Library Journal, vol. 6, No 24, October 1979,
pp. 79 and 82; cf. a memoir by McCubbin in the La Trobe Library,
published as 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', ed. Ann Galbally, loc. cit.

6 For a more detailed treatment of the first section of this chapter,
see Leigh Astbury, 'The National Gallery School of Victoria, 1870-1890',


8 For the curricula of the Artisans' Schools, their names and locations,
see the Sixth and Seventh Annual Exhibition of the Schools of Design
(1877, 1979), and Seventh Annual Report of the Artisans School of
Design, 1876, in Art Pamphlets, State Library of Victoria; Charles
D. Richardson, 'My Recollections of Fred McCubbin as a fellow student'
in Victorian Artists' Society, 15 February 1918; William Moore, op.
cit., vol. 1, p. 216.

9 J.S. MacDonald (Introduction), The Art of Frederick McCubbin, Melbourne,
1916, pp. 45-6. Cf. 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., p. 69.
Clark's teaching at the Trades Hall School may have been more innovative
than McCubbin suggested. David Thomas has claimed that Clark estab-
lished classes for 'drawing from the living model' and 'for outdoor

10 Charles D. Richardson, op. cit., p.6.

11 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., p. 69.

12 Charles D. Richardson, op. cit., p. 6; Prize List, Third Annual
Competitive Exhibition ... open to Students from Schools of Design ...
1873, in Art Pamphlets, State Library of Victoria.

13 Exhibition of Schools of Design, 1874, in Art Pamphlets, State Library
of Victoria.

14 J.S. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 45. The phrase quoted in my text was
written by McCubbin's son, Alexander, but it is an accurate reflection
of McCubbin's own recollections, cf. 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin',
op. cit.. p. 69.
C.D. Richardson, op. cit., p. 6; J.S. MacDonald, op. cit., pp. 46-7; cf. 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., p. 70.


For a more detailed discussion of the consequences of the structure of the Gallery School, see my M.A. (Prelim.) thesis quoted in fn. 6.


Report(s) of the Sectional Committee of the National Galllery of Victoria, 1871-1880, State Archives of Victoria, especially the 1874 Report, p. 35. These reports are hereinafter referred to as the Trustees' Reports.

A letter from von Guérard to the Trustees, dated 12 October 1880, in National Gallery Correspondence, Box 9, State Archives of Victoria.

Trustees' Report, 1872, p. 23.

'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., pp. 71-72.

J.S. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 50; cf. 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., p. 70.

For Clark's background, see the entry under Clark by Ann Galbally in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1851-1890, vol. 3, pp. 408-9, also my M.A. (Prelim.) thesis, op. cit.; cf. 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., p. 72. McCubbin describes Clark as 'our kindly and generous old teacher', R.H. Croll, op. cit., p. 7. Madame Elmhurst de Goode, a fellow student of Roberts, claims that Clark befriended Roberts, who was 'always a welcome guest with the Clark family'. She says that it was Clark who advised Roberts to further his studies abroad, and Clark was supposedly influential in encouraging other students to do the same.

'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., p. 71.

Ibid., p. 72.

Letter from von Guérard to the Trustees, dated 6 March 1875, National Gallery Correspondence, op. cit., Box 10.

Trustees' Report, 1872, p. 23.

Trustees' Report, 1873, p. 70.

Letter from Clark to the Trustees, dated 6 March 1875, National Gallery Correspondence, op. cit., Box 10.

Trustees' Report, 1874, p. 37.

J.S. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 51; cf. 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., esp. p. 71. These accounts find verification in a contemporary description by a Gallery Trustee, the Hon. S. Bindon, in a letter
dated 12 April 1875, *National Gallery Miscellaneous Correspondence 1872 to 1876*, Box 7, State Archives of Victoria.


35 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.*, p. 74; cf. J.S. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 50. Alexander McCubbin describes his father's response to the atmosphere of the school: 'Things he had long dreamt of, were spoken of in terms of familiarity ... [he] caught magic references to the Louvre and the Luxembourg, and to a host of painters, whose names were foreign to him'.


37 See a letter from Tom Roberts to Fred McCubbin, dated 14 November 1909, reprinted in *La Trobe Library Journal*, vol. 2, No 7, April 1971, p. 68; cf. 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.*, p. 71, where McCubbin praises Thomas Clark's draughtsmanship in the light of his 'studying as he did when Etty was painting in the Royal Academy life classes ...'.

38 Cf. 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.* The Flaxman outline engravings were contained in the following publication: *Anatomical Studies of the Bones and Muscles, For the Use of Artists, from Drawings by the late John Flaxman, Esq., R.A. engraved by Henry Landseer; with two additional plates and explanatory notes by William Robertson*, London: Nattalia, 1883; McCubbin writes that he 'studied Burnett [sic] on Composition'. He was referring to John Burnet, *A Practical Treatise on Painting*, London, 1827; cf. J.S. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

39 *Table Talk*, 31 August 1888; J.S. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

40 C.D. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 6; 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.*, p. 74. It is not clear whether students first established this class themselves or whether this is the class mentioned in Clark's report to the Trustees of 1874.

41 Box 7, State Archives of Victoria, *op. cit.* The life class and the following dispute are more fully discussed and documented in my B.A. thesis, *op. cit.*


43 *Victorian Academy of Arts. Minute Books*, La Trobe Library, Melbourne. Cf. ms. 549/1, *Rough Minute Books of the Academy*, especially 7 December 1875; 4 January 1876; 1 February 1876; 1 August 1876; 4 December 1876.

44 Richardson was first elected an 'amateur member' on 3 October 1876, which he declined in a letter discussed at the 7 November 1876 meeting. On 29 October 1878 he was elected a Council member, having evidently gained full 'artist' membership in the intervening period. On 5 August 1879, Richardson 'submitted a proposal from a Class of Life Students, for the use of the Gallery on two evenings of the week', to which the Council agreed. Above information to be found in *Rough Minute Books of the Academy, op. cit.* Cf. a letter from Richardson to P.B. Gibbes,
Secretary of the V.A.A., dated 20 January 1881, in which Richardson explains the workings of the Life Class: 'Students wishing to join had to submit a drawing from the round to the Life Class Committee but a high standard was not insisted upon', etc.

45 Cf. Richardson's letter of 20 January 1881, op. cit.: 'About every six weeks designs and sketches are invited to be sent in which are placed on the walls for criticism'; Cf. E. Fysh, Memoir of C.D. Richardson, Carlton, 1953, p. 6; cf. The Daily Telegraph, 15 March 1881, which praises Richardson's The Shepherd, shown at the 1881 V.A.A. exhibition.


47 Ibid., 15 February 1882; The Age, 28 March 1882.


49 J.S. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 52; cf. 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., pp 74-5.

50 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., p. 72.

51 To some extent, the relative neglect of Australian art in the 1870s has been modified by an exhibition covering the period, organized by Daniel Thomas in 1976, cf. the catalogue of the exhibition, Daniel Thomas, Australian Art in the 1870s, Sydney, 1976.


54 For example, the Age critic (19 March 1881) suggests that Richardson's Yackandandah, exhibited at the 1881 V.A.A. exhibition, 'seems to have been painted under the influence of Buvelot's feeling for native scenery'.

55 J.S. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 85; R.H. Croll, op. cit., p. 9; cf. Frederick McCubbin, 'A plea for Australian art', ms. in Lothian Papers, Box 57, La Trobe Library.

56 Cf. the discussion of Buvelot's stylistic influence on the early Roberts in Virginia Spate, Tom Roberts, op. cit., pp. 16-17.


58 Trustees' Report, 1881, p. 57. For Julian Rossi Ashton, see Table Talk, 24 April 1891; J.R. Ashton, Now Came Still Evening On, Sydney, 1941, esp. p. 101 for his first meeting with McCubbin.
Lionel Lindsay, 'Twenty-five Years of Australian Art', *Art in Australia*, vol. 1, No 4, 1918.


Ibid., p. 28; cf. Ann Galbally, 'Mythmaking in Australian Art', p. 67, and 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.*, pp. 75-78; the plein-airisme of the Portuguese-born Arthur Loureiro in Melbourne during the early 1880s has yet to be assessed by art historians. Significantly, Loureiro did not leave behind his written memoirs.


No 4 in the Catalogue of the 1882 V.A.A. Exhibition, State Library of Victoria; cf. Daily Telegraph, 18 March 1882: 'The sketching club lately instituted has produced valuable results, the best being Mr McCubbin's "Study of a Gallipot" ...'.


Campbell's *The Man with the Muckrake* is reproduced in *The Illustrated Australian News*, 2 January 1871.


Earles' *Stripping Feathers* is reproduced in *ART and Australia*, vol. 13, No 1, 1975; cf. *The Age*, 10 April 1876.

Ford's *The Children's Hour* is now lost, but can be seen in a contemporary photograph in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne, Copyright Envelope No 25; *The Age*, 1 December 1870.


73 Cf. Catalogues of *The Victorian Academy of the Arts Exhibitions*, 1878 and 1879, held in the State Library of Victoria; *The Argus*, 12 April 1879.

74 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.*, p. 76; Catalogue of *The Victorian Academy of the Arts Exhibition, 1880*, held in the State Library of Victoria.
Chapter 2
THE HEIDELBERG SCHOOL AND THE POPULAR IMAGE

I

The plethora of hackneyed landscape paintings emanating from the Victorian Academy of the Arts exhibitions in the 1870s and 1880s prompted one contemporary writer (The Age, 10 April 1876) to condemn the Academy as 'a "pot boiler" manufactory'. Figure subjects with a distinctively Australian character were rarely seen at the Academy's exhibitions.

The marked absence of a strong local figurative tradition in painting raises some crucial issues concerning the development of the rural mythology in Australian art. What were the pictorial sources drawn upon by the 'Heidelberg' artists for their figure compositions of Australian pastoral life, painted in the 1880s and 1890s? Given the urban milieu in which the artists lived and worked, what contemporary sources informed and influenced their portrayal of Australian rural subjects, such as swagmen 'on the wallaby track', bushmen, shearers, pioneers and bushrangers? To what extent did awareness of earlier colonial traditions in art influence the painting of these themes?

Such issues seem so essential to any historical appraisal of the Heidelberg School it is surprising to find they have been largely ignored by historians. Further, this neglect largely originates from the artists' own accounts of the period.

The Heidelberg artists stressed the significance of *plein-airisme* as an artistic creed in their recollections, which attempted to establish their unique contribution to the painting of the Australian landscape. As Tom Roberts remarked in an interview in the 1920s: "Then came the Box Hill camp where we went to the bush and, as was always our ambition, tried to get it down as truly as we could".1
Allied to this appealing idea of their immediate and untutored response to the Australian landscape, the artists encouraged a corresponding 'aura' to surround their figure subjects of Australian pastoral life. Some of their major figure paintings were later seen to be more innovative and original through the artists' adherence to the *plein-airiste* principles popularized by the French painter of peasant subjects, Jules Bastien-Lepage. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Lepage had advocated that even large-scale figure subjects should be painted 'on the spot', directly before the motif.²

According to Roberts, the *plein-airiste* method of Lepage was 'suited to depict subjects for which tradition had not yet prescribed a way of regarding and handling'.³ The fact that Roberts' pastoral subjects, *Shearing the Rams* and *The Breakaway*, were painted 'on the spot' in an outback shearing shed in New South Wales was prominently recorded in the contemporary press. By the early twentieth century, Roberts' debt to Lepage's principles was further noted and embellished in popular accounts of his work. Writing in *Art in Australia* in 1921, Roberts' fellow artist, Lionel Lindsay, remarked that 'Roberts knew that to interpret the life of the drover and shearer he must live in their environment. So he travelled with sheep and made careful studies of the shearers at work. For this reason his pictures bear the impress of reality, vitalized by fine observation'.⁴ In the foreword to the catalogue of Roberts' 1828 exhibition in Sydney, Lindsay made further claims for his friend's originality: 'To paint "The Breakaway", that masterpiece now possessed by Adelaide, he travelled with a mob of sheep for a couple of months'.⁵

Historians of the Heidelberg School have followed the lead of these popular accounts by emphasizing the relevance of Bastien-Lepage's art and methods to the artists' pastoral subjects. Anxious to place these
works within a broader European context, they have encouraged the
notion that Roberts' pastoral pictures, for example, basically involved
an attempt to 'substitute' the Australian bushman for the peasant
figures painted by Millet and Bastien-Lepage. Roberts' knowledge of
European conventions of painting pastoral labour was certainly a vital
influence upon his rendition of the Australian bushman. However, by
over-emphasizing the significance of the open-air tradition of Lepage,
such interpretations tend to ignore the specifically 'local' nature of
Roberts' subject matter. His well-known practice of 'reconstructing'
his pastoral and historical subjects by posing figures 'on the spot'
has obfuscated the issue of his debt to previously existing pictorial
sources.

In this chapter, the specifically Australian character of the
Heidelberg artists' pastoral pictures is shown to have its origins in
local popular imagery in photography and black-and-white illustration.
After demonstrating the close inter-relationship between contemporary
photography and illustration, it is argued that the involvement of
'younger' artists with the popular media lent impetus to their portrayal
of typically Australian rural themes in the 1880s and 1890s.6

II

The 'high art' aspirations of students at Melbourne's Gallery School
in the 1870s meant that their choice of figure subjects usually
excluded distinctively Australian themes. Their commitment to tradi-
tional 'high art' subjects gradually weakened by the late 1870s and
early 1880s when, under the influence of Buvelot and Julian Ashton,
they turned their attention to contemporary themes and 'the life around
them'. Outside the confines of the Gallery School and the Victorian
Academy of the Arts, however, an active Australian figurative tradition
survived through the work of contemporary photographers and illustr-
rators.
Photographers in the 1870s took up the challenge eschewed by painters, of portraying typically Australian motifs apart from the ever-present landscape. Two Melbourne photographers, J.W. Lindt (1845-1926) and Nicholas Caire (1837-1918), became significant exponents of pastoral figure subjects. Their photography should be seen against the general background of the travelling bush photographer, who had become a familiar part of the Australian rural scene by the 1860s and 1870s. Some sense of his role emerges in the text which accompanied an illustration of 'The Bush Photographer' in The Australasian Sketcher (7 May 1883):

What a characteristic scene of up-country life our illustration presents.... The inmates of some selector's household are surprised by the arrival of a vehicle, the like of which they perhaps have never seen before in the solitudes which they call home. From it there emerges a man of fluent address, who in a short time persuades the whole family to sit under the shadow of the homestead, whilst he photographs them.

As distinct from such itinerant bush photographers, whose livelihood depended upon selling their work directly to the bush people they photographed, Lindt and Caire's pastoral photographs were intended to appeal equally to an urban clientele. Both men arrived in Melbourne around 1876, and quickly established successful practices as society, theatre and landscape photographers. Their photographs of pastoral figure subjects formed an important 'sideline' to flourishing city practices.

Though business rivals, Caire and Lindt were friends who influenced each other's work. They had specialized in 'outback' subjects before their arrival in Melbourne. In the mid-1860s, Caire had travelled through Gippsland taking pictures of aboriginals and landscape photographs of the Strzelecki Ranges, while Lindt had photographed the
Clarence River district of New South Wales and its aborigines by 1873. In their photographs of Australian aborigines, it was the documentary capacity of the camera which appealed so immediately to both scientific interests and a curious urban public. At the time it was believed that the Australian aboriginal race was threatened with extinction, an attitude that becomes apparent in the text to an illustration, 'A Bush Photograph', in The Australasian Sketcher of 15 April 1874:

Our engraving illustrates a characteristic phase of Australian bush life. A travelling photographer on the lookout for subjects has come upon a camp of natives ... presently their grim figures will also be photographed to serve as ethnological specimens and curios to send to friends in England as examples of the rapidly disappearing Australian race.

An urban curiosity about rural life and the contemporary taste for picturesque views and scenery (also evident in paintings exhibited at the V.A.A. in the 1870s) created a ready city market for Lindt and Caire's bush photography. Through the 1870s and 1880s, they ventured into remote areas of Victoria and recorded the lives of pioneers and settlers, their homes, their work and the local landscape. Many of these photographs were taken in Gippsland, which was still in the process of being settled. Lindt and Caire thus recorded 'contemporary history', but their bush photography also served as a reminder to an urban public of the earlier settlement of Melbourne and its surrounding districts. Since they were usually reproduced in bound volumes for commercial sale, the public and artists had ready access to such photographs.

For contemporary audiences part of the appeal of bush photography lay in the verisimilitude of the photographic image. Ironically, it was Lindt and Caire's deliberate manipulation of the photographic image
for an urban market that was ultimately to prove most influential upon Australian painting. In the early 1870s, Lindt developed what he termed the 'genre' style; he took 'pictures of character' illustrating 'up country life', including photographs of a shearer at work, of itinerant bush-workers and of diggers entitled Camped or On the Tramp. Not only were these photographs reproduced in his commercial albums, but Lindt also reached a wider audience by displaying them at exhibitions such as Melbourne's International Exhibition of 1880.9

Lindt's early 'genre' photographs are not informal glimpses of pastoral life, but carefully posed and arranged compositions; technical difficulties necessitated some compromise in the immediacy of the photographic image. The artifice behind his genre subjects is apparent but rarely obtrusive. Lindt's Shearing (before 1876, La Trobe Library, Melbourne), for example, shows the shearer sitting with the sheep held firmly between his knees while the shearing scene takes place in the open countryside. Because of the long exposure times required in the 1870s, it was still not possible for the photographer to capture an actual scene in a darkened shearing shed interior. With special lighting, a painted scenery backdrop and a few stage 'props' such as the branches of a gum tree, Lindt had in fact reconstructed his own version of an Australian shearing scene within the confines of his photographic studio.

While for contemporary audiences photography held the promise of 'direct reportage' of pastoral life, photographers were sometimes forced to devise an artificial 'formula' through which to portray it. Lindt's Camped (before 1876, La Trobe Library, Melbourne) is typical of the formula he employed in his early genre style. A reclining digger dominates the foreground plane, while around him are strategically placed objects - his gold pan, pick, axe and prominently
displayed billy and swag - which help the viewer to identify his role. These objects or 'attributes' were the means by which an urban viewer could clearly recognize the figure as a 'digger on the tramp'.

The artifice behind Lindt's genre style was thus significant in the construction of a distinctively Australian rural iconography. His genre photographs reiterated or re-presented some of the most common iconographic elements of bush imagery treated by colonial artists like S.T. Gill. Both Lindt and his public would have been familiar with Gill's work, which was widely reproduced in illustrative form. The endeavour to 'document' the 'typical' appearance of bush characters necessarily led to a concentration on the human figure. As a result, the dominance of the figure over its landscape background in genre photographs became just one means by which a distinctively Australian figurative tradition was maintained in the 1870s. By reinterpreting the themes and bush types previously popularized by S.T. Gill, photographers like Lindt simultaneously forged a link with earlier colonial traditions in art.

Caire extended the possibilities of the genre style in the 1880s to include a new literary and narrative interest. He posed figures within a pastoral setting to illustrate Australian literary themes like The Sick Bushman or Down On His Luck. Some evidence of the inspiration Caire derived from his wide reading of Australian poets is provided by the close similarity of the title of his Sick Bushman to that of Adam Lindsay Gordon's well-known poem, 'The Sick Stockrider'. His narrative bush subjects thus exploited the 'artistic' potential of the photographic image at the expense of the camera's merely documentary capacity. Their appeal to artists like McCubbin and C.D. Richardson, who in the 1880s and 1890s painted Australian bush subjects with a pronounced narrative interest, is discussed in following chapters.
While photographers played a major role in creating and perpetuating a popular tradition of rural imagery, photographs of contemporary urban life and events were also to influence the course of Australian art. As we shall see, the painting of Australian pastoral subjects in the 1880s developed alongside, rather than in opposition to, the painting and illustrating of urban scenes. Until the late 1870s, urban themes were generally neglected or ignored by painters exhibiting with the V.A.A. in Melbourne. Photographers, on the other hand, were less reluctant to take artistic and financial advantage of the rapidly developing feelings of civic pride in the city's material progress. Here Charles Nettleton (1826-1902) emerges as an outstanding figure who successfully pursued the career of an urban photographer, while still devoting photographic attention to rural subjects.

Nettleton was an extremely versatile photographer who had arrived in Melbourne in 1854, opened his own studio four years later, and continued to run a flourishing city practice until he finally closed his studio in 1890. As well as holding a position as police photographer for over twenty-five years, Nettleton was special photographer to the Victorian Government and to the Corporation of the City of Melbourne. In this capacity, he systematically recorded the growth of Melbourne's public buildings and streets over many years. His Views of Melbourne and Suburbs was published in two volumes in 1876 and the sale of prints from this venture was immense, because his photographs appealed so directly to the community's sense of civic pride. Out of Nettleton's close involvement with the urban scene grew his role as a 'news photographer'; he recorded important ceremonial occasions in the life of the city, as well as 'newsworthy' events such as train crashes, floods and fires. Nettleton also became a successful city portraitist, at the same time as he visited country areas and the goldfields, where he photographed the commercially
lucrative 'picturesque views' of forest scenery and fern glades. His pastoral photographs include shearing scenes which may have influenced Tom Roberts' heroic paintings on the theme of rural labour.¹²

The energy and variety of Nettleton's practice was characteristic of leading photographers whose work formed an essential part of an active, popular tradition. In New South Wales the development of photography formed a close parallel with that in Victoria during the late nineteenth century. The contemporary taste for urban views, for example, found its most dramatic expression in the large panoramic photographs of Sydney and its environs taken by Bernard Otto Holtermann, with the assistance of Charles Bayliss, in the 1870s. One of these panoramic views was produced from the largest negatives ever made. Holtermann consequently sent his gigantic three-panel view of Sydney to the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition and to the 1878 Paris Exposition Universelle Internationale, in a proud attempt to establish his own and Australia's place in the forefront of world photography.¹³

During the 1880s and 1890s professional photography in New South Wales was increasingly dominated by the figure of Charles Kerry (1858-1928). Kerry had set up a photographic practice in Sydney in the mid-1870s, and by the following decade it encompassed the manifold activities of the successful professional photographer - portraiture, urban views and 'news' photography, as well as landscape and bush photography. Kerry's many photographs of Sydney's streets and urban life, taken in the 1880s and 1890s, form a parallel with the earlier work of Charles Nettleton in Melbourne. Nettleton's street scenes were taken using the wet-plate technique and, as a consequence of the slower exposure times, his photographs show almost deserted streets with just a few people artfully 'held' in stationary poses by the photographer. By the mid-1880s, with the advent of the dry-plate
technique and quicker exposure times, it was now possible to photograph moving objects. As a result, Kerry's street scenes portray the hustle and bustle of city life: the streets are full of people, trams and horse buses, ably capturing the dynamic quality of the contemporary urban scene. Here Kerry's urban photographs anticipate numerous street scenes painted by Tom Roberts, Charles Conder and Girolamo Nerli towards the end of the 1880s.

By 1893 Kerry was employing a large team of photographers and operators, and in that year he formed his practice into a company, Kerry and Co. Two years later he had inaugurated his well-known Squatters' Service, whereby his photographers travelled by train and horse to outback areas of New South Wales to cover country field assignments. Not only were the results of these outback excursions gathered together in commercial albums for sale to an urban clientele, but Kerry had also established a monopoly of the popular postcard trade. Thus the picture postcard, a profitable sideline of the photographic industry, became another popular transmitter of images of contemporary Australian rural and urban life in the late nineteenth century. So successful were Kerry's enterprises that by the end of the century his photographic business occupied 'a massive building of three floors at 310 George Street, Sydney'.

The extent to which photography formed a large and thriving industry in both Melbourne and Sydney in the late nineteenth century can be too easily forgotten today. The role of contemporary photographers has been overshadowed by the considerable achievements of the Heidelberg artists in painting. And yet photography was an inseparable part of the social and cultural milieu in which these artists worked. Stewart and Co. of Bourke Street, the photographic firm for which Tom Roberts worked in the 1870s and late 1880s, employed over fifty people
by 1888. At the same time as photography established its place in the commercial world, it gained increasing recognition as an 'art form'; hundreds of photographs were displayed alongside paintings at the large international exhibitions in Melbourne and Sydney during the 1870s and 1880s. As the public were inevitably drawn into making critical comparisons between the two media, so too did the term 'artist photographer' become more widespread as men practised both disciplines, sometimes within the one studio. Economic necessity frequently forced painters to adopt photography as their 'profession', a notable example being Louis Buvelot, who opened a photographic studio in Bourke Street soon after his arrival in Australia in 1865. Other artists found little conflict in combining the roles of painter and photographer. Henry James Johnstone, for example, who founded the important photographic firm of Johnstone and O'Shannessy, was one of Melbourne's leading photographers in the 1870s, at the same time as he exhibited his meticulously finished paintings with the Victorian Academy of the Arts.

During a period when photography found both commercial and aesthetic links with the fine arts in society, it was unlikely that the Heidelberg artists would remain completely untouched by its influence. Photographers like Lindt, Caire, Nettleton and Kerry created a popular figurative tradition of bush imagery in the 1870s; they were to continue the tradition into the 1880s and 1890s. Their photographs formed a readily available source for the distinctively Australian figure subjects painted by the Heidelberg artists. But the influence of photography extended beyond this correspondence of subject matter; it permeated another popular art form of the time, that of black and white illustration in the newspapers.
A popular pictorial tradition of urban and rural imagery became firmly entrenched in contemporary Australian culture with the emergence of the major illustrated weekly newspapers in the late 1860s and early 1870s. The main illustrated papers in Melbourne were produced by the two largest daily newspapers, The Age and The Argus. The Age published The Illustrated Australian News from 1864 until July 1896, and The Argus published The Australasian Sketcher from 1873 until December 1889. Sydney presented a comparable situation, where the major illustrated papers, The Illustrated Sydney News and The Illustrated Sydney Mail, were published by the two main daily newspapers.¹³

The newspaper firms evidently made little profit from their illustrated weeklies, but the illustrations appealed to a wide public without any specialized interest in the fine arts. As Richard Twopeny caustically observed in 1883:

> A few men have good pictures, but I hardly know anyone who has any good engravings. Muttonwool can see no difference between a proof before letters and the illustrations from the newspapers, which may be seen pasted on the walls of every working-man's cottage.²⁰

In a more sympathetic vein, Henry Lawson later described in his story, 'Water Them Geraniums', how the bare walls of Mrs Spicer's outback home were decorated with 'pictures cut from old copies of the Illustrated Sydney News'.²¹

The major illustrated papers finally collapsed in the early and mid-1890s due to the excessive costs involved in their production and, to a lesser extent, to the inroads made upon black and white illustration by new photographic processes of reproduction, which made the need for the artist's original drawing obsolete. Despite their eventual demise, the illustrated newspapers were aimed at a popular audience, and their illustrations consequently provide a clear reflection
of societal concerns and popular myths of the period. Artists working on the papers completed drawings, which were later engraved, of a wide range of daily news and events. Here the Victorian belief in the inevitable march of material progress can be discerned in innumerable illustrations of the opening of public buildings, or of the most recent technological achievements, such as the introduction of electric street lighting to Melbourne in 1888. Photographs formed a common source for artists' illustrations, especially in cases like portraits of prominent identities and illustrations of public buildings, where photographs were usually readily available.

Illustrations of 'up country' life and 'bush types' for the delectation of an urban public became a weekly feature of these newspapers for twenty-odd years. Drawings of life on the diggings, bushrangers, pioneers, swagmen 'on the tramp' and 'Sundowners' became part of the established repertoire of the graphic artist. Such illustrations enjoyed wide circulation amongst the country folk they depicted (as Lawson's story indicates), but their format and the accompanying written texts indicate that they were primarily intended to appeal to interested but rather unsuspecting urban audiences. An urban consciousness is revealed in the frequent juxtaposition of scenes from city and rural life, such as illustrations of 'Christmas Eve in the Bush' and 'Christmas Eve in Town', which might appear together on the same page. Nowhere is the reflexive empathy felt by the urban dweller for his rural counterpart more clearly pronounced than in the regular appearance of illustrations of the lives of the selectors. The text to an illustration of 'Incidents in the Life of a Selector' in The Illustrated Australian News (25 November 1885) declared:

Very few people, with the exception of those who have been personally engaged in the task of opening up new country, can form any idea of the trouble and hardship that is undergone by the pioneer selector of forest land.
Artists illustrating scenes of 'up country' life and 'bush types' did not hesitate to employ available photographs as convenient sources for their drawings. To cite just one example, the illustrator of 'Exterior of a Bush Hut on a Sunday Morning' in The Illustrated Australian News (21 February 1870) based his drawing upon a close copy of a photograph by Charles Walter, a well-known bush photographer.22

Throughout the texts of the illustrated newspapers, claims are consistently made for the authenticity or 'truthfulness' of the artist's imagery. Drawings of rural subjects are regularly described as 'typical' or 'characteristic of a scene in the bush life of Australia'. Further claims are made for the accuracy of an illustration on the grounds that 'our artist' has drawn a certain event or scene 'on the spot'. The name of photography was frequently cited as evidence of the verisimilitude of an image; drawings were openly acknowledged as being 'from a photograph'. By the 1880s one occasionally finds illustrations of newsworthy events which are proudly announced as being based upon 'an instantaneous photograph'.

Despite the repeated stress on the authenticity of the artist's drawings, the exigencies of contemporary illustration in fact worked against the immediacy and accuracy of the final printed image. If one considers, for example, the portrayal of man-made or natural disasters, one quickly realizes the impossibility of artists making 'on the spot' sketches of ships foundering and mine explosions at the height of the action. While drawings of such incidents frequently appeared in the illustrated press, they were obviously the result of the artist's imaginative reconstruction of the events after they had taken place.

In the 1870s, before the widespread introduction of photo or 'process' engraving, the graphic artist had to bear in mind the technological processes by which his original drawing would be translated
into the medium of a woodcut by a specialist engraver. The original drawing had to be suitable for reduction to a simple line engraving, and an over-abundance of detail could mean added work and possible technical difficulties for the engraver. The laborious effort involved in the hand engraving process also ensured that there would be a necessary 'time-lapse' between the execution of the artist's drawing and its appearance as a printed image in a newspaper. In order to allow time for the engraving process and yet still meet the demands of his weekly copy deadline, an artist was sometimes forced to produce a drawing of an important public occasion before the event actually took place. Faced with the problem of imaginatively reconstructing past or future 'news' events, the artist would often resort to drawing a vague, generalized image so that mistakes of fact would not be so apparent to the viewer. In such cases, the graphic medium introduced an artificial 'distance' between the viewer and the reality of the events the artist supposedly portrayed. Only through a conventionalized treatment of the specific event could the artist reasonably sustain claims of 'direct reportage' of an event he had not seen.

Illustrators were sometimes sent to rural areas on 'special assignments' for their papers, but practical difficulties, such as the slowness of transport, meant that they rarely witnessed newsworthy rural events. Since direct reporting was usually impossible, it once again became standard practice for illustrators to reconstruct imaginatively the scene they wished to portray. Here one can point to the press coverage of the capture of Ned Kelly at Glenrowan in June 1880, perhaps the best-known example of the collaboration of contemporary photographers and illustrators. When news reached Melbourne that Kelly and his gang had been captured, the leading city newspapers immediately despatched photographers and illustrators to Glenrowan
to cover the event. Arriving after a long train journey and too late to witness Kelly's actual capture, photographers and artists nevertheless exploited its aftermath. As a photograph by J.W. Lindt (La Trobe Library, Melbourne) clearly documents, the dead body of Steve Byrne was strung up against a wall and duly photographed.

Julian Ashton, who handled the assignment as artist for The Illustrated Australian News, subsequently made a drawing of Byrne's body as it lay in a cell at the nearby Benalla gaol. Ashton's drawing, 'Finding Byrne's Body - A Study', which appeared in the July issue of the paper, could thus claim to be based on first-hand reporting of its subject. However, Ashton also produced a drawing of 'The Capture of Ned Kelly' for the same issue, an event which he certainly did not witness. For this drawing, Ashton made a loose adaptation of a photographic reconstruction of the incident, Ned Kelly's Capture (A Tableau) (La Trobe Library, Melbourne). While the photographic study cannot disguise the fact that it was set up and taken indoors, Ashton's illustration suitably relocates the action within its 'original' landscape setting. Thus the 'authenticity' of Ashton's drawing relied upon a photographic source, which in itself involved considerable artistic subterfuge.²⁴

Practical and technological difficulties meant 'news' imagery relied on the use of a formula. The exigencies of contemporary illustrative practice had far-reaching implications for the creation of a popular pictorial tradition. As they struggled to meet their weekly copy deadlines, artists necessarily developed a 'stock-in-trade' range of images that would serve almost any occasion. The pages of the illustrated papers are filled with drawings of bush types, stockmen rounding up cattle, pioneer selectors and a comparable range of urban subjects, such as life on the streets and leisure activities on the
suburban beaches. These subjects became part of the illustrator's standard repertoire of images, allowing him to meet his copy deadline without having to seek out 'newsworthy' events. The lack of real news interest in these conventional images was thinly disguised on occasions by the appropriateness of an image to the season of the year. Thus spring inevitably brought pictures of children picking wildflowers or elegant women gathering blossoms; summer brought illustrations of bush fires or 'hot wind days' in the city or country; Christmas was an occasion for nostalgic and sentimental reflections on how the event was celebrated in the bush. Some pretence of direct reporting was maintained in repeated claims that an artist's drawing was 'typical' or 'characteristic of an episode in the bush life of Australia'.

Behind this 'formula' imagery of the illustrated press may be sensed the papers' aim to entertain, rather than inform, their public. The recurrence of such thematic material over a twenty-year period forged a popular pictorial tradition of typically Australian subjects.

Illustrators frequently based their drawings of 'up country' life and bush types upon available photographs, but whether or not a 'photographic vision' dominated their imagery is open to interpretation. In the first place, it must be remembered that contemporary photographers were often influenced by, and consequently employed, the same artistic conventions as painters of the period. Even though an illustrator might work directly from a photographic source, he could alter the photograph in his drawing to make it conform with his own style or with prevailing aesthetic conventions. The demands of the illustrative medium also placed certain limitations upon the use of photographic sources which had to be reduced to simple line engravings. This is particularly the case in the early 1870s, when engraving processes were less sophisticated than they were to become in the
following decade. Beaufoy Merlin's photograph, *Clarke Street, Hill End* of 1872 (Mitchell Library, Sydney), for example, presents a street view of the outback gold town with all the complexity of detail that a skilled documentary photographer could capture. His photograph was subsequently used as the basis for a woodcut in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* (30 March 1872). However, the graphic artist omitted the photograph's complex detail in favour of a simplified and stylized aerial view, which made the scene more 'readable' for the viewer and at the same time presented fewer technical difficulties for the engraver.25

Photographs were, then, often absorbed by the illustrative medium in a manner which severely modified their original qualities. The internal tradition of the illustrated papers encouraged the repetition of subjects, treated according to conventional artistic formulae. As a result, the relationship between a drawing of a standard theme and its original photographic source became muted and eventually lost with each succeeding illustration of the subject.

Illustrators understandably employed photographic sources that were most readily available to them. In effect, this meant that their choice of photographic material for their drawings was usually highly selective. For illustrations of 'up country life' artists found convenient sources in photographs taken by professional city photographers with an urban clientele in mind. Indeed, photographers like Charles Walter, Beaufoy Merlin and J.W. Lindt undertook special country assignments for the illustrated newspapers so that their photographs could serve as the basis for future illustrations.26 A distinction can then be made between the work of city photographers who specialized in bush subjects, and the work of the itinerant bush photographer described in section II of this chapter. Many photographs taken by
itinerant bush photographers or by photographers with a 'documentary' purpose in mind, testify to the appalling conditions suffered by the small selector and his family. But such photographs provide an image of Australian bush life that was contrary to the 'entertainment' purposes of the illustrated papers and the popular myths they encouraged. Consequently, illustrators rarely, if ever, employed this type of bush photography as a source for their drawings.

Behind illustrators' selective use of bush photography lay a latent urban bias: they chose photographic sources which presented the bush as the urban dweller wished to see it or, alternatively, they altered the photograph to conform to their prejudices. Photography was thus called upon to support the illustrators' claims of authenticity; but the selective use of photography served to reinforce rather than to expose the prevailing rural mythology.

Nor did an illustrator's use of photographs guarantee even a minimum level of factual accuracy. For example, a drawing of 'Sheep-shearing' that appeared in David Blair's The History of Australasia in 1879 was directly based upon J.W. Lindt's genre photograph, Shearing. But as we have seen, Lindt's photograph was an 'artistic' studio reconstruction intended for commercial distribution to an urban public. The illustration of 'Sheepshearing' compounded the artistic fiction of Lindt's photograph by correcting its more obvious visual incongruities: the shearer is shown more intent on his work, and the planes of the landscape setting are more smoothly integrated. A gullible urban viewer or an overseas reader of the book might have been led to believe that Australian sheep were shorn in the open countryside, rather than in shearing sheds!

The question of a 'photographic vision' in artists' drawings is complicated by the exigencies and conventional practices of contemporary
illustration. However, photography possibly had a more subtle and pervasive influence upon illustrators. The very notion of artists capturing 'typical' or 'characteristic' images of Australian life suggests a silent acknowledgement of photography's competing claims to record the contemporary scene. From at least the early 1880s, one can discern illustrators making a conscious attempt to include more 'factual information' within their conventionally picturesque treatment of the lives of the selectors. An illustration like 'A Victorian Selector's Homestead' in The Australasian Sketcher (25 September 1880) possesses a richness of detail and a variety of incident that could only be rivalled by the work of a contemporary photographer.28

The interaction of photography and illustration increasingly influenced the course of Australian painting. One of the strongest links between art and photography in Victoria during the 1870s was the mutual fondness of painters and photographers for picturesque landscape views. The gum trees, fern tree gullies, sylvan glades and bush tracks that critics found so monotonous at the V.A.A. exhibitions were the subject of many photographs by Lindt and Caire. Their albums of picturesque views of Victorian scenery were widely sold to the public. Henricus van den Houten's painting, Scene on the Blackspur, exhibited at the 1876 V.A.A. exhibition, epitomizes contemporary landscape painters' predilection for picturesque subjects and their attendant conventions. It portrays travellers with their horses and wagons on the mountain road of the Black Spur, near Marysville. The immediate foreground is left bare as the road leads the eye into the centre of the picture; the wagon, horses and travellers provide the focus of interest in the middle ground while they, in turn, are dwarfed by towering gum trees. This is precisely the compositional format adopted by Nicholas Caire in his numerous photographs of the
Black Spur. Caire's picturesque views of the scene were published both separately and in his commercial albums, and they no doubt served as the pictorial source for the painting. Van den Houten's *Scene on the Blackspur* was subsequently reproduced by *The Australasian Sketcher* (19 February 1876) and by the Art Union of Victoria as one of its offerings to subscribers for that year. The painting thus re-entered the popular media from which it had originally derived inspiration.²⁹

Photography was then an equally important pictorial source for painters, as well as illustrators, in the 1870s. The popular dissemination of Caire's photograph, *The Punt, Echuca*, taken in the late sixties or early seventies, neatly demonstrates the interrelationship of painting, photography and illustration during the era. The photograph shows the old punt at Echuca on the Murray River, and consequently documents the significant role the inland waterways played in Australia's transport system in the nineteenth century. For this reason, Caire's photograph formed a convenient source for the English artist and engraver, J.C. Armytage, who adapted it in a black and white illustration for a contemporary book, Edwin Carton Booth's *Australia Illustrated*, published in London from 1873 to 1876. Armytage's engraving then served as the basis for a drawing, 'Australian Wool Crossing the Murray at Echuca Punt', in *The Australasian Sketcher* (21 February 1874). Some time later, J.H. Carse employed Armytage's engraving as the source for an oil painting of the scene, *On the Murray* (Art Gallery of Western Australia). Certain stylistic features suggest that Carse may also have worked directly from Caire's photograph: for instance, the fuller form of the tree on the right of the painting which reverts to the initial format of the photograph.³⁰

Other examples could be produced to emphasize the cross-fertilization of imagery between painting and the popular media in the 1870s. Given this background, it is perhaps surprising that the popular media
had so little influence upon the work of the emerging Heidelberg painters during the period. But by the early 1880s the influence of photography and illustration was vital.

IV

To draw a clear distinction between fine artist and illustrator would be artificial within the context of late nineteenth century Australian culture. Illustrative work attracted the talents of many of the foremost painters of the time, as well as bringing to Australia artists of considerable stature. Oswald Rose Campbell and J.W. Curtis were leading exhibitors with the Victorian Academy of the Arts in the 1870s, at the same time as they were staff artists for The Illustrated Australian News. In 1878 Julian Rossi Ashton migrated to Melbourne from London to take up an appointment as illustrator for the paper. One year later, on his brother's advice, George Ashton came to Australia and joined the staff of The Illustrated Australian News. During the following decade, Walter Withers returned to Melbourne from abroad in 1888, having accepted a commission to illustrate Edmund Finn's The Chronicles of Early Melbourne.31

Sydney presented a comparable situation. Nearly all the leading artists of the late seventies and eighties at some stage drew for the illustrated press. Sydney attracted an even greater number of talented black and white artists from overseas than Melbourne. The Collingridge brothers, Arthur and George, arrived in Sydney in 1877 and 1879 respectively. They had worked in England on The Illustrated London News and The Graphic, and had done illustrative work in Paris; the two brothers consequently contributed drawings to The Illustrated Sydney News. A. Henry Fullwood, who had studied at the Birmingham School of Art, came to Sydney in 1881, bringing with him commissions from the principal London journals to act as their Australian
correspondent; he quickly found black and white work on the Sydney Mail. Charles Henry Hunt, another prominent Sydney illustrator of the period, had previously studied at Heatherley's School in London and had gained some experience in the graphic medium with a London lithographic firm.  

For several of the young Heidelberg painters, the field of photography and illustration provided occupations sympathetic to their artistic aspirations. Students at Melbourne's National Gallery School frequently chose occupations connected with the two industries - as lithographers, engravers, woodgrainers and photographers' assistants. In the seventies, Charles Douglas Richardson worked with a lithographic firm while a student at the school; Frederick McCubbin was apprenticed for three and a half years to the firm of Stephenson and Elliot, Coach Painters; Tom Roberts and Thomas Humphrey were photographers' assistants; Edwin Minchen, the future illustrator, and Robert Barnes, another prominent student, were also photographers' assistants. The trend continued amongst prominent students who joined the school in the early eighties: Charles S. Bennet, who became a well-known illustrator, worked as an engraver; J. Llewellyn Jones, a future Heidelberg artist, was a photographer; Arthur Streeton was apprenticed as a lithographer to George Troedel and Co.; Walter Withers worked as a draughtsman with the firms of Wm. Inglis and Co. and later Ferguson and Mitchell, printers.  

Students at the Gallery School were thus highly conscious of the practice of photography and illustration through first-hand experience. Their involvement was typical of a time when the two media were closely interconnected with the fine arts. Andrew Barrie, later to become a successful society portrait photographer, worked with Roberts as a photographic operator at Stewart and Co. in the seventies, and was briefly enrolled as a student at the Gallery School. Henry Walter
Barnett, who was later to establish a reputation as a society photographer in London, was another fellow operator at Stewart's, and his friendship with Roberts and Streeton was to last for many years. According to Jack Cato, McCubbin knew the painter-photographer, H.J. Johnstone, in the 1870s and 'a good deal of the student Bohemian conviviality was helped by his generous purse'.

For aspiring painters and young students the popular media provided financial support in 'compatible' jobs, until such time as the artist was able to live off the proceeds of his painting. Tom Roberts' early career, for example, shows a typical association of the artist with both photography and illustration. When he arrived in Australia in 1869, Roberts began work in a photographer's studio in Collingwood. In the following year he was apprenticed to the photographic firm of Stewart and Co. of Bourke Street, where he eventually rose to the position of senior operator. The proprietor, Richard Stewart, was so impressed with Roberts' artistic talent that he allowed him 'one day a week free to follow his artistic bent' and provided him with the use of an attic as a painting studio. Stewart's sympathetic response to Roberts' artistic ambitions once again demonstrates the close relationship that contemporaries saw between the traditional fine arts and photography as an alternative art form.

Roberts remained with Stewart and Co. until he left for England in 1881. There he helped support himself by contributing illustrations to popular magazines such as The Graphic. On his return to Australia in 1885, Roberts accepted an offer from Andrew Barrie (who was now running Stewart's) to work three days a week organizing 'the posing, lighting and backgrounds of their photographic studios'. Little is known about Roberts' photographic work, though he evidently 'added a rural touch by bringing in tea-tree and other native shrubs to the
studio'. Here one suspects that his knowledge of Whistler and the Aesthetic Movement gained in England may have influenced his photographic arrangements. Certainly Roberts' 'picturesquely arranged' painting studio in Grosvenor Chambers in Collins Street was decorated with the draperies, flower and reed arrangements and other paraphernalia popularized by Aestheticism.\textsuperscript{36} The Whistlerian backgrounds of paintings like \textit{Portrait of Mrs Louis Abrahams in a Black Dress}, 1888 (National Gallery of Victoria), suggest that his experience as a photographer complemented his work as a portrait painter. In the meantime, Roberts supplemented his income by contributing occasional drawings to Melbourne's illustrated newspapers.\textsuperscript{37} He stayed with Stewart's as a photographer's assistant until about 1890, before leaving Melbourne the following year to live in Sydney. During his Sydney period, Roberts deliberately eschewed photography and illustration, and made a conscious decision to earn his living through his chosen profession as a painter. He quickly established a reputation as Sydney's leading society portraitist, but even here his previous experience of photography may have proved useful.\textsuperscript{38}

Significantly, the earliest surviving examples of the Heidelberg artists' portrayal of nationalistic themes are found in the sphere of illustration rather than in painting. In 1880, C.D. Richardson illustrated \textit{McKinley's Australian Pictorial Almanac}, a popular publication which commented somewhat superficially on Australia's history and way of life.\textsuperscript{39} Richardson's drawings depict some of the most dominant pastoral and historical themes of late nineteenth-century Australian art. There is an illustration of two horsemen discovering the skeletons of a horse and rider, a variation on the lost-in-the-bush theme. Historical episodes are treated in drawings of the explorers, Grey and Sturt, and in an illustration of 'Captain Cook's First Landing
in Australia', a subject to be painted early this century by E.P.

Fox. Two pastoral subjects, 'Cattle Musterings' and 'Sheep Farming in Australia', foreshadow Mahony's and Roberts' well-known pastoral paintings. Indeed, the latter illustration anticipates several of the compositional features of Roberts' *Breakaway.*

Richardson's drawing on the lost-in-the-bush theme suitably demonstrates the transmission of images from the earlier colonial period to the 1880s, via the popular media. Ultimately, the prototype of Richardson's illustration lay in S.T. Gill's sketch of *The Unlucky Digger that never returned,* published in his illustrated sketchbook, *Victorian Gold Diggings and Diggers As They Are,* in 1852. Once published, however, Gill's sketch served as the basis for later illustrations of the theme. In a lithograph entitled *The Lost Bushman,* or *The Unfortunate Digger That Never Returned,* published in *Sketches of Australian Life and Scenery* in the 1850s or 1860s, the artist added to the narrative interest of Gill's sketch by including the figures of two horsemen who discover the remains of the lost prospector. It was this later version of the subject, rather than Gill's original sketches, that Richardson employed as the source for his drawing.

Art Union reproductions were another popular medium by which Australian figure subjects gained wider circulation. The Art Union of Victoria, established in the early seventies, usually presented its subscribers with photographs, engravings or lithographs of works shown in the annual V.A.A. exhibitions. For the year 1881, the Art Union of Victoria offered a series of engravings in book form to Henry Kendall's poem, 'Orara'. Both Richardson and Roberts illustrated with drawings Kendall's eulogy on the heroism and courage of Australia's early settlers. In the poem Kendall evokes the spirit of the Australian bush with its 'sultry silence' and 'waxing glooms' in a
manner reminiscent of Marcus Clarke's well-known descriptions of the 'weird melancholy' of the bush. The anonymous hero of the poem meets a lonely and violent death in the bush at the hands of the aborigines.

Here Richardson and Roberts depicted the scene of the conflict and its aftermath in separate drawings. In a further drawing, Roberts portrayed the settler's family back in England who remain unaware of his fate. The poem ends with Kendall contemplating the significance of the isolated bush grave; the accompanying drawing of the scene by Malcolm Campbell foreshadows McCubbin's later treatment of the theme.

Through their involvement with the illustrative medium, Roberts and Richardson came to portray nationalistic themes before they left for England early in 1881. Considerations of subject matter lend significance to the otherwise unremarkable quality of their drawings. For these little known engravings in Orara and McKinley's Almanac provide a vital link between the pastoral subjects they painted on their return to Australia, and earlier colonial traditions in art and literature.

Despite the fact that many students at Melbourne's Gallery School in the 1870s chose occupations connected with the popular media, the future Heidelberg artists did not produce illustrative work until the following decade. Obviously one has to take into account their comparative youthfulness and their developing maturity as artists. Nor can their apparently belated involvement with illustrative work be readily divorced from the differing social factors that influenced and shaped their art in the 1870s and 1880s. Nevertheless, the early 1880s witnessed a quite rapid change in the popular conception of the value and role of the illustrative artist. Younger painters were to respond to the increased prestige of illustrative work.

The reasons for the illustrator's enhanced status in the 1880s were probably three-fold: the influx of talented artists who were
attracted to Australia in the late seventies and eighties by the
availability of illustrative work; the emergence of the picturesque
atlases in the eighties, which added further prestige to the illustra-
tor's status; and technological advances within the illustrative
medium which helped dissolve traditional distinctions between the
'fine arts' and illustration.

In the early and mid-1870s, the historical subjects painted by
students at Melbourne's Gallery School mirrored the prevailing 'high
art' aspirations of society. Distinctions between 'high' and 'low'
art also affected contemporary attitudes towards illustration, possibly
explaining the students' reluctance to venture into the field. 46
Oswald Rose Campbell, one of their teachers at the School, treated
the usual range of contemporary subjects and 'up country life' as
staff illustrator on the Illustrated Australian News in the 1870s;
but the paintings that Campbell exhibited at the V.A.A. were invariably
grandiose historical and mythological subjects. The distinction between
the 'elevated' painting and the 'lowly' illustrative subject was clear
in Campbell's mind.

What students needed was an artist to show them the artificiality
of these arbitrary distinctions. The Ashton brothers, Julian and
George, fulfilled this need upon their arrival in Melbourne in the late
seventies. In 1878 Julian Ashton accepted a position as illustrator
on The Illustrated Australian News, although three years later in 1881
he became staff artist on Melbourne's rival newspaper, The Argus's
Australasian Sketcher. George Ashton, also a talented artist, worked
as an illustrator during his stay in Australia until 1893, mainly with
The Illustrated Australian News and The Bulletin. 47 The two brothers
brought with them extensive experience of illustrative work in England;
George, for instance, continued to draw for The Graphic while he was
in Australia.
Julian and George Ashton quickly mastered the illustrator's repertoire of Australian bush subjects. In 1882, they won prizes in a competition for chromo-lithographic designs, Julian with his swagman 'On the Wallaby' and George with his drawing of 'The Stockman's Friend'. By 1888 a writer in *Table Talk* (7 September 1888) could declare that George Ashton 'has made his fame as a figure drawer' and 'wherever one goes out in the back blocks there is sure to be seen some sketches of his cut out and pasted on the walls of the hut'. The brothers' illustrations of pastoral subjects continued a firmly established tradition, but their work was distinguished by its fine draughtsmanship and an awareness of overseas artistic trends. They had acquired academic skills in figure drawing through part-time study at the Royal Academy School in South Kensington, while Julian had studied for two years at the Académie Julian in Paris, 'drawing several hours every day'.

The Ashtons' command of draughtsmanship and figure drawing must have appealed to students at the Gallery School who held the ambition of becoming figure painters. In 1882, for example, the two brothers combined their talents in an illustration of 'The Selector at Work' in *The Australasian Sketcher* (15 July 1882). The figure drawing of the burly selector, who momentarily pauses in his work of clearing the land, is firm and assured. With its large-scale figure silhouetted against land and sky, the illustration recalls the style of Jules Bastien-Lepage, whose paintings of rural labour were currently the vogue in European and English art circles. In 'The Selector at Work', the figure becomes a vehicle for human sentiment and carries the mood and emotion of the scene portrayed. The concentration on the figure, at the expense of its landscape background, would have appealed to an artist of McCubbin's sensibility, with his pronounced interest in figure painting.
Through the works he exhibited with the V.A.A., Julian Ashton showed that such 'illustrative' subjects could be readily adapted to suit paintings of bush life and contemporary genre. Ashton's painting of *A Chip Off the Old Block*, exhibited at the 1879 V.A.A. exhibition, depicted an old woodcutter sitting down with a pewter mug of beer in his hand, while he watched a young child's first attempts at chopping wood. This anecdotal genre subject is typical of those treated by illustrators on the newspapers. Ashton thus introduced genre and 'realist' subjects, prevalent in the illustrated press for many years, into the realm of the fine arts. Nor did Ashton's paintings of such subjects preclude an academic skill in figure drawing, nor an advanced interest in *plein-airiste* painting techniques.

With Julian Ashton's encouragement, McCubbin began to submit drawings to the press in the early 1880s. He made animal sketches at Melbourne's Agricultural Show, which he forwarded to Ashton as staff artist of one of the two main illustrated newspapers. By 1881, McCubbin's drawing of 'The Melbourne Hospital: Bringing in an Accident Case' had been published in *The Australasian Sketcher* (17 December 1881), the paper for which Ashton worked. The drawing depicts four sturdy (and competently drawn) stretcher-bearers bringing an accident victim to the entrance of what is now the Queen Victoria Hospital, while a few 'obligatory' passers-by watch the event with interest. McCubbin's developing involvement with contemporary urban subjects, first encouraged by Ashton (see Chapter 1) is revealed in a further drawing of 'Brander's Ferry on a Sunday Afternoon' in *The Australasian Sketcher* (19 January 1883), portraying Melbourne's bourgeoisie at leisure in a popular meeting place beside the Yarra River. Three years later McCubbin turned his attention to the rural scene in a drawing of 'The Wood Carters' in *The Illustrated Australian News* (6 January 1886), showing three laden wood wagons on their trek towards the city.
McCubbin's illustrative work in a sense complements Ashton's advice to him - 'to paint the life about you'. By its very nature, newspaper illustration forced the Heidelberg artists to treat contemporary figure subjects. This must have acted as a counter-influence to their abiding interest in grand history paintings during the seventies. According to Alexander McCubbin, his father at one stage 'seriously thought of taking up black and white work as a livelihood'.

By the mid 1880s, artists of the Heidelberg School generation no longer hesitated to take advantage of the financial rewards and publicity afforded by illustrative work. On his return from England, Tom Roberts contributed a drawing of 'Promenade, Queenscliff' to The Illustrated Australian News (18 December 1886), which showed elegantly dressed men and women enjoying an easeful life at the fashionable seaside resort.

Arthur Streeton illustrated 'His First Snake', a lighthearted piece of bush anecdote, for The Australasian Sketcher (24 January 1889).

In 1883 Julian Ashton left Melbourne for Sydney to begin work as an illustrator on the forthcoming three-volume publication, The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia. His influence upon young Sydney artists in the 1880s and 1890s was to equal that of his earlier Melbourne years. Blamire Young later recalled that 'he was a great force in those days ... and his studio was regarded as the art centre of Sydney'. Ashton was 'always ready to welcome and help the new arrival'. Not only did Ashton's involvement with illustration present an example for younger artists to follow, but he also conducted drawing classes for the Art Society of New South Wales in the eighties. At these classes he came into contact with the young Charles Conder. Amongst Conder's fellow-students were some of Sydney's leading black and white artists: A. Henry Fullwood, Frank Mahony, Livingstone
Hopkins, Benjamin Minns and Phil May.\textsuperscript{62} They all contributed work to the Sydney Bulletin, which was rapidly becoming a major vehicle for the illustrator's talents.\textsuperscript{63} The importance of black and white work in Sydney during the eighties is suggested by the remark of W. Lister-Lister, who remembered that: 'It was a great time for black and white artists ... but a poor one for painters'.\textsuperscript{64}

Given Conder's Sydney milieu, it is not surprising that he became involved in illustrative work. Around 1887 he found employment as a lithographic apprentice with the firm Gibbs, Shallard and Co., who published The Illustrated Sydney News. Conder soon rose to the position of illustrator on the paper and he had weekly drawings published in the Sydney News from April 1887 until May 1888, shortly before he left Sydney for Melbourne.\textsuperscript{65}

Judging from his newspaper illustrations, Conder appears to have gained little from Ashton's lessons in draughtsmanship; the drawing of the human figure is weak and its role is played down in the interest of an aesthetic, decorative effect. However, this does not discount the formative influence of illustration upon Conder's early work. His contact with Madame Constance Roth was vital. Madame Roth was one of Sydney's foremost illustrators during the eighties, contributing drawings to the The Illustrated Sydney News and to The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia.\textsuperscript{66} Her illustrations reveal an advanced sense of design and simplification in the aesthetic mode, together with a possible knowledge of Japanese art. Through Madame Roth Conder probably gained some knowledge of the Aesthetic Movement and an interest in decorative painting, important influences that were to shape his future artistic career.
With the rise of the illustrated atlases in the mid and late 1880s, the influences of photography and illustration on Australian painting were consolidated. *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia (1886-89?)*, *Cassell’s Picturesque Australasia (1887-89)* and *Victoria and Its Metropolis (1888)* were all proudly parochial in their self-conscious portrayal of an Australian image. The illustrators of these volumes tackled nearly every subject popularly conceived as distinctively Australian: gold-diggers, aborigines, Australian explorers, pioneers, pastoral labourers and bush types such as sundowners, stockmen mustering sheep and cattle, and selectors, as well as the tribulations of bush life like fire and drought.

The illustrated atlases were essentially commercial ventures, but their commercial appeal was no doubt calculated to coincide with the nationalistic feelings aroused by the celebration of Australia’s centenary in 1888. At the same time, they appealed to the loyalties of the separate colonies; Victoria, for instance, had recently celebrated in 1884 the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation as a colony, and pride in the colony’s achievements was still intense. The contents of the atlases were organized according to a general thematic structure: the discovery and exploration of Australia (or the particular colony), its settlement and the development of its resources, and finally its current material prosperity and wealth. Within the texts, references to leading Australian poets and writers like Adam Lindsay Gordon, Charles Harpur, Henry Kendall and Brunton Stephens aided the appeal to a national consciousness.

Alongside illustrations of bush life were to be found many drawings of street scenes, public buildings and urban industries, reflecting the affluence of Australian society in the eighties. Here the
atlases followed a pattern already established in the illustrated newspapers: the presentation of bush imagery revealed the reflexive attitude of an urban consciousness. Next to images of the cities' wealth and progress lay images from a rural past and present, suggesting how the achievements of the Australian Bush had made possible the cities' material growth and their present state of excellence.

The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia had a more marked effect upon the course of Australian art than its counterparts amongst the illustrated atlases. This was partly due to the fact that The Picturesque Atlas was the first major publication of its kind in Australia during the eighties. The Picturesque Atlas was the concern of an Anglo-Canadian firm which based its venture in Sydney, consequently confirming Sydney's role as the most important centre for black and white art in Australia. Work began on the three-volume publication in 1883, and Julian Ashton described how The Atlas brought with it 'quite an influx of talent'. Three American specialists in black and white work, Frederick B. Schell (as art editor), William T. Smedley and W.C. Fitler, came to Australia as staff artists for the project. They brought with them a wide experience of overseas training, a profound knowledge of illustrative practice and an awareness of more recent movements in art. Schell had previously worked in Canada on a similar publication, Picturesque Canada, while Smedley had studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art and the Académie Julian in Paris.

While the immigrant American artists offered a new standard of professionalism for the illustrator, The Picturesque Atlas significantly employed the best available talent amongst local artists. Tom Roberts, the Ashton brothers, Charles Turner, A. Henry Fullwood, Frank Mahony, John Mather, John Ford Paterson, Louis Buvelot, William
Macleod, William C. Piguenit and Madame Constance Roth all produced work for the *Atlas*.

An enterprise involving so many leading artists became widely known within art circles, while the issuing of *The Atlas* in monthly instalments from 1886 kept the publication continually in the public eye. By 1888 *The Picturesque Atlas* was reputed to have attracted 50,000 subscribers.

The influence of *The Atlas* was encouraged by the methods of illustrative reproduction commonly employed by the 1880s. Technological advances within the illustrative medium had helped dissolve the traditional distinctions between the 'fine arts' (paintings, water colours and original sketches and drawings) and the 'lowly' wood engraving of the newspapers. Original drawings were now transferred directly on to wood blocks by means of photography, after which they were engraved for reproduction. This technique meant that the graphic artist was no longer hampered by the size and limits of the wood block. In effect, illustrative work was no longer the prerogative of the specialist illustrator who drew directly on to the wood. And the publishers of *The Picturesque Atlas* could boast the very latest electric equipment and technical methods, with a standard of reproduction that rivalled the original fine art product: 'The finest and purest effects are to be striven for, and to realize what is called fine art printing'.

Photographic reproduction of original drawings on paper, cardboard or canvas made possible the participation of some of Australia's finest painters as black and white artists on *The Picturesque Atlas*.

Artists and the public were consequently aware of the original art works created for *The Atlas*, as well as its published reproductions. In 1885 an exhibition of paintings and drawings for *The Atlas* was held in George Rossi Ashton's studio in Collins Street, Melbourne. Tom Roberts contributed work at the exhibition alongside other notable
artists, including the Ashton brothers and A. Henry Fullwood. Two years later, a further exhibition was staged at the Athenaeum in Melbourne, and the growing prestige of The Picturesque Atlas is indicated by a press report that 'Amongst those present were His Excellency the Governor, Sir Henry E. Loch, and leading members of the journalistic, legal, medical and various other professions'. As The Picturesque Atlas gained public recognition, so too was the status of the illustrator enhanced. Since original works for The Atlas were exhibited in a fine art context, the distinction between fine artist and illustrator was no longer so relevant. Charles Conder, for example, appears to have been greatly enthused with the work of Sydney artists who worked on The Atlas. According to Table Talk (5 April 1889), after his arrival in Melbourne in 1888 Conder decorated his studio with their work:

... souvenirs of Sydney are scattered all over the room - sketches by Phil May, F.B. Schell, Mahony, Julian Ashton, Minns, Nerli and Madame Constance Roth.

Photography and illustration remained key pictorial sources for artists' drawings in the picturesque atlases. The necessity of portraying historical events, popular Australian figures or themes and remote bush areas naturally encouraged artists to employ readily available sources for their drawings and sketches (though admittedly, artists working on The Picturesque Atlas like Julian Ashton, Frederick Schell and William Macleod did travel as far afield as Brisbane, Perth, Darwin and New Zealand sketching picturesque views or local industries). Photography was a useful aid to the illustrator, even if it presented a challenge to his traditional role. As we have seen, by the 1880s photographers were able to capture an instantaneous impression of the flux and movement of the city streets. Several drawings in The Picturesque Atlas which portray the dynamic quality
of life on Sydney's streets appear to have been based on contemporary photographs by Charles Kerry or his employees.⁷⁶

But photography also posed a challenge to the illustrator's livelihood. Since the image to be reproduced could be directly photographed on to wood, the use of photographic sources could bypass the necessity for an illustrator to create an original image. Thus some illustrations in the atlases were engraved directly from photographs; for example, J.W. Lindt's photographs of Australian aborigines were reproduced in The Picturesque Atlas, with the acknowledgement of their source.⁷⁷

Faced with this apparent competition from photography, illustrators continued to employ photographic sources but reserved their right to lend them a more 'artistic' treatment. Nicholas Caire's magnificent photograph, Selector's Hut, Croajingalang, East Gippsland (La Trobe Library, Melbourne), from the early 1880s, was on several occasions used as a source by illustrators. The photography presents an image of nature's abundance and man's resourcefulness in the bush, and Caire reproduced it in his commercial albums for sale to an urban clientele.⁷⁸

The subject was not new in Australian art. Scenes of selectors' homesteads were frequently shown at the V.A.A. exhibitions in the seventies and eighties, and the subject was a customary one in the illustrated newspapers. These works usually conceived the selector's home as a focal point within a general, picturesque view of the landscape. Sometimes the subject was treated according to the 'cottage' genre stemming from Gainsborough in the eighteenth century.

Caire's photograph contrasts with earlier versions of the subject by limiting the drive into the distance and by focusing more intently on the figure of the selector. Caire's approach emphasizes his 'documentation' of the scene: tools and items used by the selector are deliberately clustered together towards the front plane of the
photograph. When William Smedley employed the photograph as the source for his drawing, 'A Bushman's Home', in *The Picturesque Atlas*, he ignored the rich clutter of detail in the photograph in the interests of aesthetic design. Instead, Smedley created more generalized areas of light and shade to evoke an 'artistic' mood in the scene, rather than exploiting the 'documentary' qualities implicit in the photograph. The addition of another figure adds a hint of narrative interest in Smedley's drawing.

William Hatherell isolated the central figure of Caire's photograph when he drew the selector 'At Home' for *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia* in 1888. Hatherell's drawing, which adds a dog at the selector's feet, emphasizes the anecdotal and sentimental appeal of the subject. There is little detail, so evident in the photograph, to suggest that the scene portrayed is specifically Australian. What emerges is a simpler, clichéd idea of 'a man and his dog' in a rural arcadia.

Once again, the choice and treatment of photographic sources in the atlases reinforced a latent urban bias in the presentation of bush imagery. Illustrators adhered to artistic conventions that were often more formally conservative than the photographic sources they employed.

For artists working on the atlases, the illustrated newspapers contained a wealth of visual material suitable for their purposes. In some cases, illustrations were simply 'lifted' from the newspapers for publication. Contemporary awareness of the colonial tradition was increased by the occasional reproduction or adaptation of paintings and sketches by artists like William Strutt, Robert Dowling or S.T. Gill. The landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay was a predictable subject for illustration in the atlases. The colonial artist, T.A. Gilfillan, had painted a picture of *Captain Cook Proclaiming New*
South Wales a British Possession, Botany Bay, 1770 in the early 1860s. The illustrator of the subject in The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia presented an adaptation of Gilfillan's painting, with a suitable acknowledgement of his source. A further example can be found in a close copy of Robert Dowling's Group of Natives of Tasmania, 1859 (Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston), which appeared without acknowledgement in Cassell's Picturesque Australasia in 1887.

More crucial for the development of the rural mythology in Australian art was the frequent use of S.T. Gill's published sketches. Gill's drawings and water colours were reproduced in several publications in the early 1850s and also appeared later in his Australian Sketchbook, published in 1864. Because of the general availability of Gill's work in reproductions, his sketches formed a convenient source for illustrators on the atlases. For example, William Smedley's illustration of gold-diggers 'Off to Bendigo' in The Picturesque Atlas was adapted directly (with acknowledgement) from Gill's published sketch, 'Diggers on the way to Bendigo'.

Rather than simply 'copying' his work, illustrators on the atlases sometimes employed Gill's sketches as a model for their own variations on a theme. Here Gill's influence became more diffused, but was nevertheless significant. By using Gill's sketches as the basis for their own conceptions, illustrators ensured a continuity of pictorial types and themes from the early colonial era until the 1880s; but their reinterpretation of Gill's work was often made with an awareness of more recent overseas movements in art. When painters consequently employed contemporary illustrations, based on Gill's original model, as the source for pictures, a further transformation occurred. (This phenomenon is discussed in a following chapter with regard to McCubbin's painting, Down on His Luck.)
The illustrated atlases reflected, rather than imitated, an emerging national consciousness in the eighties, but they provided a vital impetus for painters to treat contemporary subjects. The atlases focused attention on the artistic possibilites of the urban scene, through drawings of the hustle and bustle of city life and of gloomy and wet evenings on the city streets. Girolamo Nerli's and Conder's paintings of street scenes appear to have been influenced by the illustrations of visiting American artists, Frederick Schell and William Smedley, who excelled in the genre.\textsuperscript{86} Through its portrayal of night life on Sydney's streets, Nerli's painting, *Street Scene*, c. 1888 (National Gallery of Victoria) follows the example of Smedley's illustration, 'Saturday Night in George Street', in *The Picturesque Atlas*; both works can, in turn, be related to a contemporary photograph by Charles Kerry (or one of his employees) of *George Street By Market Street*, which similarly exploits the effect of reflections on the wet streets.\textsuperscript{87}

In its pictorial arrangement and motif, Conder's delightful painting, *How We Lost Poor Flossie*, 1889 (Art Gallery of South Australia), closely resembles an earlier drawing in *The Atlas of 'Spring Street'* by Smedley.\textsuperscript{88} Conder has characteristically pared down the scene and given it a narrower, more elegant format, perhaps reminding us of the Japanese screens beloved by the Aesthetic Movement. Certainly the title of Conder's earlier painting, *The Gray and Gold*, 1888 (Private Collection), bears an unmistakable Whistlerian ring. The picture of a fashionably dressed couple returning home at sunset has been simplified in the aesthetic mode to evoke a poetic mood. Conder's subject had again been anticipated in a drawing by Smedley in *The Atlas, 'The St Kilda Esplanade'*, which portrayed members of the bourgeoisie silhouetted against the street and the fading light of the sky.\textsuperscript{89} In 1889 Tom Roberts also took up the subject in his
comparable streetscape, now entitled *Going Home* (Australian National Gallery, Canberra). The aesthetic simplification of the scene is even more pronounced than in Conder's *Gray and Gold*, although the two paintings bear testimony to the close working relationship between the two artists at the time. Thus aspects of Aestheticism emerged in Australian art via the influence of the picturesque atlases. Artists' sharing of common sources in photography and illustration, then, did not preclude a personal response to the subject, nor did it prevent an individual awareness of contemporary styles overseas.

The whimsical relationship between fashionably dressed women and their small children portrayed in Conder's paintings is anticipated in numerous drawings in *The Picturesque Atlas*. Conder's *Departure of the s.s. Orient, Circular Quay, 1888* (Art Gallery of New South Wales) is enlivened by his delightfully sharp observation: on the left of the picture small children hang on to the skirts of their mothers, who are rapt in conversation, while on the right a woman with an umbrella hitches up her skirt to avoid the puddles of water. The elevated view of the scene had been foreshadowed in Julian Ashton's illustration of 'Shipping, Circular Quay' in *The Picturesque Atlas*, although here Ashton followed an established convention in photographic views of the area. Indeed, Charles Kerry's photograph of *Circular Quay* (Private Collection, Sydney) bears a remarkable resemblance to Conder's painting and possibly served as its source. The aerial view of the scene, with its zigzag arrangement of planes, is almost the same, while a steamer is similarly placed in the centre of the composition. Even the presence in Kerry's photograph of little girls dressed in pinafores might have appealed to an artist of Conder's sensibility and wit.

The atlases thus encouraged the portrayal of urban themes in painting at the same time as they were lending impetus to the painting
of distinctively Australian bush themes. The emergence of both urban and rural imagery, through the influence of the atlases, was understandable; they shared a common emphasis on contemporary subject matter. As the layout and presentation of the atlases makes clear, an increased involvement with bush imagery represented the reflex of a heightened urban consciousness. Certainly, the juxtaposition of scenes of bush and city life had been a feature of the illustrated newspapers for some years; but the prestige of the atlases provided the vital spark that saw a sudden upsurge of such subjects in contemporary painting.

The influence of the atlases upon paintings of rural themes will be discussed in following chapters. However, Frank Mahony and Julian Ashton can be singled out as two artists whose paintings of bush subjects were most clearly influenced by their illustrative work. Mahony illustrated the theme of the Australian stockman rounding up a straggler for *Victoria and Its Metropolis* in 1888 and for *The Picturesque Atlas* in 1888 (or 1889?), and he treated similar subjects for *The Aldine Centennial History of New South Wales* in 1888. These illustrations became the model for his large subject painting, *Rounding Up a Straggler* of 1889 (Art Gallery of New South Wales). Julian Ashton drew scenes of men panning for gold for *The Picturesque Atlas* and he later returned to the theme in his large painting of *The Prospector* of 1889 (Art Gallery of New South Wales). Ashton's painting, *Midday Rest*, c. late 1880s or early 1890s (David Levine Collection, Melbourne) employs precisely the same figure pose as that of the bushman in his earlier illustration of 'An Old Time Squatter' for *The Picturesque Atlas*. Even the details of the bushman's costume are the same.

Illustration had a more subtle and pervasive effect upon the portrayal of the bushman in Australian art. At the same time as
American illustrators were demonstrating the excellence of their work on *The Picturesque Atlas*, Australian painters sought inspiration in the black and white work readily available in American magazines. In an important but neglected passage in José's book, *The Romantic Nineties*, George Lambert summed up the significant influence of American illustrators upon Australian art of the period:

At this time the Americans, with their national aptitude for turning talent to ready uses, were crowding the work of artists into their magazines. In their best, such as *Harper’s* and *Scribner’s*, one found their best writers, illustrated by artists of equally high merit, distinguished both for their faithful representation of Nature, and their sensitive observance of the amenities of illustrating. Dana Gibson, Howard Pyle, Appleton Clarke, Maurice Greiffenhagen, Castaigne, Edwin Abbey - these names and what they stood for are remembered by me to this day; and the influence of this kind of art, though helpful in a high degree, was, perhaps, too forceful for our untrained minds. Lacking academic training ... the student naturally lacked a true perspective, and was inclined to look upon the skilful and dashing representation of modern incidents as something superseding the quiet, dignified expression of artists who lived in centuries when excellence of craftsmanship was considered to be of first importance.\(^6\)

Rather than being 'uniquely Australian', popular images of the bushman in paintings and illustrations of the period were frequently derived from the 'frontier imagery' of American prototypes. Magazines like *Harper’s Magazine* and *The Century Magazine* contain many articles and illustrations of the way of life of the western cowboy who, in the eighties, was emerging as a cult figure comparable with that of the Australian bushman.\(^7\) It is interesting to note that, according to Henry Lawson, Australian shearsers of the time were devotees of the American 'dime novels' which featured western cowboy heroes like Deadwood Dick.\(^8\) Thus the artists and the bushmen they portrayed
both enjoyed a secondhand participation in popular American culture. The ease with which American imagery was absorbed into the contemporary portrayal of the Australian bushman in art is demonstrated in several examples.

In 1884 George Rossi Ashton painted a water colour of a stockman entitled *The Prodigal*, which depicted a mounted stockman with whip flourishing as he herds some sheep from a waterhole. The figure was immediately recognized by contemporary critics as typically Australian:

... a young stockrider who has been compelled to exchange the gaiety and whirl of life in London, Paris and Vienna for the hard fare and loneliness of the Australian bush. (*The Argus*, 25 May 1884).

This ready identification of a recognizable 'national type' is compromise by the fact that the figure and compositional format of *The Prodigal* with its large-scale image of horse and rider dramatically silhouetted against land and sky, find a close parallel in innumerable illus-

Ashton soon produced a further variation on his *Prodigal* with an illustration of an Australian 'Boundary Rider' for *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*. The pictorial convention for representing the stockrider was, then, well established when the unknown E. Girardin exhibited a work at the 1893 Victorian Artists' Society exhibition under the very Australian-sounding title, *The Bushman*. Once again, the painting's subject and compositional arrangement were clearly indebted to the pictorial formula previously employed with notable success by George Rossi Ashton.

Australian artists of the period thus borrowed or adapted American pictorial sources to extol the virtues of an 'uniquely Australian' identity. With considerable justification, a contemporary writer
in The Age (2 April 1887) pointed out that in The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia

... so much of the art employed in the work and the materials used in its construction [are] derived from American sources. There is also a tendency, likewise observable in the illustrations to Harper's Monthly and Century to over-elaborate the picturesque feature of the pictures. ¹⁰³

Not only did the texts of publications like The Picturesque Atlas follow the pattern of American publications, but in some cases the 'frontier imagery' of illustrations was neatly transferred from one national context to suit another. In 1889, for example, the American firm of Harper and Brothers published Thomas W. Knox's book, The Boy Travellers in Australasia, which contained illustrations of a New Zealand 'shearing' scene and a bush 'sawyer'. These drawings were in fact simply 'lifted' from earlier editions of Harper's Magazine, where they had served to illustrate 'typical' episodes from American frontier life. ¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the most ironical example of the interchangeability of 'frontier imagery' with Australian subject matter can be found in the case of the American illustrator, W.T. Smedley, who in the eighties worked on The Pictorial Atlas in Sydney. On his return home, Smedley drew an illustration of an American 'Sheep-Shearing' scene for Harper's Magazine in 1889, which is virtually interchangeable with earlier Australian renditions of the subject in the illustrated atlases. ¹⁰⁵ Here one could conceivably argue that Smedley had employed Australian pictorial sources to extol the virtues of an 'uniquely American' identity.

VI

The popular media exercised a vital influence on the course of late nineteenth century Australian painting. In the 1870s photography
and illustration maintained a distinctively Australian figurative tradition when nationalistic figure subjects were generally eschewed by contemporary painters. By the 1880s, the treatment of urban and rural themes in painting was often inextricably fused with the combined influences of photography, newspaper illustration and the illustrated atlases.

The illustrated newspapers aimed to entertain, as well as to inform, a general audience, and their imagery consequently reflected prevailing societal concerns and popular myths of the period. At the same time, the exigencies of illustrative practice influenced, and almost controlled, the type of imagery produced in the newspapers. The work of contemporary illustrators and photographers reveals a hidden conflict between the demands of direct reporting and the use of a formula for their subject matter. As illustrators struggled to meet their weekly copy deadlines, they created a range of pictorial stereotypes for the portrayal of urban and rural themes. These standard images fulfilled the entertainment purposes of the newspapers, while they could be justified to the public on their ability to capture 'typical' or 'characteristic' episodes of Australian life. The recurrence of such thematic material over a long period laid the basis for a popular pictorial tradition of distinctively Australian themes.

The portrayal of bush imagery in the newspapers was deeply affected by the demands of illustrative practice. Since direct reporting of rural events was usually impossible, illustrations often relied upon standard pictorial formulae to portray 'typical' aspects of bush life. Photographs formed a common source for their bush illustrations, but artists used them selectively. In many cases, the photographs they employed had been taken with an urban clientele in mind. The effect was to reinforce a latent urban bias in the presentation of bush imagery.
Significantly, we find the earliest surviving pictorial examples of the Heidelberg artists' treatment of nationalistic themes in the sphere of illustration rather than painting. This is indicative of a period when the professions of fine artist, illustrator and photographer were closely inter-related. When the Heidelberg artists began to produce illustrative work in the early 1880s, the prestige of the illustrator had been enhanced by an influx of talented artist-illustrators from overseas. Julian Ashton, in particular, showed that illustrative subjects from the newspapers could be adapted for paintings of genre and bush subjects. Illustrative work thus influenced the Heidelberg artists in two important ways: it directed their attention to the painting of contemporary figure subjects at the same time as it made them aware of their heritage in earlier colonial art.

The influences of photography and illustration on Australian painting were consolidated with the emergence of the illustrated atlases in the mid-1880s. The prestige of these publications further increased the status of the illustrator; the existence of original art works for the atlases minimized distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art. Drawings in the atlases reaffirmed an interest in the themes of colonial art, while the presentation and treatment of bush subjects revealed an urban consciousness of the Australian bush that was a feature of the illustrated newspapers. Even the popular imagery of the bushman in the atlases was not as 'uniquely Australian' as might easily be thought; in numerous cases it derived from corresponding 'frontier imagery' of American prototypes.

The illustrated atlases gave impetus to the painting of both contemporary urban and rural subjects in the late 1880s. They were to remain an important source for painters treating nationalistic themes. The *Picturesque Atlas* had established Sydney's role as the
home of black and white art in Australia. But young artists still had to learn their artistic vocabulary as figure painters. Here Melbourne took the lead in the 1880s.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 2


2 For further discussion of Bastien-Lepage and his influence, see the following Chapter 6 on Tom Roberts in this thesis.


4 Lionel Lindsay, 'Tom Roberts' in *Art in Australia*, No 8, 1921, n.p.


10 Prints of Caire's *The Sick Bushman* and *Down On His Luck* are held by the La Trobe Library, Melbourne; Jack Cato, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.


12 See the discussion in Chapter 6.


19 William Moore, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 108; Frank S. Greenhop, A History of Magazine Publishing in Australia, Sydney, 1947. Earlier illustrated newspapers in both Sydney and Melbourne in the 1850s and 1860s, such as The Illustrated Melbourne Post, played an early role in disseminating popular imagery, but the popular pictorial tradition can be said to have become firmly established with the appearance of the weekly illustrated papers published by The Argus, The Age and others in the mid 1860s and early 1870s. For the earlier illustrated papers and magazines see Marguerite Mahood, The Loaded Line: Australian Political Caricature, 1788-1901, Melbourne University Press, 1973, and Alan McCulloch, Artists of the Australian Gold Rush, Melbourne, 1977.


26 Ibid., pp 39ff; Peter Quartermaine, 'Speaking to the Eye', op. cit., p. 65.


28 Cf. the discussion in Ann Galbally, Frederick McCubbin, op. cit., pp. 70-74.

29 Caire's photographs of the Black Spur were widely reproduced, cf. No 18 in Nicholas J. Caire, Views of Victoria (General Series), Melbourne, 1877; copy in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne; Catalogue of The Sixth Exhibition of the Victorian Academy of Arts, 1876; copy in the State Library of Victoria.

was in fact drawn by J.H. Carse, despite the caption to the engraving which reads 'J.C. Armytage, from a Photograph'. Scheding also dates Carse's *On the Murray* to 1869 (under the title of *The Punt, Echuca, South Australia*), although I have been unable to verify this date. If Scheding is correct, then the chronology of the painting and illustrations would have to be rearranged. However, the general point about the interrelationship of the images still holds.


33 See the student lists in the *Annual Report(s) of the Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, 1870 to 1891*, State Archives of Victoria; *The Lone Hand*, July 1907, p. 306; 'A Short Biography of Walter Withers', *op. cit.*, p. 6.

34 Jack Cato, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-94, 106; Andrew Barrie was enrolled as a student at the Gallery School in 1878, according to the student lists.


36 R.H. Croll, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 23 and 49; *Table Talk*, 27 April 1888, 12 April 1889, 2nd August 1889 (*Table Talk* references previously cited by Virginia Spate, 'Tom Roberts and Australian Impressionism', p. 36.)


38 For a discussion of Roberts' attitude to illustrative work during his Sydney period, see the following chapter 6.


40 See further discussion in the chapter on Roberts.

41 *Victorian Gold Diggings and Diggers As They Are By S.T.G.*, Melbourne, 1852(?); the La Trobe Library, Melbourne, possesses an original watercolour of the *Unlucky Digger that never returned*, signed and dated by Gill, 1853; Gill's pair of published sketches, the *Unlucky Digger and Lucky Digger that returned*, were based on the format established in slightly earlier illustrations, such as George Strafford's 'The Water Seeker' and 'The Gold Seeker', published in *The Illustrated Australian Magazine*, January 1851, reproduced in Alan McCulloch, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

The Lost Bushman, or The Unfortunate Digger That Never Returned was published as one of a series of 12 lithographs in Sketches of Australian Life and Scenery. An original is in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne; the date and artist are unknown.

Cf. Mary Holyoake, 'Art Unions - Catalysts of Australian Art' in ART and Australia, vol. 12, No 4, April 1975.

An Illustrated Poem, Orara, By Henry Kendall, Art Union of Victoria, Melbourne, 1881. Plate VIII was drawn by C.D. Richardson and plates IX and X by Tom Roberts.


The Ashtons' drawings are reproduced in The Australasian Sketcher, 14 January 1882.

For Julian Ashton's early life and career, see Table Talk, 24 April 1891; cf. Leigh Astbury, 'Julian Ashton's Midday Rest' in A Treasury of Australian Art from the David Levine Collection (David Levine, Mary Eagle, Jan Minchin et al.), Rigby Australia, 1981, p. 16.

Cf. Julian Ashton, op. cit., p. 13, for Ashton's knowledge of George Clausen, one of Lepage's English followers, before Ashton left England for Australia.


Ashton's painting, A Chip off the Old Block, was reproduced in The Illustrated Australian News, 2 August 1879; cf. Ann Galbally, Frederick McCubbin, op. cit., p. 75.

These qualities were noted in Ashton's work by contemporary critics, cf. The Age, 12 April 1879.

J.S. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 54; cf. 'Notes by Frederick McCubbin', ed. Ann Galbally, op. cit., p. 76.


Reference owed to Dr Ann Galbally, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

Reference owed to Dr Ann Galbally, op. cit., p. 34.

J.S. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 54
59 I owe this reference to Dr Ann Galbally.

60 Julian Ashton, op. cit., p. 35.


67 Andrew Garran, (ed.), op. cit. (3 vols; E.E. Morris (ed.), *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia* (4 vols), Melbourne, 1887-1889; Alexander Sutherland (ed.), op. cit. George Rossi Ashton was, significantly, the art editor of this publication.


71 *Table Talk*, 4 May 1888; *The Picturesque Atlas* began publication of some of its parts in 1886, but parts were still being issued in 1889, cf. *The Age*, 2 April 1887.


73 *The Age*, 5 November 1885; *The Argus*, 31 October 1885.

74 *The Illustrated Australian News*, 2 April 1887, p. 55.
For example, Julian Ashton's drawing, 'King Street, From the Corner of George Street', in Andrew Garran, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 79; cf. a photograph, *George Street, Sydney*, reproduced in *Federated Australian Photographic Views*, London, n.d., vol. 2, p. 359. The 'cutting' of the form of the coach on the left of the photograph, which is repeated in an identical place in Ashton's drawing, is an interesting example of how a 'photographic vision' influenced illustrators' portrayal of street scenes.


Caire's photograph was reproduced as No 2 in his album *Gippsland Scenery* (cf. H 27471 Mc 10, Dr. 3, La Trobe Library, Melbourne). The accompanying caption emphasizes the 'most out of the way locality' of the scene and its curiosity value for urban audiences.


For example, the Colonial and Indian Exhibition which took place in London in 1886-87 led to the publication of the *Illustrated Handbook of Victoria, Australasia*, Melbourne, 1886. One of the illustrations, 'A Victorian Selector's Homestead' by J.A. Turner, had previously appeared in *The Australasian Sketcher*, 25 September 1880.

Andrew Garran, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 8; Gilfillan's painting was in *The Philosophical Institute of Victoria* in the 1880s, but it was reproduced in colour in *The Illustrated Sydney News* in 1865, and this may have been the source used by the artist on *The Atlas*, cf. Frank Greenhop, *op. cit.*, p. 144.


Andrew Garran, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 169; *Victorian Gold Diggings and Diggers As They Are by S.T.G.*, *op. cit*; an original watercolour of Gill's Diggers on the Road to Bendigo is held by the La Trobe Library, Melbourne. Gill carried forward some of his conceptions from his earlier published sketchbooks of the 1850s to his *Australian Sketchbook* of 1864. For example, the 'Stockman' in *The Australian Sketchbook* also appears in his earlier publications.

The urban street scene, often portraying wet reflective street surfaces, was a popular genre in contemporary European and American painting. Such paints suggest the influence of photography, see Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 2nd ed. 1974, esp. pp 244-45.


89 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 209 (upper illustration).

90 Cf. Ursula Hoff, Charles Conder, op. cit., p. 23.

91 Andrew Garran, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 65; Ashton's illustration is remarkably similar to a contemporary photograph of Circular Quay, possibly by Kerry. The photograph is reproduced in Alan Birch and David S. Macmillan, The Sydney Scene, 1788-1960, Melbourne, 1962, opposite p. 220, under the title 'Circular Quay and Mort's building from the north-east, 1892'. A letter from the Mitchell Librarian to the writer (17 November 1978) says that they have been unable to locate the photograph, which is supposedly in their collection. The dating of the photograph to '1892' thus cannot be confirmed.

92 Further examples could be produced to show the influence of the atlases upon paintings of urban themes. George Rossi Ashton's painting of the interior of an iron foundry, Toil and Trouble, exhibited at the May 1889 V.A.S. exhibition, introduces a genre almost unknown in Australian art until that time, although such scenes had been previously treated in the illustrated newspapers. Ashton's painting can be compared with a similar scene, 'Ladling', published in Cassell's Picturesque Australasia (vol. 4, p. 185) in 1889. This drawing is again remarkably similar to a contemporary photograph, reproduced in Federated Australian Photographic Views, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 353.


94 Ashton's drawings were 'Gold Sluicing, Beechworth' and 'Miners "Panning-Out"', Andrew Garran, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 310 and 361.


Ashton's *The Prodigal* is reproduced in George Galway, *Fifty Years of Australian Art by Members of the Royal Art Society*, Sydney, 1929, p. 102; the theme of the 'prodigal' Australian bushman became a literary motif in the late nineteenth century, for example, the character of Willoughby in Furphy's *Such is Life*.


Girardin's *The Bushman* is reproduced in the 1893 *Victorian Artists' Society Exhibition Catalogue*, held in the State Library of Victoria; Ashton's *Prodigal* was published as an engraving by the Art Society of New South Wales in 1884 and was thus probably widely known.

*Harper's Magazine* and *The Century Magazine* were widely available in Australia at the time. The State Library of Victoria, for example, holds a complete run of contemporary issues. Frederick McCubbin read *Harper's Magazine* and cut out illustrations from the magazine for his scrapbook.


W.T. Smedley's signed and dated drawing (October 1889), 'Sheep-Shearing', appears in *Harper's Magazine*, vol. LXXX, 1889-90, p. 689; see further discussion of illustrations of shearing scenes in the chapter on Tom Roberts.
Regional differences between Melbourne and Sydney's art worlds of the 1880s and 1890s played a decisive role in the emergence of an Australian national ethos in figure painting. The development of figure painting can be usefully viewed as the story of dual movements in both cities, with the artistic impetus shifting from Melbourne in the eighties to Sydney in the nineties. In the previous chapter, we saw how the involvement of both Melbourne and Sydney artists with black and white illustrations in the eighties fostered an interest in contemporary subjects and nationalistic themes. Sydney can more justifiably claim to be the 'home' of black and white art in the eighties. This was largely due to the influence of *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, the first and most important of the major illustrated atlases of the mid-eighties, whose production was mainly centred in Sydney. Not only did *The Picturesque Atlas* offer a means of economic support for several established and 'trained' Sydney artists, but its impact on younger artists was a formative one. As George Lambert later acknowledged, the prevailing interest in illustrative work in Sydney during the eighties and nineties encouraged the influence of American frontier imagery upon 'untrained minds' of younger artists 'lacking academic training'.

Against the practical involvement of established Sydney artists with black and white illustration in the eighties, must be measured Melbourne's greater success in training young figure painters at the Gallery School during the same period. Historically, Sydney lagged behind Melbourne in its development of art educational and art training institutions. Melbourne's National Art Gallery had opened in 1861, and the broad educational aims of its founders are evident in the
words of one of the original advisers, Sir Charles Eastlake, who foresaw that 'the proposed Gallery will serve to assist the practice of young artists in Australia, as well as form the taste of the public...' 2 Sydney's Art Gallery, on the other hand, was not opened until 1874. 3 The educational and moral endeavour of furthering 'correct taste' also partly underlay the foundation of two art institutions in Melbourne in 1870: the Victorian Academy of the Arts and the Art School of the National Gallery of Victoria, both being proudly modelled on English forebears. 4 The 'British' aspirations of Melbourne's intellectual leaders of the 1870s, who were responsible for the establishment of such institutions, have been summed up by Ann-Mari Jordens:

They dreamt of inculcating into all sections of colonial society, the best of British and European culture, thereby bringing about national unity. 5

Admittedly, Sydney quickly followed Melbourne's example when it formed the New South Wales Academy of Art in 1871, and established art classes in connection with the Academy by 1875. After this seemingly promising beginning, the ensuing history of art training in New South Wales is a chequered one, with the viability and future of art instruction hanging precariously on the successive fortunes of the different art societies as they won and lost control of the local art scene. Certainly in the 1880s, no major nationalistic figure subjects were painted by students attending the art classes of the Art Society of New South Wales. It was only when Julian Ashton took over the Society's art classes in 1892 that art education in the colony gained a more stable and profitable footing. 6 But by then, Melbourne's National Gallery School, under the leadership of George Folingsby in the eighties, had already produced a group of locally trained artists who lent a vital new direction to Australian figure painting of the
period. Earlier in the 1870s, students at Melbourne's Gallery School had expressed a positive desire to become figure painters, an aim which reflected the tastes of their public. How the figure paintings of Folingsby's students fulfilled the cultural expectations of their Melbourne audience in the eighties is the subject of this chapter.

The active encouragement that Melbourne's public gave to the local Gallery School is an important reflection of the cultural aspirations of Marvellous Melbourne. Francis Adams wrote of the 'general sense of movement, of progress, of conscious power' that characterized Melbourne in the eighties, compared with the slower-moving, more old-fashioned tempo of life in Sydney. 'Melbourne is the phenomenal city of Australia,' Adams declared, 'and its people have in it a pride which is a passion'. For overseas visitors, there was something about 'the hustle and life' of Melbourne which suggested an 'American-style' city, while 'there is a certain picturesqueness and old-fashionedness about Sydney, which brings back pleasant memories of Old England.' Writing in 1886, J.A. Froude was deeply impressed by the energy, confidence and material wealth of Marvellous Melbourne:

Our Colony, and Melbourne as its capital, have evidently a brilliant future before them. They cannot miss it. The resources of the country - pastoral, agricultural, and mineral - are practically unbounded. The people, so clever and energetic, will not fail to develop them.

A less perceptive observer of colonial mores than either Adams or Richard Twopeny, Froude was nevertheless able to discern the British values that underlay the ostentatious self-display of this 'American-style' city: 'Almost every leading man is professedly loyal to the connection with England, and the people generally, I think, are really and at heart loyal'.

Melbourne announced its confidence in the future prosperity of the eighties with a grand International Exhibition which opened on 10
October 1880. An audience of 15,000 people packed the Great Hall of the recently completed Exhibition Building to hear speeches eulogizing Melbourne's wonderful material progress. The chief commissioner of the Exhibition, the Hon. W.J. Clarke, spoke in rapturous terms of...

... the contrast presented by the scene here displayed and that which existed less than 45 years ago where Melbourne now stands. Then it was an unknown part of a comparatively unknown land ... Today you are opening an International Exhibition in a large city, where you are surrounded by the accredited representatives of the great nations of Europe, Asia and America, and articles illustrating the growth, produce, manufactures, arts and sciences of the whole world, while this assemblage testifies not only to the wealth and culture, but to the energy and enterprise, of the colonists.

The Governor, the Marquis of Normanby, responded by affirming 'the enterprise, intelligence and industry of its population, to bring to a successful conclusion this grand project', and finally, in the name of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, declared the exhibition open.¹⁰

The colony of Victoria, with Melbourne as its figurehead, was seen to be taking its rightful place with older countries of the world in the field of industry.¹¹ The flagrant display of Victoria's material wealth was undoubtedly the keynote of the Exhibition, but this was justified by the Exhibition's promoters on the grounds of its moral and educative value to the public. Announcing the forthcoming Exhibition in 1878, Victoria's Premier, Graeme Berry, had stipulated that 'the Exhibition Building was to be an educational establishment, showing the industrial progress of the people from year to year'. When the Exhibition opened, The Argus newspaper (which had originally opposed the idea of an exhibition) felt forced to concede that it would 'prove an educational agency of the highest value'. The Age, on the other hand, was a strong supporter of the concept of the Exhibition and,
after its conclusion, the paper indeed found that 'the effect on higher education has been ... remarkable; pictures, statuary, and art manufactures have been brought under the notice of all classes'.

Thus the advance of material progress was popularly seen to bring with it the higher and nobler benefits of art and culture. This theme was to be reiterated in Melbourne's newspaper editorials and art criticism throughout the 1880s. For example, in his review of the 1881 Victorian Academy of the Arts exhibition, The Age critic (12 March 1881) asked:

Why should Victoria, so ostentatiously proud of her more material achievements, not extend to art the stimulating influence ... of substantial aid ... It is the high water-mark of every civilized nation ... Nowhere is the link that contemporaries saw between material progress and the growth of artistic refinements better illustrated than in an Argus editorial (2 August 1888) on the 1888 Centennial Exhibition:

While the Exhibition is devoted to Commerce, we are glad of the generous recognition of art as her hand-maiden.

In a nation's history, intellectual and artistic culture comes last. First there is the stern necessity of manual work, then the adoption of every invention that renders labour more economical and more valuable, and in the end the production of a specific art and literature, and the cultivation of those things that conduces to the most highest and refined greatness of a people.

A specific art and literature would thus arise naturally out of a materially rich society. While the signs of this material achievement were most clearly visible in the cities, the editorial writer went on to make the prophetic suggestion that the 'soul' of an established, prosperous nation might be found outside the city's confines: 'Then a painter may arise who will embody the spirit of the lonely bush ...'
By the early 1880s, a large section of Melbourne society now felt ready, even obliged, to follow higher cultural pursuits. At the 1880 Exhibition, the picture galleries were the best attended section of the entire exhibition. The public were expected to derive 'educational' benefits from seeing the vast array of art works, a point clearly made in The Handbook to the Picture Gallery and Works of Art:

We may here compare all these schools with each other and with our own, remarking for instruction, faults and beauties, both in colour, choice and treatment. It will be hard indeed, if we do not derive some instruction from the opportunities the Exhibition affords.¹³

Writing in 1883, Richard Twopeny also recognized the manner in which art was popularly allied with notions of the betterment of public 'taste' and education. 'The Press', he commented, 'is very energetic in fostering taste, but I don't think it is natural to the people.' Twopeny took a more pessimistic view of the educational value of the Art Galleries at the 1880 International Exhibition. The public's thirst for art did not appear to encompass the finer points of artistic discrimination and judgement. As Twopeny put it:

They like pictures somewhat as the savage does, because they appeal readily to the imagination, and tell a story which can be read with very little trouble.¹⁴

Twopeny's criticism of the popular taste of Melbourne's art public may at first appear unduly harsh, but his isolation of the widespread appeal of narrative pictures was, as we shall see, a particularly relevant observation. The public generally admired art works which closely reflected, rather than challenged, their own tastes. Underlying their attitude may be sensed the self-confident outlook of Melbourne society in the eighties. On the other hand, the provincial pride felt in Melbourne's prosperity was conducive to the search for nationalistic subjects in art. For nationalistic subjects would bear
testimony to the colony's ability to produce a distinctive and individual culture of its own. In a society where material progress was popularly linked with the development of art, education and culture, it was perhaps inevitable that Melbourne's art public should look to their local gallery school for evidence of the city's cultural achievements.

Melbourne's art scene in the eighties was given new impetus and variety through the arrival of a group of immigrant painters who had previously trained overseas. No doubt some of these foreign artists had been attracted to Melbourne's shores by its reputation as a thriving and prosperous metropolis. Arthur Loureiro arrived in 1884, having studied in Paris and Rome; Charles Rolando, who had trained in England but spent time in Italy, arrived around 1884-85; Ugo Catani arrived in 1885, after earlier studies at the Florence Academy; another Italian painter, Girolamo Nerli, spent a year in Melbourne around 1885-86; Carl Kahler arrived from Munich in the mid-eighties. With the exception of Nerli, these immigrant painters were to figure prominently in the formation and exhibitions of the Art Association of Australia and the Victorian Artists' Society in the mid- and late 1880s. They thus brought a close knowledge of 'continental' art methods to the awareness of local painters and also to the public through exhibitions. As we shall see, the predominantly British cast of Melbourne's cultural aspirations in the eighties led to a popular bias against 'foreign' styles and techniques in art. This was an added reason why Melbourne's art public looked just as favourably upon student works at the Gallery School for signs of cultural progress, as they did towards the work of 'professional' artists in the local art societies.

In the late 1870s, Melbourne had also seen the arrival of several immigrant painters of British origins. Julian Ashton arrived in 1878
and his brother, George, a year later in 1879. When the s.s. Kent reached Melbourne on 1 July 1879, it brought with it a fifty-year-old artist, George Frederick Folingsby. From Folingsby, young Melbourne painters in the eighties were to learn their artistic vocabulary as figure painters.

II

'The man who paints landscape out of doors is a d---- fool.' Those who regard the Heidelberg School as primarily a group of *plein-airiste* landscape painters will have difficulty in accommodating Folingsby's opinion. Folingsby was master of the art school of the National Gallery of Victoria from 1882 until his death in 1891. As master, he taught a number of the most prominent members of the Heidelberg group - McCubbin, David Davies, Aby Altson, John Longstaff and others. Could his influence have been so reactionary?

It is tempting to expect the influence wielded by a leading figure will be both innovatory and radical, but Folingsby hardly supports this expectation. He was an artist thoroughly schooled in academic practice; his primary interest lay in figure painting.

Far from rebelling against an academic training, leading students at the Gallery School in the 1870s actually sought a full academic curriculum based on the study of the human figure. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, they felt frustrated by the teaching methods of the painting master, Eugène von Guérard. Throughout their training, he had confined their attention solely to one academic practice: that of repeatedly copying the pictures in the Gallery's collection. The more ambitious students were forced to develop their own resources to supplement the meagre instruction offered by von Guérard. Their activities included the establishment of a life class of their own and the formation of a subject sketch class, both ventures being indicative of their ambition to become figure painters.
In 1880, thirty-six students, including Roberts, McCubbin and Charles Douglas Richardson, expressed their dissatisfaction with their training in a petition to the Trustees. They desired 'the application of our skill to higher work and original composition'. This teaching, they said, could only be obtained from 'an accomplished and enthusiastic artist'.

These endeavours branded them as 'rebels' against authority within the confined circle of the Gallery School, but not outside it. The dominant taste of the Melbourne art scene of the 1870s and 1880s was largely unsympathetic to the broader, plein-air effects of the French School. These, of course, were the qualities that the Heidelberg artists were to display in their landscapes. The prevailing emphasis was that of the English academic tradition expressed in the critical judgements of Ruskin. The most prized technical qualities were 'draughtsmanship', 'finish' and the exact rendition of minute details.

Good technique was seen as a necessary requirement for the most complete expression of the 'subject' of a painting, which was evaluated in terms of its literary, poetical or sentimental significance in accordance with Victorian taste. In narrative pictures, an overt appeal to popular sentiment or pathos did not have the derogatory associations we might place on it today. Similarly, the landscape artist could 'interpret' his subject by suggesting poetical or anecdotal nuances, rather than merely describing the landscape's local characteristics.

Critics occasionally drew attention to the limitations of simply evaluating a painting according to its narrative interest, but the public were generally less guarded in their enthusiasm for narrative pictures. The writer of The Argus editorial (18 September 1891) aptly summed up the public's preferences when he remarked:
We do not doubt for a moment that an artist may see many points in a picture from which the general public may turn away or which they regard as a conundrum. But the painter ... appeals to the public and the picture which tells its own story and is finished in every detail will be as useful to the art student as it is pleasing to the ordinary gallery visitor.

Folingsby's arrival at the school to replace von Guérard had a 'magical effect' amongst the students, Alexander Colquhoun later recalled. His reputation as a figure painter partly accounts for his charismatic effect. Students were familiar with two of his history paintings in the Gallery: Bunyan in Prison, acquired in 1864, and First Meeting of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, commissioned 1879. Since his arrival in the colony in July 1879, Folingsby had quickly established a reputation as a portrait painter.

Folingsby's art was in the traditional mould in terms of technique and subject matter. His art and teaching methods formed the students' most vital and immediate contact with an academic tradition. It was this contact with tradition which they positively sought. Folingsby's influence as a teacher at the Gallery School, then, cannot be readily separated from the impact of his own art and the techniques he employed.

Naturally enough, he was to impart to his students both the artistic influences and the teaching methods derived from his wide experience of studios and academies in Europe. Born in Ireland in 1828, Folingsby commenced his studies at the Royal Academy, London. Alexander Colquhoun later recalled that he never spoke of it 'with more than a qualified regard' to his Melbourne students. At the age of eighteen, he left for New York, where he attended the National Academy of Design and drew for the illustrated papers. The death of his father prompted his return to Ireland, but it was not long before he began a period of
wide travel through Europe and Asia Minor. His travels and his experience as an illustrator may have been a factor in Folingsby's sympathy for locally available material as a source of subject matter.

The most formative influence on Folingsby's art was the result of his experience in the leading studios and academies of Germany and France. In 1852, he began studying drawing at the Munich Academy, where he underwent a rigorous academic training, drawing from life for three hours every evening. After a stay of two years, he journeyed to Paris, a 'pilgrimage' undertaken by many leading German artists of his generation. There he studied under Thomas Couture for six months. The French ateliers, too, placed emphasis on the study from life of the nude model in the acquisition of good drawing. Given this background, it is hardly surprising that Folingsby embraced the academic notion of the primacy of drawing in art, and passed it on to his Melbourne students.

The most crucial development in Folingsby's art took place when he returned to Munich around 1855 to spend five years studying under Karl von Piloty. During this time, Folingsby's interest in history painting matured and he acquired painting techniques which he later introduced to his Melbourne students. Von Piloty was the leading German exponent of a pseudo-naturalistic style of history painting, a tradition distinct from the epic-heroic history painting practised by the German Nazarenes. His choice of subjects was wide-ranging. They were more frequently chosen from 'national' history than from Christian or classical mythology.

Piloty had been strongly influenced by the history paintings of Paul Delaroche, under whom he studied in Paris. Delaroche popularized a new approach to history painting which affected greater realism in treatment, a 'slice of life' approach. It exploited the psychological
drama of events leading up to, or succeeding, a major historical tragedy, rather than depicting the main event at the height of its action.

The figures in Piloty's history paintings were not given a 'timeless setting' but were placed against specific and localized backgrounds. Careful attention was given to minor details; figures were portrayed in costume thought to be distinctive of the nationality and period represented. Piloty's 'realistic' treatment of the subject tended to blur the traditional distinction between the 'elevated' history painting and the modern genre piece. 'History' paintings of Piloty's school frequently concentrated on anecdotal or incidental scenes, and not on significant and momentous occasions conceived within the grand style.

After his years under Piloty, Folingsby set up a studio in Munich and subsequently established a reputation as a history and portrait painter. He exhibited with success in European cities and at the Royal Academy, London. His range of subjects reveals an ability to move easily from history paintings conceived against genre backgrounds to subject paintings of a more contemporary and domestic kind - an ability shared by many of Folingsby's contemporaries in the field of figure painting. Folingsby's Melbourne students later acquired a similar flexibility in their range of figure subjects.

Folingsby's large history paintings like Bunyan in Prison are carefully organized compositions, meticulously finished. Light falling against the background wall forces the central figure of Bunyan into sharp relief. He is shown preaching to the prisoners, his left arm raised impressively in a gesture of exhortation. By Bunyan's side is his blind daughter, who raises her face to her father's voice. The sombre, grey to light brown background colour of Bunyan in Prison is organized into broad and harmonious tonal masses, typical of the Munich
School. The painting reveals Folingsby's command of sharp realistic
details and his particular interest in depicting the textured effects
of rusticated surfaces.

A series of painted studies for Bunyan in Prison in the National
Gallery of Victoria suggests that, in working out the composition,
Folingsby's first concern was the psychological drama of the event.
Bunyan's pose and gesture are a recurring motif, providing a focal
point for Folingsby's experimentation with alternative arrangements of
the minor figures and background. By concentrating on the gesture of
the main character, Folingsby succeeds in isolating a significant
moment upon which the whole drama depends.

Other painted studies in the National Gallery of Victoria confirm
Folingsby's fondness for depicting incidents of dramatic discovery or
confrontation. The action is often organized diagonally or laterally
across an interior space, which he tends to open up by placing a half-
revealed figure in an open doorway or behind a curtain at one edge of
the picture. The drama taking place inside is thus related to the
outside world. Folingsby was employing here a thoroughly conventional
means of organizing a subject picture. A number of his students were
to find that the same convention could be readily manipulated to suit
specifically Australian subjects.

Folingsby's studies also demonstrate that he followed the practice
of his French teacher, Couture, and of Piloty's Munich School, by first
blocking in the forms of the figures with vermilion and bitumen\(^{23}\), and
he introduced this procedure to his Melbourne students.\(^{24}\) The
excessive use of bitumen often has disastrous effects in terms of the
conservation of pictures, while it is obviously antithetical to plain-
aireiste painting techniques. Folingsby's active encouragement of its
use has become so notorious that it has obscured the extent of his
positive influence upon his students.
Folingsby's interests extended beyond historical subjects and formal portraiture to genre pieces of the sentimental and anecdotal variety. The companion subjects Hope and Recovery were exhibited in Melbourne in 1885. Hope showed 'a poor little child, with wan, drawn face and eyes' lying in her sickbed, a theme appealing unashamedly to Victorian sentiment. And yet, its typically Victorian subject matter is echoed in many student works at the Gallery. McCubbin's paintings of children lost in the bush continued to appeal to the Victorian interest in the plight and misfortune of innocents.

Architectural studies formed part of the necessary repertoire of the Victorian genre and historical painter. Folingsby's studies of architecture display a sense of clear space and concentrate on the textural effects of rusticated surfaces. Not only can these studies be related to certain student works of this genre by McCubbin and Alexander Colquhoun, but they also share close similarities with the depiction of backgrounds in students' figure paintings.

Although Folingsby was primarily interested in figure paintings, he actively encouraged his students' involvement with landscape painting. His studies reveal that he held to the academic distinction between the painted landscape sketch and the finished work completed in the studio. Some, like the study of a sunset and sleeping figure, have a broad, fluent handling, while the more finished sketches, with their accents upon the edges of the forms, belong more to the tonal tradition of the Barbizon School. The status of landscape rose in the subject hierarchy of the official nineteenth century academy, and students in the French ateliers were encouraged to paint landscape sketches directly from nature in preparation for the finished picture. Folingsby's Melbourne students were also encouraged to paint landscape sketches en plein air. A student later recalled that at the rear of the Gallery there was a
large open space which was 'turned into an out of door painting
ground, and in the days of early summer easels might be seen dotted here
and there among the shrubs, masonry and lumber that littered the place'.

Students under Folingsby generally inherited the unfortunate use
of bitumen, but they were able to draw profitably on other aspects of
his practice as an artist. Von Guérard had confined their attention
to copying pictures in the collection. By contrast, Folingsby's
教学方法 were bound to appear new and exciting. Folingsby
immediately abolished the practice of copying, and completely reorganized
the curricula of the Gallery School. He introduced a systematic and
sequential course of instruction, the influence of which was increasingly
felt as the school progressed.

Following the practice of the French ateliers, Folingsby's students
in the School of Painting began to learn the art of composition through
the study of still life, while simultaneously mastering drawing by the
study of the life model and the antique. Folingsby personally superv-
ised a nude life class for his students in the evenings since, in his
own words, 'the acquisition of good drawing can only be attained by long
practice in drawing from, and a thorough knowledge of, the human
figure'. A student work by Emmanuel Phillips Fox in the Joseph

71 Brown Collection shows that he drew sensitive studies of the nude model
in these classes. Students were also introduced to figure painting
through the painting of draperies and life models.

By 1883 they were being taught to paint heads from life. Folingsby's
own head studies suggest that the students were taught in the French
manner of Couture to lay in the outlines and shadows with a 'reddish-
brown sauce' and then progressively to lighten the tonal areas to
produce a sense of form. The next stage was the painting of complete
figure compositions under Folingsby's direction. A traditional
academic emphasis on good drawing remained the basis of his instruction. His general advice to students was to 'get good drawing into it', and 'keep it broad and simple'.

The thoroughness with which students learned the basic skills of their craft under Folingsby is apparent in Aby Altson's large-scale subject picture, *A Fisherboy* (Ballarat Art Gallery), exhibited at the 1887 Student Exhibition. Within a dark genre interior, a kneeling, bare-footed boy is seen sorting fish from a wicker basket. The background is broadly painted in the thick, bituminous impasto that Folingsby so often employed. Altson's handling of the creamy pink flesh tones of the boy's face, with the stronger shadows indicated by a deep vermilion, also recalls his teacher's head studies. The figure has been carefully studied and painted from a posed model, and Altson devoted special attention to the clear articulation of the boy's left hand and bare foot. Despite the painting's technical proficiency, it still reveals its origins as a somewhat contrived student 'exercise'. There is a certain 'frozen' awkwardness in the pose of the figure which can barely sustain the narrative implications of the subject. The conspicuously displayed fish and baskets in the foreground seem to have been conceived and treated as a separate still-life motif. As a result, the composition has a rather 'stilted', unnatural appearance, and its separate elements fail to cohere into a satisfactory whole. Nevertheless, Altson's *Fisherboy* shows how he had methodically absorbed the successive stages of his instruction and was now beginning to integrate his acquired skills in a complete figure composition.

Folingsby's teaching methods thus encouraged the establishment of a new school of figure painters, carefully grounded in the fundamentals of drawing. His influence in still-life, architectural and landscape studies became an important secondary element in the artistic vocabulary of his student figure painters.
In 1883 Folingsby introduced the annual student exhibition, and his influence in figure painting is reflected in the increasing appearance of subject pictures of sentimental and anecdotal genre. In 1884 McCubbin exhibited *Home Again* (Private Collection, Victoria), which suggests the impact of Folingsby's genre pieces and their compositional arrangements. It depicts a cottage interior with a woman ironing linen, as her husband rushes in at the open door to greet her - 'a subject', noted a contemporary critic, 'which is sure to render it popular'. The background colour is carefully orchestrated into an overall tonality of grey-blues and ochre-browns, while the planes of the architecture clearly define the interior space. Various domestic utensils, pictures and decorative motifs seen on the mantelpiece and background wall are treated with the care of still-life studies; these details enhance the quiet mood of domestic warmth and intimacy, essential to the meaning of the narrative. The figure of the wife, dressed in a deep blue costume and with her hand raised in a gesture of mild surprise, forms an elegant silhouette against the light ochre wall. McCubbin carefully relates the dominant colour chords of the composition across the interior space. The pronounced whiteness of the sheets the woman is ironing is counterbalanced on the right by the light coming through the open doorway. Similarly, the vivid red of the ironing blanket and the wife's light blue apron find a more subdued echo in the man's pale blue shirt and the reddish-brown garment slung over his shoulder. Only the husband's rather 'forced' gesture of greeting introduces an artificial note into what is a skilfully treated, if not tamely conventional, narrative picture.

The young John Longstaff exhibited small genre pieces at the 1884 exhibition. Their titles - *Granny, What Shall I Say?* and *A Budding Remenyi* - adequately denote the sentimental nature of their subject matter. In particular, the topicality of *A Budding Remenyi*, which
'represented a youth playing his violin at a street corner', suggests how Longstaff painted with an eye to popular taste. The painting's title derived from the name of the visiting European violinist, Remenyi, who gave a series of successful concerts in Melbourne just prior to the students' exhibition.33

By the time of the next exhibition in March 1886, Longstaff had moved beyond these small genre studies to paint an ambitious large-scale figure subject, Motherless (Australian National Gallery, Canberra). It portrayed three young ladies weeping for their departed mother, a subject redolent with Victorian sentiment. The critic of The Age (10 March 1886) remarked,

> The three bereaved girls represented are in an agony of grief; two, utterly prostrated, hide their faces ... The quivering lips and brimming eyes of the third figure testify to the intensity of her emotion, though borne with more fortitude.

The sombre brown tonality of the interior and the competent drawing of the figures and costumes reflect Folingsby's influence; The Argus critic (10 March 1886) found these qualities praiseworthy: 'The picture is painted in a key of colour befitting the sadness of the incident narrated, and the technical qualities of the work should not pass unrecognized'. In order to bring home the full import of his pathetic subject, Longstaff appended the following line from Tennyson to the picture's title: 'Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still'. This practice is indicative of the sentimental, literary tastes of both the painter and his audience. According to Nina Murdoch, one of Melbourne's newspapers unfortunately misquoted the Tennyson line as 'Oh, for the touch of a varnished hand ...'.34

In 1886, Fox exhibited Bachelorhood, which showed an old man sitting in a genre interior of dark brown tonality with a gleam of light from
a window picking up details of the room. As well as these sentimental genre pictures, students showed a continued interest in landscape and still-life studies.

III

Perhaps because of his skill in painting drapery and costume, Folingsby delighted in depicting full length figures of elegant women set against landscape backgrounds, such as we find in his companion pictures Spring and Autumn. The picture of Autumn is now held in the Joseph Brown Collection. Autumn is shown personified as she picks the fruits of the season. The predominantly brown tonality and fading light of the landscape background further evoke the time of the year. Spring reveals the flexibility and adaptability of technique afforded to Folingsby by his academic training. The painting is refreshingly light in tonality, with the delicate, fragile dawn seen on the horizon, suggestive of the birth of the new season, as the figure of Spring gathers the blossoms. Folingsby's picture was given a most prominent position in the 1883 Exhibition of the Victorian Academy of the Arts, and was chosen by the Art Union of Victoria as its presentation engraving for that year. A further measure of the popularity of Spring with both the public and artists may perhaps be seen in an illustration entitled 'In the Orchard' in The Illustrated Australian News (18 April 1883), which appears to have employed Folingsby's painting as its source.

John Longstaff's Gathering Wildflowers (1884, Bendigo Art Gallery) follows the example of Folingsby's Spring in its light tonality and in showing an attractive woman gathering the flowers of the season.

McCubbin would also have been familiar with such works by Folingsby.

The Letter (1884, Ballarat Art Gallery) echoes Folingsby's Autumn, not only in its formal arrangement and brown tonality, but also in imparting
a poetical and anecdotal significance to a dominating figure in landscape. McCubbin conveys a relationship between figure and landscape which is typical of many Victorian narrative pictures: the privacy of the moment of reading the letter, perhaps from a lover, is extended and embellished by the quiet and lonely landscape setting.

The romantic subject of McCubbin's *The Letter* finds a parallel in the wider literary tastes of the period. Leading Australian poets of the eighties, like Douglas B.W. Sladen, Arthur Patchett Martin, Frances Tyrrell Gill and Joan Torrance, wrote innumerable poems in which the romantic passions were given a specifically Australian bush setting. An even more accessible tradition for the public lay in the annual Christmas book collections of the 1870s and 1880s, which regularly featured sentimental, romantic stories with a decidedly Australian emphasis. This local literary tradition, with its often curious admixture of Australian and English material and conventions, was of course immediately available to narrative painters of the time. Its influence needs to be emphasized at the expense of the more aggressively nationalistic 'bush lore' that appeared slightly later in *The Bulletin* by the late eighties and early nineties.

Pictorial examples of romantic episodes set in the Australian bush can also be found in the illustrated newspapers during the seventies and eighties. One such illustration, entitled 'The Valentine', in *The Illustrated Australian News* (23/2/1876), anticipates McCubbin's *The Letter* showing a fashionably dressed young lady in the seclusion of the bush as she contemplates a love letter. Other illustrations suggest that the compositional arrangement of *The Letter* (with its elegant figure seen on a rising bank next to a stream) was an accepted and conventional one in the black and white media. Australian photographers in the eighties occasionally introduced a romantic subject interest to their
photographs of Australian scenery. An undated 'subject' photograph by J. Brooks Thornley, significantly entitled The Quarrel (La Trobe Library, Melbourne), echoes both the romantic narrative content and the basic compositional formula employed in McCubbin's painting. The recurrence of such subject matter in contemporary literature and in local popular imagery helps explain the readiness with which the public accepted the narrative paintings of Folingsby's students.

Tom Roberts was not a student under Folingsby at the Gallery School, though he evidently admired and respected Folingsby's artistic ability. Before he left Australia for England in 1881, Roberts reputedly offered Folingsby fifty pounds if he would teach him how to paint. Roberts' A Summer Morning Tiff (1886, Ballarat Art Gallery) and The Reconciliation (1887, Castlemaine Art Gallery) carry forward the interest in Australian romantic narrative pictures seen in McCubbin's earlier The Letter. Indeed, according to R.H. Croll, Roberts painted The Reconciliation 'at McCubbin's suggestion'. Some evidence for this assertion can be found in a lost McCubbin painting, now known only through a photographic reproduction in the La Trobe Library. The McCubbin painting, datable in the mid-1880s on stylistic grounds, presents the theme of courtly dalliance in the Australian countryside. A couple seen emerging from the dense bush in the mid-ground of the scene strongly recall the pose of the figures in The Reconciliation. Once again the theme of McCubbin's lost painting can be related to drawings in the illustrated papers showing young, sophisticated city couples sightseeing or picnicking in the bush.

The narrative interest in Roberts' Tiff is so understated as to be barely recognizable without the aid of the picture's title; the man in the background, dismounted from his horse, provides no more than a simple point of interest in the hot, plein-air landscape. But as
the painting's title clearly indicates, Roberts was not far removed in his attitudes from the 'literary' expectations of contemporary art audiences. He exhibited the *Tiff* in 1886 with the following lines from an unnamed Australian poet:

```
Only a word at the splitter's track, -  
    A thoughtless blunder.       
She is fair and haughty and answers back,  
    So they part asunder.        
With a jerk he loosens the fastening rein, -  
    And she turns her back with fine disdain.  
Ah me! sigh the saplings in sad refrain,  
    As she passes under.  
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Not only is the light *plein-air* tonality of the landscape appropriate in conveying the heat of a summer's day when such a lover's *tiff* could occur, but the details of the painting follow closely the sentiments of the poem.

*The Reconciliation* was exhibited during the following year with a complete poem of the same name by the Australian poet, Joan Torrance. The following stanza adequately conveys its sentimental nature:

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'Tis a glimpse of Eden's raptures,  
'Tis a taste of Eden's bliss,  
When all bitter thoughts will vanish  
At a touch and with a kiss.  
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A later report in *Table Talk* (26 April 1889) lists a 'Miss Torrance' as a visitor to one of Roberts' 'Studio Wednesdays'; it suggests that Roberts knew the poet and may have painted his picture in direct response to her poem.

The tonality of *The Reconciliation* is markedly more subdued and gloomy than that of the light-filled *Tiff*. However, its twilight tones are appropriate to the mood of a dusky evening, when lovers traditionally (in so many Victorian novels, poems and subject pictures) come together for a romantic interlude. Indeed, Roberts may have
known an illustration entitled 'April Once More' that appeared in the Magazine of Art in 1885, which noticeably anticipates both the sentiment and pose of the figures in his painting. We witness in The Reconciliation the play of a poetic sensibility and an involvement with romantic situations. Roberts responded to Australian literary sources, not simply for their nationalistic content, but equally for the poetic mood they could evoke. He nevertheless emphasizes the specifically Australian setting of his picture, through the thin gum sapling on the left of the painting. In this way, he transposes the typical romantic narrative picture into an identifiably Australian scene.

IV

The press criticism of the student exhibitions suggests that contemporary opinion facilitated, rather than hindered, the development of figure paintings with distinctively Australian subject matter. In tune with contemporary taste, the students' figure paintings were either damned or praised according to the popular appeal of their narrative content and their command of draughtsmanship, finish and detail. The students' landscape or figure paintings were very rarely singled out for their noticeably Australian character before 1887. Tom Roberts had influenced a number of students to paint landscapes with a broader, plein-air technique. When exhibited at the students' exhibition, these landscapes were usually interpreted and accepted as 'studies' preparatory to the finished picture, or dismissed as 'decidedly foreign'.

The arbitrary dismissal of plein-airisme as 'foreign' was also a reflection of events taking place outside the Gallery School. In 1886 the Australian Artists' Association had been formed in opposition to the conservative, and lagging, Victorian Academy of the Arts. The foundation members of the A.A.A. - who included Roberts, Arthur Loureiro,
John Ford Paterson, John Mather, George Ashton, Ugo Catani and Carl Kahler - were nearly all *plein-airists* who had received their major training overseas.\(^5\) Reviewing the first exhibition of the A.A.A. in 1886, the conservative *Argus* critic, James Smith, wrote in slightly disparaging terms of

... the general leaning of our young artists and art students towards the French methods of landscape painting; their avoidance of too much definition of form, and their disposition to secure striking effects by colour laid on in broad masses. (*The Argus*, 7 September 1886)

A provincial suspicion of 'foreign' styles and techniques thus encouraged a certain antagonism towards the 'foreign' *plein-airists* exhibiting with the A.A.A. This attitude becomes clearly apparent in a letter that John Longstaff wrote to *The Age* (16 September 1886) on behalf of the gallery students, attacking the A.A.A.:

... we prefer exhibiting at our own exhibition, believing it to be the only truly representative Australian school of painting, all the students ... being native born. On the other hand the Australian Associated Artists are composed almost entirely of foreigners ...

In a further letter to the press (*The Age*, 18 September 1886), Longstaff explained his use of the word 'foreigner' in connection with the A.A.A.: 'I referred to the fact that most of the exhibitors are "foreign" in the sense that they had received their "art" training outside Australia'.

The strong feelings of provincial pride in the growth and products of a local art training institution partly explains the public's sympathetic response to the student exhibitions, as opposed to a residual suspicion of the 'foreign' dominated A.A.A. Indeed, the prize-giving evenings at the student exhibitions became an important occasion in Melbourne's social calendar. The exhibitions were opened
by the Governor, Sir Henry Loch, and attended by the Gallery's trustees, parliamentarians and other prominent local dignitaries. By 1889 the writer of Table Talk (15 November 1889) could describe the opening of the student exhibition as 'a brilliant and representative gathering of ladies and gentlemen'.

Although Folingsby's teaching was generally praised in the press, by 1886 he had received criticism from various quarters for what was seen as an over-insistence on the style and methods of the Munich School. 'Whilst fully admitting the progress made by Folingsby's pupils', the writer of a letter in Once a Month (15 February 1885) thought that it was 'much to be regretted' that Folingsby was 'so devoted to the German School of Art ... the English school is too much ignored by him in favour of foreign artists'. The writer could understand that Folingsby's 'long association' with the German school 'has doubtless endeared it greatly to him, but Victoria is an English colony, and her students should be taught to love and admire her school ...'. Another letter in The Argus (31 December 1885) similarly drew attention to Folingsby's 'well known prejudice against English art and artists ... in favour of the Munich school, in which he was educated'.

These criticisms of Folingsby's influence illustrate the curious intermingling of Australian and imperial patriotism that characterized the cultural expectations of the public. Admittedly, a few prominent individual art collectors, like Frederick Armytage, bought works chiefly from the German School. But public taste for overseas art remained oriented towards the English School; it was commonly seen to set a 'standard' to which local students could aspire.

Folingsby's detractors generally noted the 'sameness of method in treatment' in the student works. A French woman, for example (The
Age, 11 October 1886) described a student work 'C'est très gentil mais ce sont tous de petits Folingsby' (It is very nice, but they are all little Folingsbies). Such observations serve to underline the extent of Folingsby's influence. It is all the more understandable, given accounts by students, of his dominating, if not authoritarian, personality and his demanding attitude to their work. On the other hand, he is said to have devoted personal attention to individual students, especially 'favourites' like Longstaff, Davies, Mackennal, McCubbin and Altson, who found his advice 'intimate and stimulating'.

In 1886, however, George Rossi Ashton summed up the case against Folingsby's influence. There was, he claimed (The Age, 17 September 1886), nothing 'distinctively Australian' in the works of the students, 'either in subject or handling'. The burgeoning nationalism of the day was expressing itself in the search for distinctively Australian subject matter.

The climate of opinion was conducive to change and innovation and Folingsby took a crucial step in the development of Australian painting in 1886. On his advice, a Travelling Scholarship was to be established in connection with the annual exhibition of student works. His interest in large figure compositions and the expectations of the Melbourne public ensured that, during his term of office, it would be won by a figure composition. The innovation provided the necessary impetus for the future creation of large subject compositions with specifically Australian subject matter.

The first Travelling Scholarship was won by John Longstaff with Breaking the News (1887), now in the Western Australian Art Gallery. An old miner is 'breaking the news' of her husband's death to a woman holding a baby in her arms. He places his large hand tenderly on her shoulder in a gesture of support and condolence, and she looks up
anxiously at him, her face expressive of fear and anguish as he 'breaks the news'. Two other miners, who carry the body of the husband on a stretcher, appear in the doorway and in the distance can be seen the colliery derrick. Through attention to realistic, domestic details, Longstaff conveys the cruel swiftness with which the tragedy has struck: the clock on the mantelpiece gives the precise hour, two plates warm on the hob, and the table is laid ready for tea.

Folingsby's influence is evident in the compositional arrangement of the figures across an interior, and the use of the open doorway to place the incident within a wider scene, essential to the narrative. The central figures of the old miner and the woman have been drawn directly from life, according to the practice encouraged by Folingsby. The painting's brown tonal harmonies are reminiscent of Folingsby's art, and the careful arrangement and depiction of the genre details of the room recall his practice of setting still-life studies. Perhaps the very choice of subject - a moment of dramatic revelation - may owe something to Folingsby's example. McCubbin later recalled that 'in a composition subject, he would test your ability by your selection as much as your painting'.

Longstaff's picture was acclaimed by both critics and the public. The critics praised its draughtsmanship and command of detail, and both critics and public responded to its immediately accessible narrative - 'a graphic story of a fatal mining accident which one can take in at a glance' (Table Talk, 29 April 1887). The obvious pathos of the narrative caught the popular imagination; as the same critic put it, 'The homely pathos of the picture is such to appeal to all ... rightly regarded as a leading element in success, especially where popularity as well as artistic power is sought to be achieved'.
Most significant for the future development of Australian figure painting was the subject matter of *Breaking the News*, which appealed strongly to the rising sense of nationalism. The local reference to Australia's mining industry caused it to be described as 'a vivid and accurate presentation of a familiar incident in Australian life' (*The Argus* (29 April 1887)).

By a macabre coincidence, this view was reinforced by the publicity given to a recent mining disaster in the colony of New South Wales. Eighty-seven men lost their lives in a colliery explosion at the mining town of Bulli in late March 1887. The worst disaster in the history of Australian mining shocked and appalled the public. Within days of the event, *The Illustrated Australian News* (2 April 1887) carried a drawing of 'The Colliery Explosion at Bulli, New South Wales', which the paper claimed was based on 'instantaneous photographs'. The drawing concentrated on the scene of confusion and distress immediately after the tragedy and, prophetic of Longstaff's subject, showed a widow being comforted in the foreground of the scene. *Breaking the News* was exhibited in Melbourne in late April, when the horror of the Bulli disaster was still fresh in the minds of the public. The story grew that Longstaff's painting depicted an actual scene from the aftermath of the disaster. Denials that this was so in the press only served to fuel the developing legend and add to the popularity of *Breaking the News*.

Mining deaths were in fact 'a familiar incident in Australian life' during the late nineteenth century, as the critic of Longstaff's picture had claimed. In the 1860s in Victoria, about twenty men a year fell down shafts and were killed. Others died from dynamite or powder explosives, suffocation or the collapsing of mine walls. The absence of adequate safety regulations and the negligence of company owners and
managers added to the natural hazards of the mining industry. By 1873 the Victorian Parliament had passed the Regulation of Mines Statutes, an enlightened piece of social legislation that limited hours of work, prevented women and thirteen-year-old boys from working in mines, regulated ladderways and appointed inspectors. Under the Act, the onus was placed on mine owners to prove that accidents were not due to their neglect. But even with improved safety regulations and systematic inspection of mines, ninety Victorian miners were killed within a year of the Act's being passed.

The families of men killed in the mines received little compensation for the death of a breadwinner. The State paid no compensation. Some widows received gratuities from the friendly societies that were common in the gold towns, others were helped by the Miners' Accident societies, but many widows were forced to rely upon the charity of their husband's workmates and families.

On 12 December 1882, Victoria had witnessed a mining disaster that rivalled in its severity the later Bulli tragedy: twenty-two men died when a Creswick mine accidentally flooded. The event was consequently the subject of a drawing in *The Illustrated Australian News* (23 December 1882): 'The Creswick Mining Disaster - Scene at the Head of the Shaft - the Braceman Announcing the Death of the Miners'. Longstaff probably had a personal interest in such popular drawings of mining tragedies; he was born and spent his early childhood in the Victorian mining town of Clunes, only some ten miles away from Creswick, where the famous mining accident later took place. According to Nina Murdoch, it was Longstaff's childhood memory of a mining fatality that provided the central inspiration for *Breaking the News*: 'the day at Clunes when, following the tragic cortège from mine-head to cottage door, he had heard the stricken cry of the young wife at the sight of the stretcher-bearers' burden'.

The response of Melbourne's public to the 1887 Bulli disaster was overwhelmingly sympathetic. It helps to explain the emotive manner in which contemporaries reacted to the subject of *Breaking the News*. The Lord Mayor called a public meeting at the Town Hall on 1st April 1887, which was attended by most of Melbourne's dignitaries and leading citizens. Seven hundred and forty-five pounds were subscribed to a relief fund for the families of the dead miners. At the meeting, the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Loch, called for 'our liberal aid, to assist those who, in addition to the grief that they must suffer ... must also have a deep anxiety as to how they are to support themselves and their children' (*The Age*, 2 April 1887). The Chief Justice of Victoria followed with an impassioned plea for charity for the families of the victims. He referred to Victoria's earlier Creswick disaster and to the scenes of 'frantic grief' outside the Bulli mine: 'Every one of them had lost a husband, a father or a brother; every one of them had lost the breadwinner of the house'. For contemporaries, the theme of widowhood in Longstaff's picture must have gained added poignancy through the uncertainty of the widow's future.

However, the Victorian notion of 'charity' to those 'less fortunate' would have mitigated any implied social criticism in *Breaking the News*. Mining deaths were readily accepted as an inevitable fact of contemporary life. Mr Joseph Syme rose at the Town Hall meeting to move an amendment that public money to be expended upon the public celebration of the Queen's Jubilee in 1887 'ought to be devoted to the just and merciful object of rendering coal mining and other highly dangerous occupations as perfectly safe and wholesome as it is possible for science and art to make them' (*The Age*, 2 April 1887). His proposed amendment caused an immediate uproar, and was not put for
want of a seconder. Its dismal failure provides a clear indication of the prevailing values of Melbourne society and the double-edged attitude towards the issue of industrial accidents and safety.

*Breaking the News* appealed directly to sentiment through its narrative, but (perhaps understandably) Melbourne's public did not interpret the picture as a radical indictment of the hardships caused by a capitalist, industrial society dedicated to the profit motive. On the other hand, the Australian character of Longstaff's subject did not appear as a romanticization of a distant past, but as contemporary and relevant. Its nationalistic sentiment is partly attributable to the general Victorian interest in depicting subjects of contemporary life. The critic of *The Argus* (29 April 1887) remarked that 'it is ideas that we want chiefly in Australian art - something to tell us that the artist is getting into our life and illustrating it'. Longstaff's picture was thus compared favourably with the sentimental and pathetic illustrations of contemporary life by Victorian painters like Faed and Fildes, whose works enjoyed current popularity within the colonies.62

Thematically, *Breaking the News* bears a closer relationship to well-known Victorian pictures like Frank Holl's *No Tidings from the Sea* (1870, Royal Collection, Windsor), which portrays a wife mourning for her husband who has failed to return home from a fishing expedition. Similar subjects were treated in the eighties by members of the Newlyn School, whose work Longstaff would have seen at the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists' Exhibition held in Melbourne in 1885.63

The demand for modern life subjects in English art became more pronounced and vocal during the 1880s. Almost inevitably, this demand filtered through to Australia and increasingly affected the taste of Australian artists and their public. For example, in 1887
the English art critic, Frederick Wedmore, wrote an article in *The Magazine of Art* in which he urged painters to tackle subjects from contemporary life. He argued that 'the real historical painting of our time is the record of the characteristics of our life - its labour, its pleasure, its personages'. His ideas appear to have been influential upon Julian Ashton in his article, 'An Aim for Australian Art' in *The Centennial Magazine* of August 1889. Ashton maintained that for

... modern artists ... true historical painting consists in reproducing the scenes which lie around them ... artists of Australia ... will band-themselves to paint the Australia of today.

One year prior to Ashton's article, an editorial in *The Age* (11 August 1888) had spoken sympathetically of the 'democratizing' influence of modern society upon art:

Modern society has not always cared intelligently for art, but of modern democracy it may surely be said that it has brought 'a soul' into the painter's work, as it has taught him to associate it more and more with common cares and joys.

It may be difficult today to realize the tremendous enthusiasm with which Longstaff's winning picture was received by both painters and the public. All sections of Melbourne society felt able to respond to the 'common cares' it portrayed. Members of the public were inspired to write pieces of doggerel about the picture in the press; *Breaking the News* was reproduced in *The Australasian Sketcher* and, by 1895, *The Argus* (29 June) could claim that Longstaff's painting was 'known by reproduction in every mining township in Australia'.

Not only did the picture present a format which students were to repeat in following exhibitions and in works sent to the societies, but the picture lent new emphasis to themes which had occurred earlier
in colonial art. It related human figures to the land, and suggested the price that the land exacted from them. Death, the ultimate cost of the struggle, is set in a specifically Australian landscape. In particular, Longstaff's picture dramatically emphasized the hardships endured by women and children alongside their men, and gave the theme of man against a hostile and alien land a more homely, domestic dimension. The sentiment conveyed by the figures is typical of Victorian narrative pictures.

The critics' evaluation of Longstaff's picture suggests that the contemporary public could more easily identify their nationalistic yearnings with the subject matter of figure paintings when the appeal of the narrative tended to override considerations of 'foreign' styles and techniques. For contemporary audiences, the sentimental appeal of the narrative must also have obscured or mitigated the political implications of Longstaff's subject, which dealt with a grim aspect of industrial society. (As late as 1899, in an article called 'If I Could Paint', Henry Lawson wrote feelingly of Breaking the News in terms which emphasized the picture's sentimental impact at the expense of its possible social and political 'message'.

Longstaff's closest rival for the 1887 Travelling Scholarship was Alexander Colquhoun. Colquhoun's Divided Attention (1887, Bendigo Art Gallery), also exhibited at the 1887 exhibition, provides an interesting counterpoint to the more recognizably nationalistic subject matter of Breaking the News. The painting's compositional arrangement, dark tonality, careful figure drawing and genre details all reveal a comparable debt to Folingsby's teaching. The critic of The Argus (25 April 1887) wrote:

In 'Divided Attention' a plump old man is telling a story to a young man who may be lending him his ears, but his eyes are engaged by the young girl who stands behind the elderly speaker, and is apparently his daughter.
The subject of *Divided Attention* may now appear indistinguishable from that of many traditional Victorian narrative pictures. But for contemporary Australian audiences, details such as the copy of the Melbourne *Argus* on the table were sufficient to identify the essentially 'local' character of its romantic narrative.68

V

In the 1889 Student Exhibition, David Davies exhibited *From a Distant Land* (Art Gallery of New South Wales). The painting creates a mood of pervasive melancholy and quiet introspection. A lonely stockman adds an Australian accent to the theme of 'poverty and consequent emigration', so prevalent in both art and literature in the second half of the nineteenth century. He appears to stare despondently into space while he ponders the contents of a letter. The crude hut, dilapidated furniture and the stockman's worn, crumpled clothing indicate the frugality and hardship of his existence.

The continued influence of Folingsby and Longstaff's winning picture is felt in the firmly drawn figure, the sombre interior and the melancholy sentiment. Davies evokes the atmosphere of the hot Australian landscape outside with a broader, *plein-air* technique, while still retaining a firmly drawn 'academic' figure in the interior. The device of so many narrative pictures of opening up an interior scene through a doorway on one side thus receives a particularly Australian emphasis. A critic (*Table Talk*, 15 November 1889) remarked that the picture had 'caught the spirit of an Australian scene'.

Davies' lonely stockman, lost in contemplation of 'a letter from home', participates in one of the major themes in art and literature in Victorian England - that of people living in poverty in England
and being forced to emigrate in the hope of escaping their conditions. A letter formed their only means of communication with someone on the other side of the world. One of the famous Baxter prints, with the self-explanatory title: Australia: News from Home, encouraged the formation of an indelible impression of the subject on the minds of its Victorian audience.69

The most immediate source of Davies' painting lay in a picture called Firelight Reflections of 1874, by the Australian painter-photographer, H.J. Johnstone. Johnstone's bushman indulges in reverie before he 'turns in'; at his feet he has let fall a letter from a loved one, whose picture is visible in the open valise. He now broods as he stares into the open fire. Davies almost certainly knew of Johnstone's picture; it was engraved for the illustrated papers, reproduced for the Victorian Art Union, and formed the basis for at least two illustrations in contemporary publications.70

Firelight Reflections, in turn, looks back to an earlier colonial pictorial tradition, when the life of the average outback settler and worker was even more lonely and secluded.71 A lithograph of The Squatter's First Home by A.D. Lang (La Trobe Library), published in the 1840s, serves as a model for Johnstone's composition, down to details like the bookshelf and the figure's prominently displayed pipe.72 A mood of desolation and despair more reminiscent of Johnstone's and Davies' paintings is more feelingly evoked in a drawing by John Skinner Prout in 1849, Interior of a Settler's Hut.73 Nostalgia for 'home' is expressed by the pasting of a page from the Illustrated London News on the bare hut wall. By the 1860s, Prout had created a further variation on the theme with his engraving of an Australian Shepherd's Hut; this time with a more homely, domestic dimension, but once again he included the motif of the Illustrated London News pasted on the
wall next to the open fireplace. Once established, the tradition was carried into the 1870s and 1880s by Australian photographers like Nicholas Caire, who portrayed The Lone Bushman, significantly shown reading outside his remote hut.

From a Distant Land indicates that Davies responded to such pictorial sources with the enthusiasm of a Victorian narrative painter. His command of detail is deliberate rather than casual; one notices not only compositional features in common, but telling details: the pipe on the table, the page from The Illustrated London News on the wall, and the picture of the loved one hanging uncertainly outside its frame.

The battle to win the 1890 Travelling Scholarship narrowed down to two of Folingsby's most promising and favourite students, Aby Altson and David Davies. Altson won with his Flood Sufferings (National Gallery of Victoria), an all too obvious variation on Longstaff's Breaking the News. The popular appeal of Flood Sufferings lay in the sympathy felt for the mother and child, the innocent victims of a natural disaster. It is hardly surprising that Altson's picture was praised for possessing the same formal and iconographic qualities as Longstaff's work. It represents, said a critic (Table Talk, 14 November 1890), 'an episode common enough in occurrence but fearfully pathetic in reality'. Reference to contemporary Australian life was now such a decided advantage to any subject that the critics actively sought it out: 'Flood Sufferings', said one critic, 'shows an incident which may have happened during the recent inundation at Bourke'. The picture suggests both Longstaff's and Folingsby's influence in its compositional arrangement, its monochrome brown tonality, enlivened by areas of white, and in its detailed treatment of surface textures such as the background wall. Only the present of an aesthetic motif - the
fan on the table - introduces a more adventurous note and evidences Altson's familiarity with local art developments outside the Gallery School.

It has become customary to see Folingsby's academic painting and teaching as being directly opposed to the development of Australian *plein-airiste* painting. And yet, his encouragement of the accepted academic practice of painting landscape sketches directly from nature, prior to the finished studio work, must have facilitated some of his students' adoption of *plein-airiste* techniques. David Davies exhibited *A Hot Day* (National Gallery of Victoria) in 1888 and *Under the Burden and Heat of the Day* (Ballarat Art Gallery) in 1890. These works were sufficiently *plein-airiste* in their tonality and handling to provoke criticism for their 'slight and sketchy workmanship' and 'tendency to opacity' (*The Argus*, 13 November 1888 and 13 November 1890), but they were praised for capturing the typical Australian landscape. Critics saw their distinctly Australian character not simply in the painterly definition of the landscape's features, but in the evocation of mood and sentiment. Davies' landscapes gave rise to such descriptions as 'the glare of the all penetrating light, the feeling of heat in the atmosphere, and the pallor of the grey-blue sky' (*The Argus*, 13 November 1888).

The figures' interaction with the landscape further emphasized its essential qualities. A critic (*Daily Telegraph*, 14 November 1888) drew attention to the 'toiling waggoner as he wearily trudges under the broiling sun' in *A Hot Day*. In *Under the Burden and Heat of the Day* 'one may understand', said a critic (*The Argus*, 13 November 1890), 'the sufferings of the poor fellow who has sunk down upon the burning ground in a state of utter exhaustion'. The ready appeal of this sentiment was no doubt encouraged by memories of the recent drought
of 1888. Davies possibly found a convenient pictorial source for his subject in Frank Mahony's drawing of 'The Discovery of King by E.J. Welch', published in The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia in 1888. Mahony's illustration of a well-known episode in the Burke and Wills story depicts the distressed King half-reclining on the ground, as he is comforted by the kneeling figure of Welch; the landscape background is desolate and forbidding, befitting the theme.

It is the setting, not the sentiment, which separates the conception of Davies' work and Altson's Flood Sufferings of the same year. Davies has transposed the pathos and sentiment of a traditional Victorian figure painting into a new, plein-airiste setting. The narrative paintings of Folingsby's students were thus instrumental in winning public acceptance for plein-airisme through the figures' interaction with the landscape. Reviewing the 1887 student exhibition, The Age critic (25 April 1887) had remarked upon the competing values of a strictly 'academic' approach and plein-airisme:

The first point which strikes a critic is that two distinct methods appear to be followed, a fusion between which might be advantageous. The one errs in minuteness, bordering on insipidity; the other in too much breadth and want of texture.

The basic format of numerous student paintings - 'academic' figures in a genre interior, with a 'plein-airiste' landscape seen through an open doorway - became a particularly apposite means of reconciling and combining these opposing modes of painterly vision.

Folingsby's influence in the development of figure painting in Australia is evident in the debt most of his students owed him in the drawing of the human figure and in the handling of colour, composition and technique. His academic art and teaching were the basis for a number of important figure paintings with distinctively
Australian subject matter. This subject matter had its origins in the traditional sentimental or anecdotal genre painting of contemporary life. Folingsby's ultimate legacy, through his students, was the combination of academically conceived figures against *plein-airiste* landscape backgrounds, such as we find in the arranged and descriptive compositions of McCubbin. The development of Australian subject painting of this era lay, not in a rebellion from academic values and practice, but in a manipulation of them.

VI

In 1890 Sidney Dickinson wrote of the new nationalistic bias in Melbourne art that had been given impetus by the popular success of Folingsby's students' narrative paintings:

A strong prejudice prevails in Australia in favour of pictures describing local incidents or characters - a prejudice which future contestants for the scholarship would do well to bear in mind. With a peculiarly Australian subject and fair technical treatment, a student would evidently have a better chance than another who might paint equally well, but who had looked abroad for his inspiration.62

The degree to which the Gallery School students became sensitive to the demands of popular taste can perhaps be illustrated in the case of the now unknown student, G. Grant. At the 1890 exhibition, Grant exhibited *The Drunkard's Home* which, according to *The Age* (13 November 1890) was

... painted on the lines of Mr Longstaff's *Breaking the News* ... The besotted husband entering his domicile is affectionately reproached by his young wife ...

Perhaps heeding Dickinson's advice, Grant decided to lend a more identifiable 'local character' to his entry in the following 1891 exhibition. He borrowed part of the title of Altson's winning
scholarship picture of the year before for his painting, *Strike Sufferings*, and made an open appeal to the topical interest in Australia's industrial turmoil of 1890 and 1891. strike Sufferings was duly awarded an Honourable Mention at the student exhibition.

Theo Brooke Hansen's *Love or Duty* (present whereabouts unknown), also exhibited at the 1891 exhibition, perhaps makes more subtle and skilful use of the pictorial conventions established by Folingsby's leading students. The painting portrays an attractive young woman poised by the door of a cottage interior as she ponders the decision between her 'duty' to her elderly father and her 'love' for the young man seen in the distance through the open doorway. The theme is typical of romantic narrative paintings; a similar subject entitled

108 *The Reprimand*, by the American artist, Eastman Johnson, was reproduced in *The Magazine of Art* in 1882 and may have been known to Hansen. *Love or Duty* follows closely the compositional format of Davies' *From a Distant Land*, but the relationship between the interior and exterior scene acquires a different psychological meaning. The dark genre interior has connotations of restraint and social responsibility, while the delicate, pink gradations of the evening sky and the vine around the door suggest the opposing ideals of freedom, youth and transience.

Outside the Gallery School, Charles Douglas Richardson's painting, *The Sick Shepherd* of 1890 (now lost), also reveals the current tendency to adapt the conventions of narrative pictures to suit specifically Australian subjects. The *Sick Shepherd* portrayed the interior of a bush hut where 'an old man, with flowing white beard, is lying on his rude bed, while a fair young girl is trying to soothe his weariness by reading to him' (*Table Talk*, 7 March 1890). Described in the press as a 'thoroughly Australian' picture, Richardson's subject followed an established tradition in colonial art, photography
and literature. Henry Kendall's poem, 'A Death in the Bush' (first published in 1870), describes a similar incident of a faithful wife patiently nursing her shepherd husband on his death bed.87

Critics of Richardson's Sick Shepherd once again commented on the role of the landscape seen outside the hut; the landscape presented an effective contrast with the shepherd's suffering - 'through the window shines a glimpse of golden sunlit plains, in striking contrast with the dark wood slabs of the hut' (Table Talk, 7 March 1890). It is not surprising that a contemporary writer in the Melbourne University Review could group Richardson's Sick Shepherd with Longstaff's Breaking the News and McCubbin's Bush Burial as 'indicating one channel at least in which coming Australian art will find expression'.88

Despite such confident predictions of the future course of Australian art, narrative paintings in the mould of Breaking the News or The Sick Shepherd were to play only a minor role in the portrayal of a national image during the 1890s. A few isolated paintings raised themselves above the level of mediocrity to demonstrate the continuing potency of the narrative conventions and pathetic subjects first popularized by Folingsby's students. One of these paintings was George Coates' winning entry for the 1896 Travelling Scholarship, a work entitled At Last. It portrayed an injured or sick stockman in a bush hut, awaiting the arrival of the doctor 'at last'. The doctor's figure could be seen through a doorway to one side.89 Nevertheless, the importance of this particular genre of Australian narrative painting declined fairly rapidly after Folingsby's death in 1891. Its demise also coincided with the onset of the economic depression of the nineties, which severely dented the self-confidence of Marvellous Melbourne.
The popular alliance of art and education with material progress in the 1880s engendered strong feelings of provincial pride in the achievements of Melbourne's Gallery School students. The students' work provided evidence of the benefits to be derived from a local art educational institution in a materially affluent society. Their figure paintings thus answered the cultural expectations of Melbourne's public on several complementary levels. Not only were these paintings admired for their 'academic' technical qualities, but the appeal to sentiment in the narrative made them accessible to a wider public. In paintings with a decidedly 'local' character, the sentimental appeal of the narrative also served to deepen their nationalistic meaning. Nationalism and the provincial tastes of Melbourne's public were inextricably fused.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1 Arthur W. José, op. cit., p. 24.


4 The Victorian Academy of the Arts, with its system of Academicians and Associates, was modelled on the British Royal Academy. For the National Gallery School, see Leigh Astbury, 'The National Gallery School of Victoria, 1870-1890', M.A. (Prelim.) thesis, University of Melbourne, 1975.


6 So far there has been little detailed research done on art education in Sydney during the 1870s and 1880s. Some factual information may be found in Alan McCulloch, Encyclopedia of Australian Art, op. cit.; also cf. James Green (De Libra), 'The Fine Arts in Australia: their progress, position and prospects', Australasian Art Review, 1 June 1899, pp. 20-22.


11 Parris and Shaw, op. cit., p. 245.

12 Ibid., pp. 243, 250.

13 Ibid., p. 247.


16 Shipping Records, State Archives of Victoria; Museum of Art Letter Book, National Gallery 1877 to 1886, State Archives of Victoria.

17 A remark recorded by Frederick McCubbin, appearing in an unsigned typescript, probably written by James MacDonald, in Lothian Papers, Box 31, La Trobe Library, Melbourne. Cf. The Art of Frederick McCubbin, Introduction by J.S. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 56. The following account of Folingsby and his influence is based on my article, 'George Folingsby and Australian Subject Painting' in Studies in Australian Art, ed. Margaret Plant and Ann Galbally, op. cit. In the preparation of this article I was indebted to Ruth Zubans, who made available her research on Folingsby, see Zubans' entry under Folingsby in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, op. cit., vol. 4, pp. 193 ff.

18 Box No 9, State Archives of Victoria. Petition dated 7 October 1880; also The Argus, 7 October 1880.

19 Virginia Spate, 'Tom Roberts and Australian Impressionism, 1869 to 1903', op. cit., p. 4.

20 Alexander Colquhoun, 'Old Gallery Days - a Memory', Victorian Artists' Society, 1 August 1908, p. 6.

21 Edward La Touche Armstrong, The Book of the Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, 1856-1906, Melbourne, 1906, p. 125. One of Folingsby's first commissions was a portrait of Sir Redmond Barry, now in the Melbourne University Collection. Other portraits are held in the National Gallery of Victoria, the Victorian State Library and the Mitchell Library, Sydney.


23 Piloty had studied under Delaroche, who used this technique. Couture was a student of Delaroche. Couture's Méthode et Entretiens d'atelier reveals his use of bitumen in his palette. See Linda Nochlin (ed.), Realism and Tradition in Art, 1848-1900, New Jersey, 1966, pp. 5-6; see also Albert Boime, op. cit. and Richard Muther, op. cit. The admiration that German artists of this era felt for French art partly explains Folingsby's advice to Longstaff to study in Paris. Cf. Nina Murdoch, op. cit., p. 57.

24 In particular, see Colquhoun, 'Old Gallery Days', op. cit., p. 4 and The Age, 20 August 1932.

25 Once a Month, 15 September 1884, p. 227.

The Age, 22 December 1884. The National Gallery of Victoria possesses Old Stables by McCubbin and Old Melbourne by Colquhoun, which belong to this era.

28 Annual Report of the Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, 1882, p. 32. Further information in this section is based on these annual reports.


31 Altson's Fisherboy was exhibited at the 1887 National Gallery Students' Exhibition, see Exhibition Catalogue in the State Library of Victoria; the painting measures 87 cm x 59 cm and is reproduced in Joel's Auction Catalogue, November 1977, p. 161.

32 Alexander Colquhoun, Frederick McCubbin: a Consideration, op. cit.; The Argus, 19 December 1884; I am indebted to Dr Ann Galbally who made available a colour reproduction of this work.

33 Nina Murdoch, op. cit., pp. 49-50. Murdoch gives the location of the work Granny as being in the possession of his sister, Miss Jean Longstaff. I have not traced its present whereabouts. The Age, 3 November 1884, under the heading 'The Remenyi Concerts', draws attention to the 'eighth Remenyi concert' by the 'eminent and popular violinist'.

34 Nina Murdoch, op. cit., p. 50. Longstaff's painting appears in the catalogue of the students' exhibition, held in the State Library of Victoria, as simply Motherless. Longstaff may have added Tennyson's line to the title on the original frame, see The Daily Telegraph, 10 March 1886. I am indebted to John Jones for providing reproductions of this work, now badly damaged. Motherless measures 91 x 124.6 cm.


36 Autumn has been known previously as Woman Picking Blackberries. Spring is reproduced in a colour photograph under the title Blossom Picking in the catalogue of The Joseph Brown Autumn Exhibition 1971. Spring is described in The Argus, 13 December 1882. The National Gallery of Victoria holds a study for Autumn, while it also possesses a study of blossoms, likely to be a study for Spring.

37 The Argus, 3 March 1883; The Argus, 3 April 1883; Catalogue of the exhibition and Annual Report of The Art Union of Victoria, 1883, State Library of Victoria; Table Talk, 20 March 1891.

38 A similar work, probably the Bendigo Picture, called Going to Market, is described in The Age, 10 March 1886; Longstaff also exhibited at 1883 V.A.A. exhibition and would have certainly known Folingsby's Spring.
McCuubin exhibited a work entitled *Spring* (Private Collection, Victoria) at the 1896 Victorian Artists' Society Exhibition, see *The Argus*, 23 October 1896. It may have been influenced by his memory of Folingsby's *Spring*, or the illustration 'In the Orchard', *The Illustrated Australian News*, 18 April 1883; cf. Leigh Astbury, 'The Heidelberg School and the Popular Image', *op. cit.*, p. 264.


For example, the illustration 'Under the Mistletoe', *The Illustrated Australian News*, 31 December 1880.

For example, 'Wattle Blossoms', *The Illustrated Australian News*, 5 October 1881 and 'Upon the Willows, The Avon, New Zealand', *The Illustrated Australian News*, 31 March 1888.

Thornley's *The Quarel* (La Trobe Library, Copyright Env. 12, 28933) belongs to a series of narrative photographs with titles like *Jilted, Goodbye, The End of the Book*; *The Quarel* is reproduced in Leigh Astbury and Susanne Spunner, *op. cit.*, p. 74; cf. J.W. Lindt's photograph, *Gossip, Fernshaw*, La Trobe Library, Env. 32, 25833.


The reproduction of the lost McCubbin painting is in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne (Box 987/4 Ms. 8525). The original painting depicted two couples picnicking by a lake, with the fifth figure of the woman in the near foreground, obviously dissonant at her lack of a partner.


'April Once More', a poem by Edmund Gosse, illustrated by Mary L. Gow, in *The Magazine of Art*, vol. 8, 1885, p. 253; also p. 453 for a poem entitled 'Reconciliation', but not a love poem.

For example, *The Age*, 10 March 1886.
53 Cf. Virginia Spate, *Tom Roberts*, op. cit., p. 34.

54 This is not to underestimate the support given to the Australian Artists' Association by prominent Melbourne citizens, see the list of patrons in the catalogue of the inaugural A.A.A. exhibition. Student works were reproduced in the press, see *The Illustrated Australian News*, 31 March 1886, and *The Australasian Sketcher*, 28 November 1889.


57 For Ffoliosby's original letter to the Trustees, see *The Argus*, 11 March 1886.


61 Nina Murdoch, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

62 In 1886 the National Gallery of Victoria acquired Thomas Faed's *Mitherless Bairn*. This was a key work which had built his career when exhibited with success at the Royal Academy in 1855. The Art Gallery of New South Wales possessed Luke Fildes' *The Widower*. These works may have influenced Longstaff; a study for *Breaking the News* was exhibited in the 1925 Loan Exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, see the catalogue held in the State Library of Victoria.

63 Holl's *No Tidings from the Sea* is reproduced in Christoper Wood, *Victorian Panorama*, London, 1976, p. 56; cf. the review of the Newlyn paintings exhibited in Melbourne in *The Argus*, 26 October 1885. The most famous example of the Newlyn painters' treatment of the theme of widowhood amongst the Newlyn fishing community is Frank Bramley's *A Hopeless Dawn* of 1888.


65 Julian Ashton, 'An Aim for Australian Art' in *The Centennial Magazine*, vol. 1, No 1, August 1889, pp. 31-32.


67 Interestingly, *Breaking the News* was first bought by Messrs. Clarke and Wallen, a well-known Melbourne firm of stockbrokers, who later sold it to William Macleod of the Sydney *Bulletin*, in whose collection Lawson would have known the picture, see Nina Murdoch, op. cit., p. 57; Henry Lawson, 'If I Could Paint' (1899), reprinted in *Australian City Reader*, Deakin University, Geelong, 1978, pp. 97 ff. Lawson, admittedly, saw
a certain didactic purpose in narrative pictures like *Breaking the News*:

'My ambition would be to paint Australia as it is, and as it changes: pictures that Australians could look through - and through a mist of tears, perhaps - back into their pasts: pictures that Australians could look through onward to a brighter and nobler future .... Pictures showing the worst side of humanity, the poverty, misery and squalid vice, that men might hate the greed and selfishness that causes it all."

68 *Divided Attention* was reproduced in *The Australasian Sketcher* (29 December 1887), see p. 195, where it is stated that 'It will serve as a companion picture to Mr Longstaff's "Breaking the News", which we issued last winter'. The text also provides a clear indication of the provincial pride felt in Colquhoun, who 'is a Victorian artist in the strictest sense of the term'; for the rivalry between Longstaff and Colquhoun, see Nina Murdoch, *op. cit.*, p. 55.


71 Cf. Russel Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-81, for a discussion of shepherds' conditions before the Gold Rush. Some new emigrants took jobs as shepherds, the most lonely and monotonous of bush occupations. There is a vague suggestion of 'shabby gentility' in the figure in *From A Distant Land* which might reflect this situation.

72 Alexander Dennistone Lang's *The Squatter's First Home* was possibly first published in *Scenes in the Bush of Australia*, printed by McLean and Co., c. 1845; several editions of this lithograph may be found in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne. One edition is inscribed in freehand, 'The Squatter at Home, 1839. Bad News from the outstations'.

73 Prout's *Interior Of A Settler's Hut* was first published in *The Illustrated London News*, 17 March 1849. A copy is now held in the Nan Kivell Collection, National Library, Canberra.
The dating of Prout's engraving of an Australian Shepherd's Hut to the 1860s is tentative. It was reproduced in Edwin Cartoon Booth's Australia Illustrated, London, 1873-76, vol. I, between pages 58 and 59; cf. J. Feldheim, Australian Art in the Sixties: a Book of Engravings, Melbourne, 1915, where it is also reproduced.

Caire's The Lone Bushman is reproduced in Jack Cato, op. cit., between pages 32 and 33; the above discussion on the sources of Davies' painting was previously published in Leigh Astbury, 'The Heidelberg School and the Popular Image', op. cit., pp. 265-266. The theme continues beyond Davies' painting in popular illustrations, for example, 'A Letter From Home' in The Illustrated Australian News, 1st January 1891; the text on p. 10 presents the traditional Australian interpretation of the subject's meaning.

The Australasian Critic, 1 December 1890.

A description of A Hot Day in The Daily Telegraph, 14 November 1888, almost certainly suggests that the painting is the work known as Golden Summer in the National Gallery of Victoria.


Frank Mahony, 'The Discovery of King by E.J. Welch', in Andrew Garran, (ed.), op. cit., vol. 2, p. 425. The precise date of Mahony's drawing is made difficult through the fact that The Picturesque Mahony Atlas was also issued separately in monthly instalments, but Mahony's illustration certainly predates Davies' painting.

The pose of both Davies' and Mahony's half-reclining figure suggests the classical statue of The Dying Gaul as a likely source. Davies would presumably have known this source through his study of the antique at the Gallery School. The pose of King in Mahony's drawing also follows Welch's later account of the episode; he described how King 'fell to the ground ... when I turned back the figure had partially risen. Hastily dismounting, I was soon beside it ...'; cf. Alan Moorehead, Cooper's Creek, London, 1963, pp. 138-139.

The combination of figures 'painted in the studio' and a plein-airiste setting was noted by Sidney Dickinson in The Australasian Critic, 1 December 1890, p. 75.

Sidney Dickinson, 'Students' Exhibition at the Melbourne National Gallery', The Australasian Critic, 1 December 1890, p. 74.

See the catalogues of the 1890 and 1891 student exhibitions in the State Library of Victoria; Hubert von Herkomer's famous picture, On Strike (Royal Academy of Arts) was also painted in 1891 and was possibly known to Grant via a reproduction; for further information on the Australian strikes of 1890 and 1891, see the chapter on Tom Roberts.

Cf. the catalogue of the 1891 student exhibition in the State Library of Victoria; Love or Duty, which measures 80 x 120.5 cms, was sold at the November 1976 Leonard Joel Auction to Frank McDonald of the Thirty Victoria Street Gallery, Sydney; see Leonard Joel Auction Catalogue, November 1976, No 874.
85 Eastman Johnson's *The Reprimand*, which shows an old man next to a fireplace in a *genre* interior, reprimanding a young woman, was reproduced in *The Magazine of Art*, vol. 5, 1882, p. 485.

86 Richardson's *Sick Shepherd*, though now lost, is reproduced in the catalogue of *The Victorian Artists' Society, Winter Exhibition, 1890*, p. 17, in the State Library of Victoria.

87 Henry Kendall's 'A Death in the Bush' was published in his *Leaves from Australian Forests*, Melbourne, 1870; for an earlier version of the sickbed theme in an Australian context, see H.J. Johnstone's painting, *Old Mates*, reproduced in *Art Union of Victoria, 1874-75, op. cit.*; for an Australian photographic example, see Nicholas Caire's *The Sick Bushman* (La Trobe Library, Victoria). The dating of this work is uncertain, but it presumably belongs to the late eighties or early nineties; the sickbed theme was of course a traditional subject in Victorian narrative painting, see Christopher Wood, *op. cit.*, chapter 12.

88 *Melbourne University Review*, vol. 6, No 2, 1890, p. 82; also p. 26 for comments upon the landscape in *The Sick Shepherd*; also *The Age*, 29 March 1890, which also links *The Sick Shepherd* with *Breaking the News*.

89 See the press criticism of Coates' *At Last* in *The Argus*, 18 December 1896; also see D.M. Coates, *The Life and Art of George Coates*, London, 1937, p. 8, and p. 3 for the inspiration Coates derived as a young student from Longstaff's *Breaking the News*; cf. Henry Lawson, 'If I Could Paint', *op. cit.*, p. 98: 'Paint that picture! ... "The Bush Doctor" in the hut ... "The Crisis" ... The parting between the bushman and the doctor after the danger has passed'.


'Whereas the appeal of the bush has been the great myth of Australian history, the appeal of the city has been the great fact'. An historian has thus succinctly summed up the significance of the city and urban values in the creation of an 'Australian Legend'. By 1891 two-thirds of Australia's population lived in the cities and towns, rather than in the bush. The Heidelberg artists were essentially city dwellers. Their apotheosis of the Australian bushman in paintings during the late nineteenth century was but one reflection of the general nostalgia felt by an urban-based society for the simple and harmonious values of rural life.

In the the previous chapter, it was shown how the narrative figure paintings of Folingsby's students answered the cultural expectations of both critics and a wider public during Melbourne's boom period of the eighties. The overlay of Victorian sentiment in these paintings served to deepen their nationalistic appeal for contemporary audiences, overriding or obscuring 'artistic' consideration of foreign styles and techniques. Longstaff's *Breaking the News*, for example, found a sympathetic response in the public's burgeoning nationalistic feelings, even though its subject ostensibly dealt with a grim aspect of an industrialized society. The painting was not interpreted, as it could have been, as a radical critique or indictment of the hardships occasioned by a capitalist, industrial society, but rather as a sentimental portrayal of a scene from contemporary life. In the search for an Australian identity, nationalism and a 'radical impulse' here appear as mutually exclusive forces.

Similarly, in tracing the development of the pastoral myth in Australian history, it is necessary to underline the discrepancy
between the pastoral ideal and the urban and rural realities from which the myth derived. Melbourne and Sydney certainly did not constitute 'a working-man's paradise' in the eighties and nineties. As Michael Cannon has amply documented:

Living and working conditions of the bulk of the 'lower classes' were in fact far inferior to the rosy picture painted by those who wished to believe that the existing order of society was the best of all possible worlds.³

Amidst the ostentatious material wealth of 'Marvellous Melbourne' in the eighties, contemporary journalists delighted in drawing attention to the seamier side of the city's life. The hidden vice, disease and poverty of the 'back slums' became a journalistic cliché.⁴ These journalistic outpourings were inevitably modelled on the example of English writers, like Henry Mayhew's well-known work, London Labour and the London Poor (1861-62). The existence of poverty and squalor in Marvellous Melbourne was patronisingly justified as the necessary consequence of the rapid urban growth and increasing material prosperity which marked the progress of all great cosmopolitan cities.⁵

With the onset of the severe economic depression of the nineties, the problem of widespread poverty had reached such proportions that it could no longer be so glibly dismissed in contemporary journalism. It was now more openly acknowledged that poverty had permeated the whole social fabric of Melbourne society: 'side by side, almost rubbing shoulders with the children of the rich, can be found the emaciated and wasted faces of the women and their little ones'.⁶ The pastoral myth of the period was to develop in the face of this harsh urban reality. As Graeme Davison has recently hypothesized:

And so it was natural perhaps that as the city came to symbolize the concentrated sin and suffering of the colony, the countryside, as the original source of goodness and wealth, should seem purer, simpler and more
harmonious .... The rural dream was the reflex of the urban nightmare.\(^7\)

There is perhaps no better example of the projection of urban values on to an idealized pastoral life than that found in the writings of the English journalist, Francis Adams, who visited Australia in the late eighties. Adams declared that 'there is but one absolutely new and characteristic type in Australia, and that type is the Bushman'.\(^8\) The 'perfected sample' of the pastoral figure must be sought, wrote Adams, 'in the ranks of the shearsers, boundary riders and general station hands'. Australia had been 'created by sheer muscle - by the pick and the shears'.\(^9\) Described as an 'Arnoldian Socialist', Adams claimed that the political views of the shearer 'are of the most decisive and "advanced" order' with 'The Union as a practical gospel, Socialism as his devoted creed'.\(^10\) The perfected sample of the bushman was to be found, not in the workman of the Pacific Slope, but far inland, 'three or four and five hundred miles' from the sea - in the workman of the Eastern Interior.\(^11\)

The urban origins of Adams' idealized view of the bushman became apparent in his qualified 'rejection' of the city of Melbourne, 'where much that is typically Australian is to be found, much also is mere replica at second hand of the older civilization'.\(^12\) Even the coastal towns had become contaminated, in Adams' opinion, with some of the evils and stench of the city: 'the insane clatter of foetid and dusty streets, the grimacing drawingrooms, the spiteful, scandal-mongering haunts of an unwholesome privacy'.\(^13\) Adams' idealization of the bushman was thus strongly motivated by a sense of urban disillusionment and socialist political sympathies.\(^14\)

The writers associated with the Sydney Bulletin in the nineties gave the most popular expression to the contemporary desire to locate
the 'real Australia' in the outer pastoral regions, far away from
the corrupting influences of the cities and towns. A passage on
the Riverina district in Joseph Furphy's novel, *Such is Life*, written
in 1897, sums up the prevailing attitude:

> It is not in our cities or townships, it is not in our
> agricultural or mining areas, that the Australian attains
> full consciousness of his nationality; it is in places
> like this, and as clearly here as at the centre of the
> continent.\textsuperscript{15}

Nationalistically-inclined writers from the *Bulletin* school called
upon the artist to meet 'the artistic needs of his public' and to
paint the real Australia of the interior. As early as 1889, Fred
Broomfield (later to be a sub-editor of *The Bulletin*) wrote a piece
for the *Centennial Magazine*, where he stipulated that the dedicated
artist of

> ... the Australian School ... will find his work in the
> bush and on the plains of the far-west, in depicting ...
> the exciting scenes daily to be witnessed on the
> squattages - the rounding of cattle on the runs, sheep-
> droving, camping of wool-carters' teams, branding,
> boundary-riding, bullock driving, gold mining, selecting,
> clearing the forest of the encumbering trees, shearing,
> bush farming.\textsuperscript{16}

Once again the urban origins of Broomfield's views make him reject
the cities and towns as suitable subjects for the truly Australian
artist. Presaging Adams' later writing, Broomfield declared that

> The townsman's life is merely a replica of the townsman's
> life wherever the English language is spoken - it is not
distinctive enough to be representative. In the bush
> conventionalism is absent, and if the bushman is painted
> from the standpoint of the bushman, unconventionally, amid
> his surroundings, clothed in his own proper atmosphere, the
> painting will be an example and a triumph of the Australian
> School.
Broomfield's example was followed by later *Bulletin* writers like Edward Bevan, who agreed that

The regulation bush township is one of the most inartistic subjects to be found in any country, a very nightmare of weatherboard and corrugated iron. It is to the limitless plains that he [the artist] must turn [in order to depict] the wild, free life of the bush.¹⁷

The paintings discussed in detail in the following chapters - Roberts' *Shearing the Rams*, *The Breakaway*, *The Golden Fleece*, Mahony's *Rounding Up a Straggler*, Ashton's *The Prospector* and McCubbin's *Down on His Luck* - would all appear to answer contemporary calls by nationally inspired writers for the artist to meet the 'needs of his public' through his portrayal of the bushman as an emerging cultural hero. However, it should not be assumed that, in creating these works, Roberts and his fellow artists primarily intended to appeal to the same 'public' that the *Bulletin* School addressed.

The approbation of bush subjects by writers of the *Bulletin* persuasion was not so enthusiastically nor naively shared within Australian 'art circles'. The call to paint 'outback' bush subjects was often treated cautiously by critics and writers in the press. They feared that an unquestioning acceptance of the *Bulletin* ethos could lead to an insular attitude that ignored the 'higher' purposes of art. Discussing Mahony's and Roberts' paintings of the early 1890s, a writer in *The Sunday Times* observed:

It has been said that the painters have not gone far enough afield for their subjects. But what next? ... If a subject is characteristically Australian, so much the better; but we don't see that it is necessary to go to the Great Stony Desert for it. We hold that the business of the artist is not to paint a picture that will make everyone exclaim, 'That's a bit of Australia. Ain't it gaudy?'¹⁸
Such reservations were frequently expressed in the press, but they point to a general shift in critical attitudes to bush subjects by the late 1880s. Most critics became more receptive to paintings of distinctively Australian themes. The critical enthusiasm for Folingsby's students' figure paintings and the influence of the picturesque atlases suggested a new direction for Australian art. These nationalistic tendencies were taken up and crystallized in the writings and lectures of the visiting American art critic, Sidney Dickinson. Dickinson arrived in Australia in 1889 and he quickly became an influential figure in local art circles, being elected Secretary of the Victorian Artists' Society one year later.\(^{19}\)

Dickinson was an articulate spokesman for the emergence of an indigenous Australian art and culture. In his article, 'What Should Australian Artists Paint?', published in *The Australasian Critic* in October 1890, Dickinson argued that

... the mixed life of the city and the characteristic life of the station and bush furnish countless subjects, whose successful description would attract universal attention in the galleries and saloons [sic] of Old World Exhibitions, but are being ignored because of their familiarity. It should be the ambition of our artists to present on canvas the earnestness, rigor, pathos and heroism of the life that is about them.

He called upon artists to paint

... works based upon our own experience, and descriptive of our own intimate life or surroundings. Thus, from the particular and personal, we might hope in time to come to the general and universal...

The subject of a painting was of paramount importance to Dickinson, but he also acknowledged that the 'weak point in Australian art is its general ignorance of the higher powers of painting'.\(^{20}\) In an earlier lecture, Dickinson noted that
... the attention of the resident artists thus far has been chiefly directed to landscape painting. This is to be expected in a new country, where means of education in art are limited ... few have become figure-painters without strict academical [sic] training ...

Every modern school whose works are valuable, insists that the figure must be mastered before the student enters upon the line of work for which he thinks himself fitted.\textsuperscript{21}

Dickinson adhered to a traditional academic value which accorded figure painting a higher status than landscape painting.

The call for artists to paint scenes from contemporary national life was not new in Australian art criticism. As we saw in the previous chapter, it was a demand increasingly voiced by critics and their public during the late 1880s. However, Dickinson was more outspoken in his nationalistic emphasis, and his criticism gave the issue a more pointed slant. He called for nationalistic figure subjects that were treated with the seriousness and scale of the elevated history painting. By the late 1880s several artists, including Roberts, McCubbin and Julian Ashton, had already responded to changing critical expectations by creating pastoral figure paintings on the scale of the 'history' painting. At this crucial stage, Dickinson lent his influence and critical support to Roberts' and McCubbin's large pastoral pictures; in letters to the press he advocated that paintings like McCubbin's \textit{Bush Burial} of 1890 should be purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria.\textsuperscript{22} Throughout the 1890s painters continued to produce large scale pastoral paintings that were obviously intended to find their place in public art galleries.\textsuperscript{23}

Distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art were still relevant to a 'progressive' critic like Dickinson. They were even more important to critics of a conservative mould. For the conservative critic, a painting's worth could be judged according to a moralistic criterion,
its power to 'elevate' the mind and the universality of its theme. James Smith, the *Argus* critic in Melbourne, for example, was influenced in his aesthetic judgements by Ruskin's concern with morality and the technical virtues of finish and detail. In 1889 Smith wrote a scathing review of the Heidelberg artists' '9 X 5 Impression Exhibition' in which he agreed

... with W.P. Frith, R.A., 'Impressionism is a craze of such ephemeral character as to be unworthy of serious attention'.

During the following year, however, Smith wrote a sympathetic review of Roberts' *Shearing the Rams*, which acknowledged the nationalistic significance of the subject. 'Painted upon a comparatively large scale,' wrote Smith, 'the work may be characterized as an ambition achieved'.

There is no real conflict between these two judgements. Although he was a conservative critic, Smith was nevertheless a person of wide learning and cultivated tastes; since his arrival in Melbourne in 1854, he had played a leading role in the cultural affairs of the colony. Smith's sincere commitment to Australia's cultural development made him sympathetic towards nationalistic subjects in art; a controlled and 'finished' figure painting like *Shearing the Rams*, 'Painted upon a comparatively large scale', was worthy of his serious critical attention.

In New South Wales the leading critic, James Green, was also a vociferous opponent of Impressionism, which he dismissed as 'a novel fashion'. According to Green, the critic's function was in 'assisting to establish and maintain a lofty standard in every branch of Art'. Green's belief in 'high' art made him conclude 'it follows that the branch of painting should be highest which concerns itself with the delineation of the human form'.

But Green's conservative view of art's function did not prevent him from becoming an outspoken advocate of nationalistic figure subjects. In his review of the 1889 Art Society of New South Wales Exhibition, Green declared that

... in the Australian national, political, social and domestic life of the present and immediate past we have a capacious and comparatively untrodden field, which lies open to our rising artists ...

On these grounds, he praised Frank Mahony's *Rounding Up a Straggler* as 'the most Australian of anything in the gallery'. Green could accommodate the nationalistic appeal of Mahony's subject with his interest in figure painting and high art:

As in Mr Percy Spence's picture [*The Ploughman Homeward Plods His Weary Way*], the figure occupies but a small portion of the canvas; but the interest in both subjects is so human that they are not merely exceedingly fine animal paintings, but are exalted to the dignity of figure-subjects.28

The evaluation of art according to moralistic criteria could, on the other hand, sometimes lead to a bias against distinctively Australian themes. An Australian subject might be considered 'unworthy' of treatment, or at the least deemed unsuitable for 'high art',29 Perhaps the most pointed and significant example of this critical attitude is found in an *Argus* editorial (28 June 1890) on Roberts' *Shearing the Rams*, which claimed that the subject was 'altogether unworthy of depiction' on the universalizing grounds that 'art should not be for an age (nor a place) but for all time (and all places).'

Some of the leading Heidelberg artists like Tom Roberts and Julian Ashton partly concurred with conservative, critical opinion of art as an elevated, moral endeavour. But there was a crucial difference of emphasis. These artists and the critic, Sidney Dickinson, wished to establish the validity of nationalistic subjects within the realm of
high art. Some sense of the aspirations of local painters towards 'high art' can be gained from a report in the press in 1889 of a group of artists - including Roberts and Streeton - who had become 'tired of the slow progress of Australian art' and were consequently seeking European recognition by sending pictures 'with a decided leaning towards nationality' to the Royal Academy and the Paris Salon.\textsuperscript{30}

Younger, more progressive artists were equally sensitive to the question of Australian 'insularity' that might arise with the continual repetition of stock bush motifs in painting. Writing in \textit{The Centennial Magazine} in 1889, Julian Ashton cautioned:

> Then there is the gentleman who sees no beauty in any subject unless it is from the back blocks. Treeless plains covered with parched grass, the blackfellow, kangaroo and emu, men dying of thirst or being speared, men in any form of agony or danger, and landscapes void of every feature which charms the eye, are to him subjects peculiarly Australian in character.

Ashton continued his warning against provinciality in Australian art with the assertion that

> ... we are expected to have an Art which no one can mistake for any country other than Australia, totally forgetting the fact that Art belongs to no country, but to all time.\textsuperscript{31}

This remark, with its emphasis on the supposed 'universalism' of great Art, presages the critical debate that was soon to surround Roberts' painting, \textit{Shearing the Rams}.

The major divisions in contemporary attitudes towards bush subjects were those which separated the relatively closed 'art circles' inhabited by critics and painters from the 'popular taste' of a wider public. The differences which separated the attitudes of the Heidelberg artists and the critics were relatively minor by comparison. (We have already seen in Chapter 1 how the treatment of pastoral themes in the art of the
seventies and early eighties was sanctioned by critics through artists' use of picturesque conventions of landscape painting. These conventions tended to confine and restrict both the scale and activity of the figure in relationship to the landscape setting to such an extent that the human figure became a mere adjunct to the dominating landscape.

Nowhere is the division between contemporary critical opinion and the popular taste of the public more clearly apparent than in the case of the Melbourne artist, J.A. Turner, who was a prolific painter of Australian pastoral themes from the seventies until the end of the century. Turner was an artist of minor, even negligible, talent, but he succeeded in building a popular reputation as a painter of 'bush incident' and 'station life'. He generally depicted trivial incidents from bush life - a wagon broken down beside a bush road - and rarely if ever raised his subjects above an anecdotal level. Nevertheless, Turner's paintings received an enthusiastic reception from Melbourne's public at the same time as his work was regularly dismissed by art critics.\textsuperscript{32} The visiting English journalist, Richard Twopeny, an ironic but acute observer of colonial life and mores, seems to have pinpointed the reason for Turner's continued popularity with the public. Writing of the International Exhibitions in Melbourne and Sydney in the late seventies and eighties, Twopeny commented that

\ldots the pictures most admired at the exhibitions were those which were most dramatic - such as a horse in a stable on fire ... Next to dramatic pictures, those in which horses, cows, or sheep appeared were most admired, for here the colonist felt himself a competent critic, and was delighted to discover any error on the part of the artist.\textsuperscript{33}

The public's enthusiasm for Turner's bush subjects becomes more understandable given the fact that the major proliferation of pictorial
images of the bushman took place, not in the paintings of the period, but in the field of black and white illustrations in contemporary newspapers. It is perhaps surprising that illustrations did not influence more painters to attempt large-scale Australian figure subjects. Once again conservative critical opinion was a retarding factor. The writer of the Argus editorial (28 June 1890) advised against the purchase of Roberts' Shearing the Rams on the grounds that

The gallery exists primarily and solely for art. It is not its function to serve as an illustration-book - showing in a series of plates Australian buck-jumping, landbooming, logrolling, sheep-shearing and other interesting processes.

Subjects bearing a close resemblance to scenes in contemporary illustrations were thus conveniently relegated to the category of 'low' art.

The potentially hostile criticism of a conservative press only partially accounts for the comparatively few large-scale pastoral figure subjects painted by contemporary artists. Monetary considerations were of pressing importance, a fact candidly admitted by Tom Roberts in an interview published in The Argus (24 June 1890). Roberts estimated that 'One hundred and forty pounds in cash was expended in necessary travelling expenses, payment of models, and purchase of materials' for his painting of Shearing the Rams, while the 'price set on the picture' and his 'two seasons and eight months' of artistic labour was only three hundred and fifty guineas. He invited the Melbourne 'public' to a private viewing of his pictures, Shearing the Rams and The Breakaway, at his 'picturesquely arranged studio' in Collins Street, with the hope of finding 'a permanent home' for his pictures 'in our national gallery', or a prospective purchaser amongst the 'pastoral folks'. The writers of The Bulletin were, of course, not faced with the daunting prospect of finding a specific buyer for
their copy. No doubt they would have found the idea of selling their works to the pastoral 'bosses' an anathema to their stated radical outlook.

Artists creating large-scale figure subjects were invariably placed at the mercy of official public patronage, because of the time and expenses involved in such works. In the early 1890s Tom Roberts, for example, wrote articles and letters to the Melbourne press, where he explained the virtues of nationalistic subjects and argued that the National Gallery of Victoria should purchase more works by local artists.36 His letter to The Argus (30 November 1892) complained bitterly of

... quite recently asking the trustees of the Gallery to see a work I had finished and brought in from a long stay in the country [either Shearing the Rams or The Breakaway], but of the whole number two came as invited ...

The National Gallery of Victoria only rarely bought paintings from its local art society, the Victorian Artists' Society, during the late 1880s and 1890s. Admittedly, some of the Gallery's purchases - David Davies' Moonrise, Templestowe, purchased in 1894; Streeton's Purple Noon's Transparent Might, acquired in 1897; and McCubbin's A Winter Evening, acquired in 1900 - were outstanding landscape paintings by local artists. But the Melbourne Gallery bought no nationalistic figure subjects during the period. Even McCubbin's The Pioneer was finally purchased in 1906 as the result of a public outcry in the newspapers, against the reluctant judgement of the Gallery's director, Bernard Hall, and his board of trustees.37

From its inception, the National Gallery of Victoria had a policy of purchasing 'original paintings of modern masters of acknowledged ability'.38 In the context of colonial Australian society, 'modern masters' usually meant overseas academic art, basically oriented towards the British Royal Academy or German and French academic schools.39
Replying to one of Roberts' articles advocating the purchase of local works, the writer of the *Argus* editorial (28 October 1893) reminded his audience: 'Art is good and desirable because it is art, and not because it is Australian ...' Local artists had to compete with the notion that their paintings were worthy of patronage against the best available works in England and on the Continent. Roberts believed that the challenge could be met. In his review of 'The Loan Collection of Victorian Artists' in *The Argus* (30 September 1893), he argued that alongside 'the adjoining gallery of British and foreign pictures ... [we] see how well the native work stands the comparison in general effect and good workmanship'.

Roberts' espousal of local artists and nationalistic subjects was not, then, based on a narrow parochial attitude. Rather, it formed part of his desire for a new standard of professionalism amongst Australian artists. In 1886 Roberts had played a leading role in the formation of the Australian Artists' Association as a breakaway group from Melbourne's local art society, the Victorian Academy of the Arts. Later, in 1894-95, he was a prominent figure in the establishment of Sydney's Society of Artists as a professional group opposed to the existing Art Society of New South Wales. In both cases the issues at stake were similar: the presence of two many 'amateur' members in the existing societies, and the right of leading local artists to adopt 'progressive' overseas styles such as plein-airisme.

The plight of professional Melbourne artists worsened in the 1890s with the onset of the economic depression. As the private patronage of the 1880s Boom years dried up, the question of official public patronage became more vital and was widely discussed in the newspapers. The failure of Melbourne's National Gallery to support ambitious national figure subjects became a bone of contention amongst both
artists and the public. In 1892, for example, Arthur Loureiro had painted an important historical picture, *The Death of Burke*, which was ignored by the Gallery trustees. Three years later, however, the Gallery saw fit to purchase Loureiro's painting of a dog, entitled *Baron*. The irony of the situation did not pass unnoticed by *The Age* (29 October 1895):

'I'm glad they've bought your dog at all events', said an artist to the painter of one of the works chosen; 'but why didn't they buy your death of Burke?'

'What can one expect as an artist in Melbourne, but to be sent to the dogs', was the answer.

In the light of the Gallery's inconsistent and discriminating purchasing policy, Tom Roberts could only conclude in *The Argus* (30 September 1893) that the trustees were 'treating the work done immediately around them with a contemptuous indifference'.

In contrast with Melbourne's Gallery, the Art Gallery of New South Wales regularly bought Australian paintings - often with a decidedly nationalistic content - from its local art society, the Art Society of New South Wales (and later from the Society of Artists). Sydney artists could paint large-scale pastoral subjects with sound prospects of receiving official patronage. The Art Gallery of New South Wales purchased Julian Ashton's *The Prospector* and Frank Mahoney's *Rounding Up a Straggler* in 1889; Mahoney's *As In the Days of Old* was bought in 1892; *Shearing at Newstead* by Roberts, who was then living in Sydney, was purchased in 1894; George Lambert's *Across the Black Soil Plains* was purchased in 1899.

The acquisition policy of Sydney's Gallery could possibly be seen in terms of Sydney's stronger nationalistic outlook, fashioned by the writers of *The Bulletin*. But the *Bulletin* writers wielded no power in official art circles. The key figure in Sydney's art world was undoubtedly Julian Ashton, an outspoken and skilful advocate of local
art. Ashton was elected a member of the Art Society of New South Wales in 1885 and was its President from 1887 to 1892; he was also a trustee of the Art Gallery of New South Wales from 1889 to 1899. From these posts, Ashton was in a unique position to influence public patronage in New South Wales. His acquaintance with Melbourne artists during his stay there from 1878 to 1883, also encouraged him to look beyond the confines of the Sydney art scene in his desire to purchase worthy paintings. In 1897 the Sydney Gallery bought McCubbin's important pastoral picture, On the Wallaby Track, from the annual exhibition of the Art Society of New South Wales, a notable purchase from an artist living in Melbourne.

Melbourne's lack of patronage of its local artists gave rise to Sidney Dickinson's ironic comment in 1891 that the Sydney Gallery was 'known to Victorian artists as the only influential patron they have'. With the important exception of McCubbin's work, the major pastoral figure paintings of the 1890s were painted by artists living in Sydney. The availability of official patronage was a decisive factor for artists who wished to establish the place of nationalistic figure subjects within the realm of high art.

II

In the late 1880s writers in the Sydney Bulletin, like Henry Lawson, were rapidly earning the journal an Australia-wide reputation as the vehicle for a distinctive brand of 'radical nationalism'. Within the Bulletin's pages the Australian bushman provided a symbolic focus for the expression of nationalistic and egalitarian ideals. As the Bulletin writers were building a national mystique around the bushman, artists were creating major paintings on the theme of Australian pastoral labour. Tom Roberts' The Splitters was probably painted in
1886; his *End to a Career - the old Scrub Cutter* was painted in 1888; and *Shearing the Rams* was begun in 1888 and finally completed in the early months of 1890. Other important paintings which present an heroic interpretation of the bushman - Frederick McCubbin's *Down on His Luck* (1889), Julian Ashton's *The Prospector* (1889) and Frank Mahony's *Rounding Up a Straggler* (1889) were all painted in the late eighties. Given the contemporary veneration of the bushman in both literature and painting, it is tempting to assume that painters like Roberts and McCubbin shared the radical nationalistic impulse that inspired Henry Lawson to pen his jingoistic, socialist poem, 'A Song of the Republic' published in *The Bulletin* on 1 October 1887.58

Painters of the period and the *Bulletin* writers did share in much of their creative work a basic urban nostalgia for rural values. Just one literary example appears in Lawson's poem, 'The Roaring Days', written in 1889, which condemns the railway as an uprooter of a traditional way of rural life.51 Underlying the nostalgic attitude to the rural past so often expressed by both painters and writers, may be discerned a common urban dream: the aspiration towards economic independence. For the working man in Melbourne in the eighties, the practical realization of this dream of independence may have meant little more than the chance to secure freehold ownership of a suburban residence. 'The mere fact of a home being our own is an incentive to make it as beautiful as our means, no matter how small, will allow', sermonized a writer in *The Building Societies' Gazette* in 1888; 'it is like a little world of our own creation which we endeavour to make more and more perfect, and for which we work all the harder'. But even this practical goal of home ownership, as Graeme Davison has noted, was overlaid with wider 'aspirations to petty landownershi and rural peace'.52 Geoffrey Serle has summed up the quest for independence which characterized the thinking of Melbourne's working and middle
classes in the 1880s: 'The ideal of independence, of being one's own boss, remained potent, although most hopes were blighted and independence was often a poor reality'.

Patriotic feelings aroused by events such as the celebration of Victoria's half centenary in 1884 and Australia's centenary year in 1888 further encouraged an urban public to identify their historical origins in a rural past. Here the illustrated atlases of the time played a substantial role in formulating and perpetuating the developing rural mythology. *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia*, for example, devoted separate chapters to 'The Daily Life in The Bush' and 'A Day's Work in the Never Never Country', which provided glowing accounts of the 'freedom and simplicity', and yet 'hard fare' of bush life. *Victoria and Its Metropolis* presented an illustration of a stockman galloping through the bush (probably by George Ashton) alongside an accompanying text which emphasized the idyllic nature of the bushman's existence:

Even when the hot wind blew with languid breath over the plains, those riders who rounded up the sheep ... or galloped out after the straggling wethers, were cool on horseback in their slight attire. And when the long day's work was over, beneath the exhilarating lightness of an Australian sky, they returned, to no home of luxury perhaps but certainly to a well earned rest .... Then with morning came again the open air, the broad plains and the gallop at full career. It was a life as rough and rude as it was free and glorious.

Such descriptions of the bushman's 'free and glorious' life-style strongly recall some of the more optimistic sentiments of Adam Lindsay Gordon's bush poems, especially 'The Sick Stockrider', which enjoyed widespread popularity by the 1880s. Gordon was often identified and quoted as the Australian 'bush poet' *par excellence* in publications of the eighties, despite the fact, as Russel Ward has noted, that 'the
great bulk of his work is completely within the mid-nineteenth-century English romantic tradition and quite un-Australian in tone and setting.\textsuperscript{57}

Unlike later writers from the Bulletin school, Gordon was certainly no radical in terms of his political beliefs. He had died prematurely by his own hand in 1870, but his literary reputation continued to grow in the 1880s, as critics and writers attempted to define his place in the development of a national Australian literary tradition.\textsuperscript{58} Francis Adams, writing as a contemporary observer of bush mores in the early nineties, felt impelled to acknowledge that the Australian bushmen had found 'their mouthpiece' in Gordon's poetry.\textsuperscript{59}

Adam Lindsay Gordon's popular fame in the 1880s points to an important element of the burgeoning rural mythology. Contemporary artists and their public often identified the figure of the 'typical' Australian bushman with his image portrayed in Gordon's poetry, or with the vague romanticized descriptions of the bushman in the illustrated atlases and newspapers. In 1887, for example, Arthur Loureiro painted his Stock-rider, which was immediately acclaimed by a contemporary critic (The Age, 18 June 1887) as 'a page out of Lindsay Gordon ... a clean limbed young fellow with good features and a clear eye, but with the self-assertiveness of the bushman in every line'.\textsuperscript{60} This stereotyped conception of the ideal Australian bushman existed in the eighties quite independently of the alternative, more radical conception emerging in The Bulletin. Certainly Gordon's popularity with practising artists was frequently mentioned in the local press. By 1890 Gordon subjects had been shown so regularly at exhibitions that a critic (Table Talk, 7 March 1890) referred to 'the Gordon craze' in painting.\textsuperscript{61}

The 'Gordon craze' in contemporary art indicates the pervasive influence of a more conservative, essentially nostalgic interpretation of the bushman's significance. Indeed, the participation of leading painters as illustrators on the various atlases published in the
eighties formed a vital contribution to the literary and artistic effusions occasioned by Australia's centenary celebrations; their drawings of the bushman and typical bush episodes were an integral part of the national image propagated by the atlases.

The Bulletin, on the other hand, was forthright in its condemnation of the imperialistic nature of the public centenary celebrations. On 21 January 1888, it ran an editorial article entitled 'A Centennial Oration', in which it proposed 'the day we ought to celebrate', that is, the uprising of the gold-diggers at Eureka in 1854. Interestingly, this proposal acquired further relevance when it was repeated at the eight-hour celebration that accompanied the Intercolonial Trade Union Congress in 1888; the loyal toasts were replaced by 'the day we celebrate' and three cheers were given for the 'Federated Republic of Australia'. Of the Bulletin writers, Henry Lawson was perhaps the most vehement in his criticism of the 1888 celebrations. He expressed his disgust with their imperialistic, class-based nationalism in his caustically satirical poem, 'The Army of the Rear', published in that year. In an article in The Republican he delivered a further tirade:

Why on earth do we want closer connection with England? ... The loyal talk of Patriotism, Old England, Mother Land, etc. Patriotism? after Egypt, Burmah, Soudan, etc. Bah! it sickens me ... we are Australians - we know no other land.

Such expressions of open mistrust of Queen, country and Empire gave rise to accusations of 'treasonous bombast' in the Melbourne press; the Bulletin writers were seen to be diffusing 'the poison of their anarchical doctrines among the dregs of the masses, and disloyalty, turbulence and outrage are the outcome'.

Contemporaries, then, were clearly able to distinguish between two separate strains of nationalistic feeling and thought in the 1880s.
One strain was politically conservative and maintained its loyalty to Australia's British heritage and to the Empire. The other strain was more radical in its political outlook, being anti-imperialist and distinctively republican in its leaning - 'temper, democratic; bias, offensively Australian'.

Australian painters bore a complex and seemingly ambiguous relationship to these alternative, often conflicting, modes of nationalistic thought. In the late eighties several leading painters, including Frank Mahony and George Ashton, produced illustrations for both the picturesque atlases and The Bulletin; their artistic output thus spanned both major strands of nationalistic expression. By the mid-1890s many leading artists - Roberts, Streeton, Mahony, Julian Ashton and George Lambert among them - moved in the same bohemian circles in Sydney as the Bulletin writers.

However, more recent research on the literature and social milieu of the so-called 'Bulletin school' has revealed that the Bulletin 'crowd' did not form such a homogeneous and ideologically united group as was sometimes implied by earlier proponents of the Australian Legend in historical writing. The attitudes of individual writers to 'the Bush' now appear more varied than previously suggested, perhaps even diametrically opposed in the case of Lawson and Paterson. In assessing the contribution of painters to contemporary nationalism, it is similarly necessary to discriminate between the responses of individual artists to the bush ethos propagated by the Bulletin writers.

The Bulletin and other radical journals like The Boomerang had expectations of their illustrators different from the more conservative illustrated newspapers and picturesque atlases. In both cases, artistic expectations were influenced by opposing forms of national idealism. Contemporary illustrations consequently reflect the gamut
of political views and ideologies of the time. However, the commitment of illustrators to a certain political viewpoint is less easy to define, despite the apparent evidence of their drawings.

Artists adopted illustrative work for a variety of reasons, not the least being economic considerations. Some artists who saw illustration as their chosen 'profession' were able to tailor their treatment of subjects to suit the editorial policies of different publications. Indeed, their livelihood often depended upon this ability. George Rossi Ashton, for example, was a staff artist for The Illustrated Australian News in the 1880s and he also became artistic editor for Victoria and Its Metropolis, published in 1888. By the following year, Ashton was contributing drawings to the Sydney Bulletin which ably expressed its left-wing viewpoint. This 'professional' attitude also characterized a select group of Sydney artists in the 1890s who, presumably, found nothing demeaning in the illustrator's role. 'The black-and-white men', observed a Sydney correspondent in The Argus (28 May 1898), 'form a small but flourishing school of their own'.

Other artists were forced to produce illustrations for a variety of publications through financial expediency, but felt their art was compromised by the practice. For many young painters, illustrative work was the only means of financial support available to them. George Lambert, for example, supported himself by drawing regularly for The Bulletin in the 1890s, but he considered the pressures of illustrative work a hindrance to his serious involvement with painting.

The attitude of individual painters to the thematic content, pictorial conventions and financial rewards of illustrative work may provide some insight into the nature of their nationalistic intentions. This issue will be further explored when the contrasting attitudes of Roberts and Mahony towards illustration are discussed in Chapter 6.
The artistic portrayal of the bushman in the various picturesque atlases of the eighties certainly indicates a strong response to contemporary events. Within the pages of the atlases one finds abundant evidence of contemporary feelings of national, civic and imperial pride, that were to culminate in the euphoria surrounding the public celebrations of Australian's centenary year. The artistic rendition of the bushman in the atlases also had its roots in a much longer popular pictorial tradition. An examination of the origins and development of this tradition clearly emphasizes that the bushman's popular image was not born out of, nor moulded by, a radical national impulse that later characterized so much writing in The Bulletin. Rather, the emergence of the bushman as a popular figure in pictorial imagery in the late nineteenth century points to a related phenomenon: the ever-widening gap that was to separate a romanticized, urban view of the bush from the realities of rural life.

Russel Ward is the major proponent of the alternative interpretation of the rural mythology in Australian history. Ward sees the rural mythology of the late nineteenth century as the culmination of a popular, radical tradition. In The Australian Legend (1958), Ward has argued that the national mystique which was later to surround the figure of the bushman grew out of the actual social conditions existing amongst the early convicts and the 'nomadic tribe' of itinerant pastoral labourers before the Gold Rush period. An acute shortage of labour in outback areas, amongst other factors, increased the bushman's bargaining power with his grazier employer, and helped to establish a proud esprit de corps within the bushman's ranks. The 'loneliness and hardships of outback life' encouraged the 'tendency towards a social collectivist outlook' of 'mateship' and egalitarian values.
Towards the end of the century, through the influence of the Sydney Bulletin and the 'new unionism', this egalitarian tradition was transported from the pastoral frontier to the coastal cities, where it was to form the basis of a national culture.

Ward's thesis relies upon, but is a neat reversal of, the 'frontier hypothesis' of the American historian F.J. Turner, which Turner first expounded as early as 1893. Whereas the climate, fertile soil and favourable Homestead Acts of the American frontier had produced a tradition of 'individualism' based on a class of small independent farmers, Australia was a 'big' man's frontier. The aridity of the soil and the failure of the Free Selection Acts in Australia meant that the possibility of the typical wage-worker 'becoming his own master by individual enterprise was usually but a remote dream'. The economic interest of the bushman on Australia's frontier, argues Ward, thus reinforced his collectivist outlook, since 'by loyal combination with his fellows he might win better conditions from his employer'.

Ward cites an apparently impressive selection of literary evidence to support his contention that a radical, bush ethos emerged from the social conditions of bush-workers in the pre-gold rush era. Writing about outback workmen in 1847, a pastoral employer named John Sidney observed that

Within the boundaries labouring men are frequently most grievously oppressed. In the Bush, masters are almost entirely at the mercy of their free servants.

Similarly in 1840 Niel Black, a conservative squatter, acknowledged the effects of labour shortages in outback regions when he wrote that outback workers were 'in circumstances the most independent of any class of labouring men alive.'

The ideal of the 'freedom' of life in the Australian bush, a recurring theme in the picturesque atlases of the 1880s, was also
expressed by contemporary writers before the gold rush. In 1848 H.W. Haygarth described how

This sensation of absolute freedom, which is one of the chief attractions of this sort of life ... gains a strong hold upon many minds; ... there are few men who, after leading a pastoral life would be able to content themselves with ... 'less exciting occupations.'

Written from first-hand experience of rural conditions in Australia in the 1840s, such accounts testify that the independence of this 'class of labouring men' had substantial basis in historical fact. However, the romantic, idyllic tenor of Haygarth's description of bush life serves to remind us (as Ward does not) that this account of 'the free life of the Bush' appeared in a publication intended to appeal to interested urban audiences in London, as well as in Australia. Even the titles of such publications suggest their exotic appeal for a distant public: Recollections of Bush Life in Australia during a Residence of Eight Years in the Interior, or alternatively Voice from the Far Interior of Australia.

Rather than being simply documentary in their approach, these publications simultaneously addressed themselves to a more general nineteenth-century desire for rural values. Their benign interpretation of bush life finds a parallel in a comparable treatment of the 'romantic' Australian bush in contemporary English journals. Thus an article entitled 'On the Wallaby' appeared in the English magazine All the Year Round in 1867, which projects a rural arcadia on to a far-off land. Its writer praised the freedom and advantages of life 'on the wallaby' in Australia, where 'a good bushman can earn at piece work from two pounds to three pounds per week, clear of rations'.

The revered 'independence' of the Australian bush-worker, a vital element of the developing rural mythology, was in fact gained despite the opposition, even open hostility, of his pastoral employers. Ward
occasionally acknowledges the opposition of the pastoral bosses, but 
interprets it as evidence of the bushman's omnipresence. The real 
situation was much grimmer than he ever suggests. In 1845, the 
notorious Masters and Servants Act had laid down legally enforceable 
conditions governing the contractual relationships between employer 
and employee. As applied in rural areas, the Act positively favoured 
the pastoral employer, who could bring his employees to court for 
breaking a contract or for the common charge of 'neglect of duty'. 
Pastoral workers could be imprisoned for three months as the result of 
litigation in the courts. This discriminatory piece of legislation 
remained in operation from the 1840s through to the 1880s, an ironic 
comment upon the economic and social realities underlying the myth of 
the 'independent' proletarian bushman.76

In The Australian Legend, Ward relies heavily on the evidence of 
the folk tradition of ballads before the gold rush period. Essential 
to the major thrust of his argument is the notion that the bush ethos, 
embodied in early ballads, was later transported from the pastoral 
frontier where it found expression in the literature of The Bulletin. 
However, his explanation of how the bush ethos was transferred from 
country to city can be more easily applied to the fields of literature 
and popular ballads than it can to the visual arts. A popular pict-
orial tradition of the bushman did not appear until the beginning of 
the gold rush era. This is not surprising; paintings, engravings 
and illustrations rely heavily on the availability of a commercial 
urban market for their existence, compared with popular ballads which 
were first sung amongst the bush workers who created them.

It was only during the gold rush period of the 1850s, with the 
consequent growth in Victoria's population, that a pictorial tradition 
centred on the Australian pastoral worker finally emerged. Here the
published illustrations of life on the goldfields and pastoral regions by S.T. Gill successfully set down some of the major thematic directions to be pursued by later artists. Gill's sketches, often heavy-handed and clumsy in their execution, may present a stereotyped vision of the diggings and Australian pastoral life, but they were the result of his first-hand observation of the rough and tumble life of the time. Indeed, it was not until the late 1860s that the era of the independent migratory digger finally gave way to the era of the wages miner.  

Gill's illustrations were intended to bring glimpses of the 'rough and ready' life on the goldfields and outer pastoral regions to an urban audience in Melbourne and other cities. His sketches gained widespread circulation amongst city audiences up until the 1880s by virtue of their publication in works like Victorian Gold Diggings and Diggers as They Are by S.T.G. of 1852(?) and Gill's later The Australian Sketchbook of 1864.  

Gill's influence upon later artists attempting bush subjects related to the thematic content of his innumerable sketches, rather than their intrinsic artistic merits. He portrayed hapless and dejected diggers, frequently seen brooding over their misfortunes before a camp fire. This theme of the 'unlucky digger' culminated in McCubbin's image of a gold prospector, Down on His Luck of 1889. Gill's sketches such as Wayfaring Diggers (1852) show men camping out in the bush as they eke out an existence 'on the wallaby track' - a major theme in late nineteenth century painting and illustrations. The robust action and masculine vigour of bush life was another of Gill's common themes, seen for example in his Stockman (1855), who rides fearlessly at full gallop as he rounds up a runaway steer. Such subjects provided a repertoire of standard motifs for later artists and illustrators who sought to portray 'typical bush episodes' while remaining safely ensconced in their city environments.
Gill's political sympathies appear to have lain broadly with the diggers and itinerant bush workers, evidenced by his illustrations of 'licence hunts' on the diggings, where the police are portrayed in a demeaning and satirical manner. There are, then, some aspects of Gill's illustrations that may support Ward's interpretation of an emerging, proletariat bush ethos which was strengthened, rather than weakened, by the common experience of life on the diggings.\(^{80}\) No doubt Gill's public would have greatly appreciated his command of humorous caricature and anecdotal incident; these engaging elements of his style probably mitigated the sense of social criticism implicit in his occasional treatment of the conflict between diggers and the gold-field police. Gill's major legacy to the pictorial tradition of the bushman did not lie in any radical implications of his art. Rather, his early goldfields illustrations gave expression to a *leitmotif* of subsequent interpretations of the bushman in the visual arts - the idea of the 'freedom and independence' of the bushman's existence.

A popular pictorial tradition of the bushman became firmly entrenched in contemporary culture with the emergence of the major illustrated weekly newspapers in the late 1860s. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, many newspaper illustrations created thematic links with Gill's earlier goldfields sketches and caricatures, especially those presenting a humorous and richly anecdotal view of the eccentricities of bush life.

The romantic distance that increasingly separated city illustrators and their audiences from the sometimes bleak reality of contemporary pastoral life, is clearly apparent in the illustrations and in the superficial blandness of the written texts accompanying them. A drawing entitled 'Christmas Eve on the Wallaby Track' in *The Illustrated Australian News* (31 December 1880) is typical of the manner in which bush episodes and quaint bush 'characters' were often presented for
their trite curiosity value. It portrayed a stereotyped image of an old pipe-smoking swagman, seen resting against a hollow tree with his swag, billy and ever-faithful dog all conveniently located by his side. The explanatory text begins with an urban lament for the 'ingregarious' nature of the festive occasion, but then continues in laudatory tones:

A swagman is not easily discomposed. The changes are that hardship and misfortune have long since eliminated from his mind anything of the nature of sentiment. He has taken to himself new ideas and habits foreign to the general run of mankind .... He is in search of work, and is able and willing to do it should it turn up. If disappointed, he passes on, not in the least incommode by the fact. During the day he trudges along with his swag and billy, and when night comes down he lights his fire, makes tea in his billy, smokes his pipe, and for the time being, is monarch of all he surveys.

Entertainment, rather than accurate information, was the over-riding aim of the illustrated newspapers. Their presentation of bush life sidestepped the question of class antagonism between the pastoral worker and his employer. Instead, class issues and the economic struggle between various rural classes were usually either ignored or treated obliquely in a superficial, patronizing manner. The glib matter-of-factness of the writer in *The Illustrated Australian News* (5 October 1868) is typical of this patronizing attitude: 'If it were not for the class of men "on the wallaby",' he asked, 'how could the occasional work on stations be done?'

The polite avoidance of questions of rural class conflict was partly the result of the exigencies of contemporary illustrative work. City illustrators were often content to repeat standard bush motifs as they struggled to meet the demands of their weekly copy deadlines. More importantly, the avoidance of class conflicts reflects the proprietorial interests and political persuasions of the owners of the
major illustrated papers. Only exceptional rural disturbances, such as the 1891 and 1894 Shearers' Strikes, were deemed sufficiently newsworthy to encourage illustrators to forsake their standard bush formulae for the pretence of 'direct reporting' of serious industrial conflict within the rural scene.81

The picturesque atlases of the eighties thus served to continue and to consolidate a conservative, rural mythology that had been established in the illustrated newspapers since the late 1860s. Illustrators on the atlases repeated the stereotyped bush motifs that had been a recurrent feature in the newspapers, while their occasional copying or adaptation of S.T. Gill's sketches pointed to the origins of this popular tradition in the gold rush period. Writers in the atlases, as we have seen, echoed the bland and often platitudinous descriptions of rural life that characterized an urban-based view of the bush in the illustrated newspapers. Here the writers' nostalgic reflections upon the 'freedom and independence' of the bushman's existence reiterated a theme that can be found in accounts of Australian pastoral life written as early as the 1840s with a similar urban readership in mind.

The common popular pictorial tradition of the bushman in the late nineteenth century provides no evidence to suggest that a proletariat bush ethos had been transported from the outer pastoral regions to the cities, as Ward's Australian Legend proposes. Admittedly, a radical class-conscious treatment of the bushman made a rather belated appearance in illustrations in The Bulletin and The Boomerang by the mid-1880s and 1890s. These journals, of course, espoused a markedly different editorial policy from that of the conservative illustrated papers and atlases. The Bulletin's illustrators and cartoonists delighted in drawing attention to the class antagonism between squatters and pastoral workers; the often biting satire of their drawings
effectively complemented the radical viewpoint of the Bulletin writers. These satirical drawings stand apart from the mainstream of popular bush imagery in the nineteenth century.

IV

Proponents of the Australian Legend in historical writing have argued strongly, and often persuasively, for the significance of a radical popular tradition of the bushman in late nineteenth-century Australian culture. The bush ethos, they claim, was transported from the outer pastoral regions to the cities, where it later found expression in the literature of the Sydney Bulletin. Certainly the participation of leading artists as illustrators and cartoonists on the Bulletin formed an important contribution to the radical national image propagated by the magazine.

An examination of the portrayal of the bushman in the visual arts of the period reveals the existence of not one, but two popular traditions of the Australian bushman. The origins of the second and more pervasive pictorial tradition lay in the early goldfields sketches by S.T. Gill, in popular illustrations of 'Life in the Bush' in weekly newspapers from the 1860s onwards, and continued in the illustrated atlases of the 1880s. Within this influential tradition, pastoral life and the rural past were viewed from the comfortable distance of the cities, and rural class conflict was not examined. A radical impulse did not inform the portrayal of the bushman in the illustrated atlases, but instead his image served to enhance the conservative, imperialistic aims of the public centenary celebrations.

The illustrative work of artists often encompassed and spanned the two dominant strains of contemporary nationalism. But it is clear that many leading painters did not accept unquestioningly the 'up country ethos' propagated by The Bulletin. Some were forced to accept
illustrative commissions through financial need. More importantly, painters like Julian Ashton and Tom Roberts aspired to a form of 'high art' that would transcend the narrow parochialism involved in the tired repetition of standard bush motifs in illustrations. Along with sympathetic art critics like Sidney Dickinson, they wished to establish the place of nationalistic figure subjects within the realm of 'high art'. The availability of official public patronage was thus a vital issue for artists attempting large-scale figure paintings; the Bulletin writers, on the other hand, were able to appeal to a more popular audience in their work.

Despite these apparent differences, artists and the Bulletin writers shared common concerns in their formulation of a national image centred on the bushman. They were strongly motivated by a general urban desire for rural values - the 'real Australia' was to be located in outback rural areas, away from the cities and towns. This attitude was accentuated when their present well-being was threatened by the economic depression of the 1890s.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

6 The Age, 22 June 1892, quoted by Davison, op. cit., p. 282.
7 Graeme Davison, op. cit., p. 251.
15 Tom Collins (pseudonym for Joseph Furphy), Such Is Life. Written in 1897, the novel was eventually published by The Bulletin in 1903. The above quotation from the Rigby Australia paperback edition, 1975, pp. 80-81.
19 See a biography of Dickinson in Table Talk, 30 August 1889.
Sidney Dickinson, 'What Should Australian Artists Paint' in The Australasian Critic, 1 October 1890, pp. 22-22; cf. Dickinson's 'Wanted: A Standard in Art Criticism' in The Australasian Critic, 1 June 1890, p. 217: 'The trouble with our criticism is that it does not properly apprehend the importance of the subject'.

Sidney Dickinson, Art Lectures delivered at the National Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1889 (copy in the State Library of Victoria), pp. 48-49.

Dickinson's letter to The Argus, 24 April 1890, praising McCubbin's Bush Burial and recommending its purchase by the National Gallery of Victoria; see Dickinson, 'What Should Australian Artists Paint', op. cit., p. 22, where he singles out Roberts and McCubbin for their nationalistic subjects.


The Argus, 17 August 1889. Smith's words that 'four-fifths are a pain to the eye' and 'a paint-pot has been accidentally upset over a panel', appear to echo deliberately the language of Ruskin's famous attack on Whistler's art, and reveal Smith's debt to Ruskin's criticism.

The Argus, 31 May 1890. The article is unsigned and could possibly have been written by another journalist. However, a similar example can be found in Smith's praise of Folingsby's students' nationalistic figure subjects.


Virginia Spate, Tom Roberts op. cit., p. 87; also cf. Virginia Spate, 'Art Criticism in the Australian Press, 1880-1900', op. cit.

Table Talk, 30 August 1889; cf. Virginia Spate, Tom Roberts, op. cit., p. 86 and p. 141, fn. 22.

Julian R. Ashton, 'An Aim For Australian Art' in The Centennial Magazine, vol. 1, No 1, August 1889, p. 31; cf. an almost identical discussion by Ashton in an interview recorded in Table Talk, 27 January 1888.

See The Argus, 21 June 1886, for the subjects Turner sent to the 1886 Indian and Colonial Exhibition; The Melbourne University Review, vol. I, No 3, 27 September 1884, where the writer notes that the most popular series of paintings with the public at a recent exhibition were those of J.A. Turner 'devoted to one theme - the history of a bale of wool'; Table Talk, 4 December 1885; The Argus, 8 March 1884.

Richard Twopeny, Town Life in Australia, op. cit., p. 247. See also Twopeny's comments on 'high' and 'low art' in Australia and the popular resposne, pp. 42-43.
A study of contemporary exhibition catalogues reveals that, almost without exception, the large-scale pastoral figure subjects painted by the 'Heidelberg' artists (Roberts, McCubbin, Julian Ashton, Frank Mahony, etc.) have survived and are today housed in public collections in Australia. These works are relatively few in number. Notable exceptions, which are now missing or possibly in private collections, include Roberts' End to a Career - an old Scrub Cutter of 1888 and McCubbin's Found of 1892.

For the private showing of The Breakaway, and Table Talk, 17 July 1891.

See the documentation of sources in Virginia Spate, Tom Roberts, op. cit., p. 137, footnotes 20 and 26; also Roberts' comments on patronage in Bookfellow, 29 April 1899.

Catalogues of the National Gallery of Victoria; for the purchase of The Pioneer by the National Gallery of Victoria, see the later chapter on McCubbin; cf. Roberts' claim in a letter to The Argus (17 September 1891): 'During the last six years that I have been in Melbourne, I know of no Australian work bought for the Melbourne Gallery ...'.

Letter of 26 December 1863, from Sir Redmond Barry to Sir Charles Eastlake, quoted by Leonard B. Cox, op. cit., p. 404; the Gallery's purchasing policy was originally set down in the 1863 'Commission on the Fine Arts', ibid., pp. 26-27.

The above statement is, admittedly, more applicable to the Gallery's purchasing policy in the 1870s and 1880s, than to the 1890s. In retrospect, Bernard Hall's acquisitions were quite enlightened - in 1905 Hall acquired one of the Gallery's Impressionist masterpieces, Camille Pissarro's Boulevard Montmartre of 1897, through the Felton Bequest.

For example, a letter to The Argus of 5 October 1893 (which replies to Roberts' article in The Argus, 30 September 1893) arguing that Roberts and his contemporaries are not good enough to compete on the same ground with overseas artistic imports.

Virginia Spate, Tom Roberts, op. cit., pp. 34-37; Victorian Academy of Arts, Minute Books and Rules, manuscript in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne, especially the entries of 17 May 1887, 12 July 1887, and 9 August 1887, for the 'take-over' of the Academy and its replacement by the Victorian Artists' Society; The Daily Telegraph, 14 August 1895, which discusses the new Society of Artists and shows the basic issue was the presence of too many 'amateur' members in the Art Society of New South Wales; 'De Libra' [Green], 'Fine Arts in Australia', op. cit., 1 Aug. 1899, p. 23, where Green attributes the split between the Art Society of New South Wales and the Society of Artists to 'Impressionist characteristics' of younger artists.

For example, The Age, 18 February 1893; The Age, 13 August 1894, which states that when John Mather, an artist on the Board of Trustees, proposed that the 250 pounds per annum to be expended on pictures by Australian artists, should be increased to 500 pounds, the motion was not seconded; The Age, 29 October 1895.

See The Age, 26 March 1891, for a discussion of the purchasing policy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Twelve pictures were to be purchased from the annual exhibition of the Art Society of New South Wales that year.


46 Bernard Smith, *Catalogue of Australian Oil Paintings, op. cit.*, p. 17; Streeton's *Still Glides the Stream and Shall Forever Glide* and his *Fire's On, Lapstone Tunnel* were purchased by the Sydney Gallery, largely on Ashton's recommendation.


52 Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne, op. cit.*, p. 175. The quotation from *The Building Societies Gazette* is also from Davison, p. 175.


54 E.E. Morris (ed.), *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia*, Melbourne, 1887-1889, vol. 1, p. 278, refers to 'The social life of the bush, in all its freedom and simplicity', etc.

56 Russel Ward, op. cit., pp. 221-2; Geoffrey Serle, op. cit., p. 290. See in particular Streeton's letter to Roberts, probably written in August 1890, wherein Streeton praises the 'Sick Stockrider' and also the quiet, beautiful wealth of the 'Bush that we must still endeavour to work', reprinted in Bernard Smith (ed.), Documents on Art and Taste in Australia, op. cit., p. 253.

57 Russel Ward, op. cit., p. 221.


59 Francis Adams, The Australians, op. cit. p. 150, also pp. 122, 186.

60 Loureiro's Stockrider was exhibited at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition (No 77 in the catalogue held in the Victorian State Library).

61 The Table Talk writer was referring to landscapes by Streeton and Conder bearing titles from Gordon's poetry; a further report in Table Talk (13 November 1891) announced 'an important Gordon evening to be given shortly', where black and white illustrations of Gordon's poems, including 'The Sick Stockrider', were to be shown as reproductions on 'magic lantern slides'.


65 The Argus, 20 June 1887; Table Talk, 17 June and 24 June 1887, quoted by Geoffrey Serle, op. cit., pp. 283-4.


67 Vance Palmer, op. cit. and Russel Ward, The Australian Legend, op. cit., Graeme Davison's 'Sydney and the Bush', op. cit. is the most important recent article to question The Bulletin's role in the creation of 'the Australian Legend'.

68 Cf. Bruce Nesbit, op. cit.


78  *Victorian Gold Diggings . . . By S.T.G.* , op. cit., issued in two parts with 48 sketches in all; *The Diggers and Diggings of Victoria As They Are In 1855*, drawn on stone by S.T. Gill; *The Australian Sketchbook* by S.T.G., printed in colors and published by Hamel and Ferguson, Melbourne, 1864. Copies of the above publications are to be found in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne; cf. Alan McCulloch, *Artists of the Australian Goldrush*, op. cit., esp. pp. 82-83, 172-173.

79  An example of Gill's treatment of the 'unlucky digger' theme is his *Invalid Digger*, 1852, watercolour drawing in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne; *Wayfaring Diggers* was published in Gill's *Victorian Gold Diggings . . . By S.T.G.* , op. cit., in 1852. The original watercolour drawing is held in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne; Gill's *Stockman* appeared in his *Diggers and Diggings*, op. cit., 1855, and was then repeated in an almost identical format in his *Australian Sketchbook* of 1864.


81  For example, an illustration of 'The Shearers' Strike - Barcaldine, Queensland' appeared in *The Illustrated Australian News*, 1 April 1891.


83  Admittedly, the main protagonists for the 'Australian Legend' in historical writing, Vance Palmer and Russel Ward, do not attempt to use the paintings of the Heidelberg School to support their interpretations. In *The Australian Legend* Ward makes no mention of the Heidelberg School, while Palmer in *The Legend of the Nineties* does so only fleetingly on pp. 171-172.
THE HEIDELBERG SCHOOL

AND THE RURAL MYTHOLOGY

David Leigh Astbury

VOLUME II
Chapter 5

FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE: 'ON THE WALLABY TRACK'

The 1880s in Australia saw the rapid organization of widely dispersed rural workers into large and powerful industrial unions. In 1882 W.G. Spence became secretary of the ailing Amalgamated Miners' Association, whose membership had been declining for some years. But four years later the A.M.A. had become a formidable industrial force under his leadership, boasting 23,500 members in both Australia and New Zealand. Spence's outstanding skills as an organizer of pastoral workers consequently earned him the position of foundation president of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union of Australasia in 1886. By 1890 the A.S.U. could claim to have unionized about 85 per cent of the 2800-odd shearing sheds of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.¹

These important developments were swiftly changing the face of Australian pastoral life in the eighties, as the divisions between organized labour and capital became increasingly pronounced. But these dramatic events appear to have had little direct impact upon the portrayal of the bushman in contemporary painting. Frederick McCubbin's Down on His Luck (1889) and Julian Ashton's The Prospector (1889) are probably the two most famous paintings of the itinerant pastoral worker painted in the 1880s; significantly, both paintings lend heroic stature to the figure of the individual gold prospector, rather than depicting the more common wages miner of the time.

Contemporary painters generally chose to ignore the changing state of industrial relations in pastoral regions. This is most tellingly revealed in their nostalgic treatment of the theme of bushmen 'on the wallaby track'. Paintings of itinerant bush workers, swagmen and sundowners 'on the wallaby track' appeared regularly at local
exhibitions. J.A. Turner, who specialized in anecdotal bush subjects, exhibited his painting of *A Sundowner* in 1884; in 1886 he created further variations on the theme of bush workers 'on the tramp' with his paintings *On the Wallaby Track*, *Free Quarters* and *On the Woolshed Trade in the Murray District*. Alexander Colquhoun exhibited a work, *The Sundowner*, at the 1887 Melbourne Gallery Students' Exhibition and later showed a painting bearing the same title at the 1892 V.A.S. Exhibition. In 1886 Frederick McCubbin painted a small picture, now entitled *While the Billy Boils* (Private Collection, Victoria), showing a bushman reclining beside his campfire - a subject he was later to develop in his large-scale painting, *Down on His Luck*. Sydney artists too found the theme of the itinerant worker 'on the wallaby' appealing: Arthur Collingridge's *On the Wallaby* of 1889 was praised by a local critic for its portrayal of 'the resolute gait of the undaunted swagman as he trudges with his "swag" and "billy" through the drenching rain and slush amid the deepening twilight...'.

As the press criticism of these paintings demonstrates, they posed no obvious threat to the sensibilities of even the most conservative public. Paintings of men 'on the wallaby track' paid tribute to the supposed 'independence' of the itinerant bushman, but simultaneously avoided reference to the social relationship between master and servant that was an integral part of contemporary pastoral life. Urban audiences could identify their own aspirations towards economic independence with life 'on the wallaby track' from a comfortably romantic distance. The theme appealed to an urban dream of independence, rather than indicated the actual aspirations of city dwellers.

For urban working and middle classes, the quest for independence had a more practical and immediate goal: 'A Home of One's Own'. The writer in *The Building Societies' Gazette* (13 June 1888) declared that
in a community where all classes are virtually equal, we see no reason why the dwellings of the rich and poor should not be intermingled. Let each man select the site that is suited to his wants and taste, and let his house ... be such as becomes his station and means.

The virtues of home ownership were vigorously espoused by the building societies in the 1880s. All classes of urban society were encouraged to secure their future through the possession of 'a home of one's own'. This popular belief in a property-owning democracy formed an ironic counterpoint to the imagined 'democratic' and necessarily 'homeless' life-style of men 'on the wallaby track'.

Although realizable in practical terms, the pursuit of home ownership was itself overlaid with the values of a popular urban dream. In some respects these values were opposed to those of the rural myth. The building societies implored the urban working man to be thrifty, to hold a permanent job, and to be regular in his house payments. The societies condemned the nomadic existence of 'the shepherd and stockman of the Australian interior' and called upon the wanderer to ... admit, after all, that it is possible to settle down in the one locality and house and be content and happy in the knowledge that, even though humble and in the midst of sordid surroundings, it is Home.

The 'wallaby track' theme, in fact, achieved popular success in art of the 1880s, when Melbourne enjoyed the highest rate of home ownership of any comparable city in the world. The ideal of home ownership nevertheless carried with it overtones of rural peace and simplicity. The working man in his humble dwelling, we are told, could find 'the pleasure and comfort of life in a cottage surrounded by its own garden ... with all the advantages of country life'. In the 1880s, Melbourne's more affluent classes tended to establish their homes in the semi-rural, south-eastern suburbs where they were promised
'the Advantages of Country and City Life combined'. Even the names of some of Melbourne's suburbs - Hawthorn, Burwood, Box Hill, Glen Iris, Armadale - suggested a rural retreat from the inner city. Within the garden of his home, the middle-class gentleman could find a haven from the pressures of city and business life, amidst the 'coolness and seclusion and thick umbrageous foliage through which not a speck of disease-breeding dust [could] penetrate'.

By 1891, forty-one per cent of Melbourne's householders owned or were buying their own homes (Sydney's rate of owner-occupiers was admittedly lower, at thirty per cent in 1891). But with the onset of the economic depression of the early 1890s, the ideal of home-ownership turned sour for the working and lower middle classes. They were the hardest hit victims of the economic crash, and during the depression they found it almost impossible to keep up their repayments.

The popularity of the 'wallaby track' theme in art should be viewed against this urban background. During the boom years of the 1880s, the urban working and middle classes sought 'independence' through the status and security of owning a home. The bushman's life, on the other hand, could be romanticized as a carefree existence where 'independence' was achieved without the security of material possessions, and without the bind of meeting financial commitments. When the economic depression of the 1890s brought hardship for many urban dwellers, the freedom of life 'on the wallaby track' must have seemed even more romantic and appealing.

II

The popularity of the 'wallaby track' theme in painting was one indication of its even more frequent occurrence within a wider popular tradition. The text to an illustration of 'On the Wallaby' in The Illustrated Australian News (5 October 1868) explained for the benefit
of an uninformed urban audience how

The expression designates a peculiar phase of Australian life. It is applied to a class of men who continue to exist without a home, and, in great measure, without work. They are to be found in the pastoral districts wandering from station to station ...

By the 1880s drawings of men 'on the wallaby' had become a standard bush motif in the illustrated newspapers. Julian Ashton's drawing, 'On the Wallaby' in *The Australasian Sketcher* (14 January 1882) suggests the basic appeal of the theme to urban yearnings after the simplicity and bucolic calm of rural life; his drawing presented a stereotyped image of rural peace and the simple life - a bearded swagman, casually smoking his pipe by a campfire in the bush, while he waits for the billy to boil.

Illustrations of 'A Swagman' and itinerant workers 'On the Road' appeared in the picturesque atlases of the eighties almost as a matter of course. Artists occasionally attempted to lend greater verisimilitude to their portrayal of the bushman by basing their drawings on contemporary photographs by J.W. Lindt and Nicholas Caire. But even here an urban consciousness of the bush was surreptitiously present. Lindt and Caire, in fact, invariably posed their 'bush characters' and carefully arranged the elements of their compositions in order to capture the full richness of local detail for an urban market. The influence of American frontier imagery also permeated the treatment of the Australian itinerant bushman in the atlases. Writing in *The Boy Travellers in Australasia* in 1889, Thomas W. Knox made an explicit comparison between the American tramp and the Australian sundowner:

The sundowner is as insolent as the American tramp; by Australian custom he is welcome to supper, lodging, and breakfast ... the lodging being in his own blankets on the floor of the men's hut or the woolshed.
The illustration to the text, supposedly of Australian sundowners 'Waiting for Sunset', was in fact drawn by the American illustrator, Howard Pyle, and had previously appeared in an American publication under a different title.\textsuperscript{16}

The theme of men 'on the wallaby track', then, formed an inseparable part of the bush mythology by the 1880s. While the term 'on the wallaby' may have suggested something of the 'hard fare' of the bushman's existence, it also carried with it more optimistic connotations of a democratic life-style 'tied to no man' and of a land of plenty which would provide.\textsuperscript{17} This apotheosis of the itinerant bushman 'on the wallaby' continued in contemporary literature through the turn of the century and beyond. J. Le Gay Brereton, for example, took as the theme of his book, \textit{Landloper}, written in 1899, what he called 'the irresistible charm of nomadic idleness' on the wallaby track. Brereton was not a bushman himself, but a Professor of English Literature at Sydney University.\textsuperscript{18}

Not only did the idealization of the migratory bushman in contemporary art and writing conveniently ignore the fact that many itinerant workers were being organized into pastoral unions, but the idyllic picture presented of life 'on the wallaby' was no longer an accurate description of rural conditions. By the late 1880s in the Riverina district, declining profits from squatting encouraged station owners to be increasingly paltry in their handouts to wandering swagmen and sundowners. So too had the traditional celebrations provided by the station owner after the end of the shearing season all but disappeared by the early 1890s.\textsuperscript{19} As Francis Adams observed in 1893 that 'All the old profuse hospitality, the hunts and dances and four-in-hands of the squatter "kings" live now but as a dim tradition'.\textsuperscript{20} Henry Lawson, severely chastened by his 'sole experience of the outback' after his
journey to Hungerford in 1892, wrote bitterly of the grimness of life on the wallaby in his story, 'Stragglers': 'To live you must walk. To cease walking is to die'.

The obvious discrepancy between the rural ideal and its bleak actuality points to a crucial feature of the developing rural mythology. It suggests an unstated and perhaps unconscious conflict in the minds of contemporary artists and writers: a conflict between the idea of the freedom of the individual bushman 'on the wallaby track' and the collective spirit and discipline required by modern pastoral unionism.

In his poem 'The Roaring Days', written in 1889, Henry Lawson looks back nostalgically to the 'Days of Gold' when unionism was simply 'being mates': 'And you and I were faithful mates/All through the Roaring Days'. 'When Fortune frowned' on the diggers, their solution was simple: 'Their swags they'd lightly shoulder/And tramp to other ground'. But Lawson ends his poem with a note of regret that the freedom of the era had now passed:

Those golden days are vanished,
And altered is the scene;
The diggings are deserted,
... .
The mighty Bush with iron rails
Is tethered to the world.

Like Lawson, Joseph Furphy also looked back to the gold rush days as a period in which egalitarian ideals arose spontaneously from the social circumstances of life on the diggings. The 'digger of the old school', he claimed, was 'fully alive to the privilege of release from the pressure of mildewed conventions touching squire and parson'.

The nostalgia expressed by writers in The Bulletin for the 'good old days' of the gold rush era is understandable when one considers that a number of its leading writers - Lawson, Bernard O'Dowd, Edward
Dyson, A.G. Stephens, the Lindsays among them - had spent their youth on declining goldfield towns in the country, before arriving as impressionable young men in the cities of Melbourne and Sydney. Faced with the grim evidence of poverty and social conflict within the cities (such as the events of the 1890 Maritime Strike), it is perhaps natural that this group of young intellectuals should wish to contrast their disillusionment with contemporary urban society with a seemingly freer and more egalitarian society of the bygone gold rush era.24

After the crushing defeats of labour in the 1890 Maritime Strike and the 1891 Shearers' Strike, radical thinkers often sought solace in utopian dreams of the future and in nostalgic reflections upon the passing of the 'democratic' age of the gold digger. In his utopian novel, *The Workingman's Paradise* of 1892, William Lane wrote longingly of the era when every man was able to live in 'freedom, justice and democracy without an employer'.25 These sentiments were echoed as late as 1909 in W.G. Spence's own account of the labour movement in *Australia's Awakening*:

There was no life more free and independent than that of the gold-digger. He was no wage slave, but a free man, with all those high qualities only developed under free conditions ... He was a democrat.

Spence went on to lament the drying up of the shallow gold leads that 'soon led to the days of big mining companies and the free independent digger became a worker for wages'.26

A similar nostalgia for the passing of a 'democratic' gold era informs Ashton's and McCubbin's choice of subject in *The Prospector* and *Down on His Luck*. But their idealization of the individual gold prospector bears only a tangential relationship to the gold-mining industry as it existed in the eighties. The majority of miners of the time worked for companies and wages, and had been organized into the by then
quite powerful A.M.A. Yet, as Geoffrey Blainey noted, the miners' union 'was watchdog rather than bulldog', since thousands of miners were shareholders in the gold-mining companies which employed them. The average gold miner did not see himself condemned to a lifetime of wage slavery, because he still held out hopes of making his fortune under the newer company system.\textsuperscript{27} It is ironical that writers on The Bulletin looked back longingly to the 'freedom' of the gold rush period, while contemporary gold miners usually embraced the capitalist ethos which these writers despised.\textsuperscript{28}

At the same time as the independent digger faded from the contemporary scene and the average miner became a wage earner, a popular pictorial tradition of the individual gold prospector gathered strength in the illustrated newspapers. Fluctuations and declines in the fortunes of the company gold-mining industry served only to deepen the nostalgia felt for the passing of the individual prospector.\textsuperscript{29} In the picturesque atlases, illustrators also paid tribute to the prospector, frequently basing their drawings on photographs by Lindt and Caire.\textsuperscript{30} Writers therein expressed a well-worn theme when they drew attention to the 'old days' of alluvial mining and contrasted them with the present day, when mechanization had brought gold-getting to the 'highest state of perfection'.\textsuperscript{31}

There is no hint of the gold digger's waning power in the physical assertiveness of Julian Ashton's image of The Prospector of 1889 (Art Gallery of New South Wales). Ashton's conception of the subject is essentially heroic and romantic; the prospector is deliberately seen from slightly below, while the dark background forces his figure into bold relief. A contemporary critic described The Prospector as

\begin{quote}
... a purely Australian subject, nervous and racy of the soil ... The man stands up before us intent upon his avocation, his figure typical of the bone and sinew of the nation.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}
Ashton had earlier drawn gold-mining scenes for the *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, basing his illustrations on well-known photographs of Nicholas Caire. The motif of the miner examining the contents of his gold pan was a recurring one in colonial art, largely due to the popular works of S.T. Gill. In pose and stature, however, Ashton's prospector closely resembles the central miner in Antoine Fauchery's photograph of *Washing Out a Good Prospect*, taken in the 1850s. Certainly, the strategic placement of the miner's tools of trade in *The Prospector* suggests Ashton's close familiarity with the conventions of local Australian photography.

American frontier imagery may also have been an unconscious but positive influence upon Ashton's portrayal of his subject. The participation of Californian gold-diggers in the Australian gold rush was an historical phenomenon that was frequently acknowledged by Australian writers up until the end of the century. A description of the early Australian gold-digger that appeared in *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia* in 1887, evidences how the popular image of the American and Australian digger had become fused in the minds of contemporary audiences:

The digger himself was usually attired in a blue or red shirt, moleskin trousers tucked into high boots, and a slouch hat, while at his waist were pistols and knife, without which weapons of defence and offence no man was ever seen.

The accompanying illustrations depict 'Australian' diggers wearing slouch hats, money pouches and prominently displayed gun holsters, all conspicuous features of Ashton's treatment of *The Prospector*.

Sadness at the passing of the individual gold prospector is more subtly evoked in McCubbin's *Down on His Luck*, 1889 (Art Gallery of Western Australia). McCubbin portrays the melancholy meditation of
the solitary prospector considering his fate. A critic (The Argus, 4 May 1889) enthused that

The lonely figure and all its sylvan surroundings are rendered with a true feeling for nature [in] the stillness and seclusion of the sequestered bit of woodland scenery.

The subject of Down on His Luck finds a contemporary, and perhaps ironic, counterpoint in George Ashton's earlier water-colour drawing of 1885, entitled Luck At Last; Ashton's water colour portrayed an 'elderly digger in a flannel jumper and moleskin trousers ... seated in his wooden shanty, contemplating a handful of nuggets, the fortunate result of a protracted toil ....' 39 But unlike Ashton's picture, Down on His Luck - with its isolated bush setting and its solitary figure next to the campfire - also takes on some of the associative meanings of a much wider tradition of the bushmen portrayed 'on the wallaby track'. 40

Contemporary critics found the pessimistic implications of McCubbin's picture mitigated by ideas of the 'hard fare' but 'freedom' of life 'on the wallaby'. According to the writer in Table Talk (26 April 1889), the face of McCubbin's prospector

... tells of hardships, keen and blighting in their influence, but there is a nonchalant and slightly cynical expression, which proclaims the absence of all self pity ... and the misty atmosphere around which is so dreamily subduing the leaves and branches of the trees into a general neutrality of colour seems to leave the lonely figure of the wanderer untouched .... Mr McCubbin's picture is thoroughly Australian in spirit, and yet so poetic, that it is a veritable bush idyll ...

Ultimately the subject of Down on His Luck stems from the gold-fields illustrations of artists like Gill. Gill's anecdotal water colour, 128 Bad Results, 1852, presents an early version of the theme in showing a dejected digger 'sadly ruminating on the perversity of his ill fortune'
while he is comforted by a companion. The anecdotal flavour of Gill's gold-fields sketches survived in several illustrations of the 'unlucky' digger in the illustrated newspapers of the seventies and eighties. Typical examples may be found in the drawings of 'unlucky' and 'lucky' diggers that appeared in *The Illustrated Sydney News* (21 January 1871). The writer of the adjacent text elaborated upon their meaning:

We desire to represent the genuine gold-digger both in his successful and unsuccessful aspect; or as he would probably express it, 'as he appears after making a pile', and again 'when down on his luck'.

In 1888 J. Davis, a well-known illustrator, appears to have adapted the imagery of Gill's *Bad Results* in his drawing of 'The Gold-Digger: Down on His Luck' for *Victoria and Its Metropolis*. Employing the same oval format favoured by Gill in his water colour, Davis shows the motif of the despondent digger comforted by his partner, while in the background may similarly be seen the miners' windlass and instruments of trade. In particular, both pictures portray the dejected digger with his bowed head supported by his hand, anticipating McCubbin's later treatment of the motif. A writer in *Victoria and Its Metropolis* described how

... the early diggings are full of tales of the silent, solitary stranger [whose] golden dreams dwindled down to the mere hope of finding enough to keep the spark of life [within him].

The subject of McCubbin's *Down on His Luck* thus has its origins in a long-established illustrative convention for portraying the 'unlucky digger'. However, an even more immediate source for the painting may exist in the field of contemporary photography. A photograph by Nicholas Caire, also conveniently entitled *Down on His Luck*, bears a remarkable resemblance to McCubbin's picture. In Caire's photograph we
find that the seated figure has been similarly posed before the campfire, his swag prominently placed by his side. Immediately next to Caire's bushman rises a giant hollow gumtree, while the open foreground area extends evenly into the mid-distance, where it meets the dense vegetation of the bush. Here the land slopes gently away from right to left in a manner comparable with its treatment in McCubbin's painting; similarly, in both the painting and photograph, only small patches of sky may be seen through the foliage of the background bush.\(^3\)

*Down on His Luck* is indebted to popular imagery, but at the same time transcends it. Influenced by the open-air realism of the French painter, Jules Bastien-Lepage, McCubbin omits more particularized details and limits the role of anecdote to present a more universal image of the itinerant bush worker. His command of subtly modulated tonal values, the sturdy peasant type of the bushman, and the subdued grey sky above the trees, all suggest the vital influence of Lepage's realist style. McCubbin's treatment of the subject succeeds in lending *Down on His Luck* some of the evocative associations of the bushman 'on the wallaby' theme, but he skilfully avoids the cloying sentimentality and stereotyped anecdotal quality that so often characterized earlier renditions of the theme in paintings and illustrations. The image of the bushman in *Down on His Luck* is prophetic of the concept of the 'lone hand' underlying much writing in *The Bulletin*: the independent prospector who, scorning to accept wages from any man, endures a solitary life in the bush, turning the fact of endurance itself into a 'victory' over fate.\(^4\)

The onset of the economic depression in the early 1890s saw no waning of artistic and public interest in the gold prospector. His figure continued to provide a symbolic focus for the aspirations of the urban dweller towards economic independence, but now these yearnings were deepened by the signs of poverty and unemployment so clearly visible in the cities.
Earlier in the 1880s the gold-fields had promised workers a seemingly practical solution to their dreams of independence. The Charters Towers field in Queensland had begun to boom around 1886, while even earlier in 1885 the Kimberley discoveries had encouraged the migration of eastern workers to the west. With the discovery of gold in Kalgoorlie in June 1893, the steady migration of easterners became a flood, as thousands of 'refugees' from the depression fled to the west in search of gold. Meanwhile, in the colonies of Victoria and New South Wales, the depression conditions saw a sizeable number of fossickers reworking the old gold-digging areas.\textsuperscript{45}

The events on the gold-fields in the east and the west were reflected in frequent drawings of fossickers and prospectors in the illustrated newspapers. The text to J. MacFarlane's drawing of 'The Fossicker' in The Illustrated Australian News (1 January 1892) mentioned 'the patient wanderer and worker upon those old abandoned diggings which are still seen in the vicinities of Ballarat and Bendigo'. Alternatively, other illustrations purported to introduce Melbourne and Sydney audiences to the adventurous life of the prospector in the far west.\textsuperscript{46}

Painters were equally fascinated by the image of the fossicker and gold prospector who somehow managed to eke out an existence during the worst depression years. In January 1893, Walter Withers spent several weeks at the gold-mining town of Creswick in Victoria, where he conducted outdoor painting classes. (His students included the promising young artist, Percy Lindsay.) Withers subsequently exhibited paintings of gold-mining scenes at the local 1893 V.A.S. Exhibition under the titles of Fossickers, Panning Out and Seeking for Gold - Cradling. The crisp \textit{plein-\textit{a}ire} tonality of these pictures was the result of his close observation of the light and atmosphere of the Creswick landscape. However, their compositional arrangement and attention to local detail had been prefigured in earlier photographs of gold-mining scenes taken
by Nicholas Caire in the 1880s. A painting attributed to Tom Roberts entitled *The Fossickers* (Art Gallery of South Australia) is closely related to the thematic content of Withers' gold-field scenes and also presumably dates from the early nineties. The painting shows three prospectors working a claim, while their lonely camp may be seen in the mid-distance of the bush. Once again *The Fossickers* bears remarkable compositional similarities to Caire's gold-field photographs, especially his photograph of 'Dry Blowing' at Coolgardie.

While such paintings certainly reflect a response to daily events of the nineties, the figure of the individual prospector was simultaneously viewed through the filter of a nostalgic yearning after a bygone age. The *Argus* critic (20 April 1893) wrote:

> In 'Seeking for Gold' and 'Panning Out', Mr D. [sic] Withers has portrayed two reminiscences of the early gold-digging days in this colony, when the long handled shovel, the pan, and the cradle were the stock-in-trade of the miner.

Similarly in 1894, a contemporary writer described a painting of *Cradling for Gold* by the Sydney artist, A.J. Fischer, as

> ... a subject redolent of the history of Australia ... It is during the early days of the gold-fields that one must look for the picturesque side of mining life, in the wanderings of the prospector ..."  

These press comments quietly acknowledge that, by the depression years, the 'freedom and independence' of 'life on the wallaby track' had become an idyllic and very remote dream for an urban population.

III

The portrayal of the itinerant bush worker 'on the wallaby track' was a vital element of the rural myth in art and literature. The theme derived its origins and strength from a firmly-established popular
tradition. It was treated in numerous anecdotal paintings by minor contemporary artists like J.A. Turner, while the recurrence of the theme in the illustrated newspapers and picturesque atlases followed a tradition reaching back to the early gold-field sketches of S.T. Gill. The freedom of men 'on the wallaby track' also formed a *leitmotif* in the writing of the 'Bulletin School'. And yet despite the prevalence and widespread appeal of the theme, it gave rise to comparatively few large-scale figure paintings. Only Frederick McCubbin and Julian Ashton attempted to raise the theme to a more universal plane of experience in their large subject paintings, *Down on His Luck* and *The Prospector*. But even these two paintings found their sources within the popular tradition.

The idealization of the migratory bush worker by artists and writers was, then, strongly influenced by a popular nostalgia for the rural life. These nostalgic yearnings were deepened when their security was threatened by the bleak outlook of the 1890s depression. Both artists and writers often sought refuge in the identification of a 'golden age' in the rural past during the gold-rush era. The figure of the individual gold prospector came to symbolize the 'freedom and independence' of a past age, when egalitarian ideals and individual initiative were not in conflict and could be equally rewarded by a 'democratic' society.

Underlying this reflective attitude the rural life was more than a simple reaction to living in an increasingly complex urban environment. At the root of the contemporary veneration for the bushman lay the aspirations of the average urban dweller towards economic independence. For an urban audience, the theme of men 'on the wallaby track' presented an archetypal of rural peace and simplicity, where men could live in harmony with nature in a land of plenty. The independent existence of the itinerant bush worker offered a romantic and escapist solution to the materialistic imperatives of urban society. In reality, the
urban dweller invariably sought security, as well as 'independence', in the pursuit of an opposing goal, home-ownership.

Indeed, there was much to ignore so that the myth of life 'on the wallaby track' could remain robust and attractive. The idyllic conception of life 'on the wallaby' precluded any awareness of changing social conditions in the rural scene. It avoided the opposition of pastoral employers to the increasing power of organized pastoral labour, and ignored the tightfistedness of squatters towards itinerant workers by the late 1880s. The psychological attraction of the theme lay in the fact that it assiduously avoided placing the itinerant worker within the social context of a master and servant relationship which was such an essential part of pastoral life. This glossing over of the harsher realities of rural life explains why the myth of men 'on the wallaby track' had such strength and popular appeal.

The task which Tom Roberts set himself was the portrayal of the rural worker within pastoral society. Whether Roberts achieved greater realism in this undertaking than his artistic contemporaries is the subject of the following chapter.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 5


2 J.A. Turner's A Sundowner was exhibited at the 1884 Ballarat Fine Art Exhibition (Catalogue, State Library of Victoria). Turner's On the Wallaby Track, Free Quarters and On a Woolshed Trade in the Murray District are described in The Argus, 21 June 1886; Colquhoun's paintings of The Sundowner are listed in the catalogues of the 1887 Melbourne Gallery Students' Exhibition and the 1892 V.A.S. Exhibition in the State Library of Victoria, see The Argus, 25 April 1887; at the 1888 V.A.S. Exhibition, Jane Sutherland exhibited On the Tramp (Catalogue, State Library of Victoria).

3 McCubbin's While the Billy Boils (oil on canvas, 20.4 x 40.6 cm) is reproduced in Ann Galbally, Frederick McCubbin, op. cit., p. 64, also cf. p. 60.

4 Collingridge's painting On the Wallaby is described and reproduced in an article by James Green, 'The Art Society of New South Wales', op. cit.

5 The following argument and information are derived from Graeme Davison, The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne, op. cit., chapter 7, 'Suburban Dreams and Urban Realities', and chapter 8, 'A City of Freehold Homes'. The passage from The Building Societies' Gazette is quoted by Davison, p. 146.

6 Ibid., pp. 175-177.

7 [Australasian Building Societies' and Mortgage Companies' Gazette], Home Truths for Home Seekers, Melbourne, 1890, p. 55; quoted by Graeme Davison, op. cit., p. 176.

8 Graeme Davison, op. cit., p. 181.

9 The Argus, 25 October 1884; quoted by Davison, op. cit., p. 140.

10 C. Boyne Luffman, The Principles of Gardening for Australia, Melbourne, 1903, p. 44; quoted by Davison, op. cit., p. 138.


12 Ibid., pp. 186-188.

13 Numerous newspaper illustrations that do not bear the specific title, 'On the Wallaby Track', can be safely assigned to the theme. For example, illustrations of 'sundowners' obviously belong to this category, cf. 'Sundowners', The Australasian Sketcher, 3 October 1874,
or 'The Sundowner and His Doings', *The Illustrated Australian News*, 21 January 1885.


15 For example, William Smedley's drawing 'On the Old Man Plains' in Andrew Garran, ed., *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 775, may have been based on photographs by Nicholas Caire of bushmen camping out in the open, cf. Caire's photographs reproduced as postcards, *Traveller Sleeping in a Mia Mia and Giant Tea Camp, King Parrot Creek*, in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne (H 4159 Mc. 4 Dr. 9 Env. I and H 18193 Mc. 10 Dr. 3 Env. 2). Caire's and Lindt's bush photographs were reproduced in commercial albums and the accompanying explanatory captions to the photographs are almost identical to the texts in the illustrated newspapers. For example, see the caption to Caire's *A Sundowner's Camp*, No 30 in his album *Gippsland Scenery*, La Trobe Library, Melbourne. The photograph is reproduced in Michael Cannon, *op. cit.*, p. 85.


28 Humphrey McQueen, op. cit., p. 146; cf. Coral Lansbury, 'The Miner's Right to Mateship' in Meanjin, vol. 25, No 4, 1966. Lansbury argues that Australian coal miners, rather than gold-miners and bushmen, were the true progenitors of a radical tradition in Australian culture. Amongst other reasons, she points out that they were earlier organized into industrial unions, and held no hope of making a fortune under the company coal-mining system.

29 For example, the text to an illustration, 'Out Prospecting' in The Australasian Sketcher (15 April 1876), describes how the Government has sent out several prospecting parties with 'a view to aiding to improve the rather languishing prospects of mining...'; other examples of the genre include: Oswald Rose Campbell's 'Prospecting in Australia' in The Illustrated Australian News (Supplement, July 1870); 'The Prospector' in The Illustrated Australian News (8 August 1883); and an historical subject by George Ashton, 'Esmond Discovering Gold at Clunes, 1851' in The Illustrated Australian News (1 August 1888).

30 See especially further discussion of Julian Ashton's drawings for The Picturesque Atlas and footnote 33; for an earlier example of this practice, see the illustration 'Digger on the Tramp' in David Blair, op. cit., p. 433, which is based on J.W. Lindt's photograph, On The Tramp, original in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne; also the illustration 'Prospecting' in Garran, ed., Picturesque Atlas of Australasia, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 742, is based on Lindt's Prospector's Hut (Solferino, N.S.W.), from his album Characteristic Australian Scenery, original in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne.


34 For example, S.T. Gill's watercolour drawing, Interesting Statement, Quality of Washing Discussed, 1852, reproduced in the catalogue of the Joseph Brown Gallery Autumn Exhibition, Melbourne, 1977; Gill repeated the motif in his sketch of 'Prospecting' in The Australian Sketchbook in 1864.

and Sue McKinnon, *Life on the Australian Goldfields*, Sydney, 1976, p. 32] also bears close stylistic similarities to Ashton's painting, suggesting the convention of portraying the digger examining the contents of his pan was well established in late nineteenth century Australian photography; cf. an illustration 'Gold Winning in West Australia. A "Dry Blower" at work' in *The Illustrated Australian News* (1 September 1894), which acknowledges that the illustration reproduces a photograph by J. Randall Mann.


38 *Ibid.*; William Hatherell's illustrations 'Prospecting' and 'Fossicking' on pp. 172 and 184 introduce similar figure types to those of Ashton's painting.

39 George Ashton's *Luck at Last* was reproduced as an engraving in Morris, ed., *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia*, op. cit., vol. 4 (1889), p. 25, and the quotation in my text is from a description of the painting in *The Argus* (27 April 1885).

40 A further contemporary example of the lone bushman resting in a secluded bush setting may be found in William Hatherell's drawing of 'Fernshaw' in Morris, ed., *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia*, op. cit., Vol. 4 (1889), p. 58.


43 Nicholas Caire, *Down On His Luck*, original in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne, reproduced in *Federated Australian Photographic Views*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 113. So far I have been unable to provide a precise date for Caire's photograph; its striking similarity to McCubbin's painting suggests a direct interrelationship between the two works. The practical difficulties Caire would have faced in finding a landscape setting that corresponds so closely to that in McCubbin's painting indicates that the photograph is the earlier work. Certainly, Caire took comparable photographs showing swagmen, etc. camped next to hollow trees that can be safely dated to the early and mid 1880s.


46 For example, the illustration 'Gold Winning in West Australia. A "Dry Blower" at Work', *The Illustrated Australian News* (1 September 1894);
other examples of the genre include 'A Prospecting Party', The Illustrated Australian News (2 December 1895).

47 Cf. the April 1893 V.A.S. Exhibition Catalogue in the State Library of Victoria; Withers' Seeking for Gold - Cradling (now in a private collection) is strongly reminiscent of Caire's goldfields photographs, especially in the scale and placement of the figure within the landscape, cf. a photograph entitled Prospectors Trying a Dish (presumably by Caire) in Federated Australian Photographic Views, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 73; Ballarat Art Gallery owns Withers' Mining Scene, Creswick, 1893 (reproduced in Alan McCulloch, The Golden Age of Australian Painting, Melbourne, 1969, plate 36) and the Australian National Gallery, Canberra, owns Withers' large-scale subject picture, The Two Fossickers, 1893. See 'A Short Biography of Walter Withers' (no author given, but perhaps by Alexander McCubbin), in Walter Withers Correspondence, manuscript in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne; The Art and Life of Walter Withers (no author given, but almost certainly by Alexander McCubbin), Melbourne, n.d. (c.1925?), p. 19; Anne Humffray, 'Tranquillity and Tempest: the Paintings of Walter Withers' in C.B. Christesen, ed., The Gallery on Eastern Hill, op. cit., p. 43. At the 1892 VAS Exhibition, James Quin showed his painting, An Old Fossicker.

48 Caire's photograph 'Dry Blowing' at Coolgardie is reproduced in Federated Australian Photographic Views, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 14. The attribution of The Fossickers in the Art Gallery of South Australia to Tom Roberts has been questioned by various experts; the painting is signed 'Tom Roberts' in the lower right corner; Walter Withers and Percy Lindsay have been suggested as the possible artist. Cf. Virginia Spate's catalogue of Roberts' works (No 444, The Fossickers) in 'Tom Roberts and Australian Impressionism', op. cit., also p. 204.

49 Edward Bevan, op. cit., p. 82; A.J. Fischer's Cradling for Gold is reproduced on the same page.
Chapter 6

TOM ROBERTS: 'STRONG, MASculine LABOUR'

I

In his book, *The Romantic Nineties*, Arthur José defined the essential character of Sydney art in the 1880s and 1890s: 'The younger men, students and practitioners alike, were very American in their black and white and very French in their colour work'.¹ José's identification of the twin influences of black and white illustration and French painting points to an important feature of the artistic portrayal of the Australian bushman during the period. As we have seen in earlier chapters, artists certainly found inspiration for their bush subjects in readily available illustrations from newspapers and magazines. But in paintings of the bushman, these popular sources were often transformed or modified through the wider influence of an established European realist tradition of the theme of pastoral labour. Tom Roberts' well-known Australian pastoral subjects stand as key examples of this phenomenon for, between 1881 and 1885, Roberts had spent an artistically formative period in Europe and England.²

While there was a plethora of illustrations of bush subjects in newspapers, illustrated atlases and magazines like the Sydney *Bulletin*, many of these bush subjects were clearly unsuitable for a more 'elevated' artistic treatment within the European tradition. An illustration of 'A Shearer "Knocking Down" His Cheque' by the *Bulletin*’s famous cartoonist, Livingstone Hopkins, is typical of the 'up country' bush ethos popularized by the magazine.³ Similar illustrations of the boozy fraternity of bush workers appeared regularly in the weekly newspapers of the time.⁴ It is therefore necessary to realize the extent to which Roberts' well-known paintings of Australian pastoral workers differed from popular bush imagery and the particular strain of nationalism fostered by the
Bulletin writers of the nineties. Roberts did not simply become 'very French' in his 'colour work', as José's description might suggest. He made a conscious attempt to imbue his treatment of local subjects with a sense of the weight and meaning of a wider European tradition.

The veneration of the bushman in late nineteenth century Australian art and literature may be seen with some justification as a minor offshoot of a more pervasive European movement. Peasant subjects had assumed a profound moral significance for European painters of rural life in the 1880s. With the encroachment of modern industrial developments into more and more aspects of daily life, the peasant depicted in painting was increasingly viewed 'as a symbol of man's lost affinity with nature'. The earlier art of the Barbizon painter of peasant subjects, Jean François Millet, became a seminal inspiration for artists wishing to portray the values and aspects of rural life that were believed to be quickly fading. However, recent research into the artists' colonies in Brittany during the 1870s and 1880s has shown that visiting painters usually ignored or misinterpreted the successful industrialization of the Breton rural economy. After Millet's death in 1875, peasant subjects had gained widespread popularity in European art, indicating the general nostalgia 'for the pre-industrial past, which Millet had sensed with dignity and heroism'.

Early in 1881, Roberts left Australia for England and Europe, where he was to gain first-hand knowledge of these developments. By December of that year, he had enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy Schools, and there his friends and fellow students over the next three years included the English artists John Buxton Knight, R. Anning Bell and Maurice Greiffenhagen. Within Roberts' artistic circle in London during the early eighties, Millet's art was greatly admired. Like so many artists of their generation, Roberts and his friends would have found in Millet's peasant subjects 'a new sincerity of vision', which
emphasized the primacy of content in art, over the artist's dexterous manipulation of style and technique.\textsuperscript{11} While Millet was clearly a seminal figure, 'progressive' young English artists also absorbed his influence through the work of his follower and fellow-countryman, Jules Bastien-Lepage.\textsuperscript{12}

Before his premature death in 1884, Bastien-Lepage had become the idol of students in French and English art schools, by virtue of his more academic and sentimentalized versions of Millet's peasant subjects. The large-scale peasant figures in Lepage's paintings are drawn and modelled in the academic manner; the landscape backgrounds are closely observed and carefully modulated with an eye to the 'relative values' of tones - silvery, grey-green and brown mid-tones predominate. Walter Sickert cynically characterized another key element in Lepage's technique: 'the usual mechanically obtrusive square brush-work of the Parisian schools of art'.\textsuperscript{13} Lepage's peasant subjects also influenced a revaluation of the traditional placement of the human figure in relation to the landscape. In his recorded statements he argued that, rather than being seen in silhouette against the sky, the figure is more naturally seen within the landscape background.\textsuperscript{14}

However, Bastien-Lepage's most profound influence in the 1880s lay in the practice of open-air painting. His name became synonymous with a popular interpretation of \textit{plein-airisme}. The necessity of painting each subject directly on the spot became an article of faith for Lepage's followers. A writer in \textit{The Magazine of Art} expressed the contemporary admiration for what was seen as Lepage's 'uncompromising' \textit{plein-airisme}: 'All his landscapes were painted from the first to the last touch in the open'.\textsuperscript{15} According to the interpretation of \textit{plein-airisme} popularized by Lepage and his willing disciples, strong daylight was considered detrimental to the overall unity of open-air paintings.
Lepage's own figure subjects are invariably set in landscapes with subdued, overcast grey skies.\(^{16}\)

Roberts followed the pattern set by 'progressive' young English artists in the late seventies and early eighties by studying for a short period in France.\(^{17}\) Around 1883-84(?), he spent some months in Paris and, like the English painters George Clausen and Stanhope Forbes, who had made the pilgrimage a few years earlier, he was greatly impressed by the style of painters like Lepage exhibiting at the Salon. J.S. MacDonald later wrote of the impact of this experience on Roberts:

Roberts went to France, where he studied at Julien's. At this time, Bastien-Lepage was one of the foremost painters of the day. With good judgement, Roberts took Lepage for a model.\(^{18}\)

In Paris, Roberts would also have seen the work of Millet and Courbet, who had been honoured with a large retrospective exhibition at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1882.\(^{19}\)

A measure of Bastien-Lepage's outstanding popularity with 'progressive' English artists in the eighties may be seen in the fact that his aphorisms on art were widely known and quoted. His sayings, such as 'A man ought to paint what he knows and what he loves', were recorded in English art journals and quickly became part of the current jargon within artistic circles.\(^{20}\) Lepage had in fact visited England on several occasions in the late seventies and early eighties, and exhibited works at the Royal Academy.\(^{21}\) The contemporary enthusiasm for Lepage and the 'modern French School' played an important role in the formation of 'artists' colonies' at Newlyn and St Ives. In the early eighties, these two small fishing villages on the Cornish coast became favourite painting grounds for artists, paralleling the establishment of similar 'artists' villages' in Brittany and France.\(^{22}\)
Artists practising at Newlyn, like Clausen and Stanhope Forbes, took Bastien-Lepage as their 'ideal modern painter', and in their open-air figure subjects depicted the daily work, trials and vicissitudes of the local fishing community. They desired a sincerity of content in their art, which could only be achieved through a direct and personal communion with Nature: 'To paint a thing properly', they maintained, 'you must be intimate with it'. Newlyn artists shared the belief of French realists like Lepage that it was 'necessary for the painter to live as much as possible as part of the life he paints. 

Letters to Roberts from John Peter Russell and R. Anning Bell mention painting trips to Cornwall and show that he was clearly familiar with these open-air movements during his first English sojourn. When Roberts left England in 1885, Russell wrote to him urging him to 'Go and forget style and tackle our stuff for love. Think more than you paint'. He was to return to Australia with first-hand knowledge of the realist tradition of Millet-Courbet-Lepage in representing rural labour, while he was also aware of the extension of that French tradition in the work of the Newlyn School and other Cornish artistic communities.

Roberts' familiarity with these European conventions supplemented the work of immigrant painters who were prominent in the Melbourne art scene in the eighties. Mrs E. Ritchie Harrison and Arthur Loureiro, formerly a fellow student of Lepage under Cabanel at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, exhibited European peasant subjects in the manner of Lepage at local exhibitions. The art of the Newlyn painters was already known to Australian audiences as early as 1885, when shown at the Anglo-Australian Society of Artists Exhibition held in Melbourne that year; the Newlyn figure subjects of Cornish fishing life were warmly received in the press of the day.

For contemporary Australian painters and critics, the search for a distinctively national content did not necessarily preclude aspirations
towards 'high art'. In 1890 Sidney Dickinson, one of the Heidelberg School's most sympathetic and perceptive critics, had written in Baudelairean terms that 'It should be the ambition of our artists to present on canvas the earnestness, vigour, pathos and heroism of the life that is about them'. At the same time he identified the 'weak point in Australian art' as 'its general ignorance of the higher powers of painting'. He went on to advise 'our promising young artists' to 'acquire the accomplished methods of a school like the modern French, and bring to bear upon them their own individual and national feeling'. During the same year, Dickinson had written a letter to The Argus (24 April 1890) praising McCubbin's Bush Burial on the grounds that

... the highest importance of the picture ... is found in the intimation it gives of the possibility of finding in Australia material that shall be at once peculiar to the country and susceptible of the highest artistic treatment.

Roberts' attitude to painting national subjects was, as we shall see, almost identical to that of Dickinson. European painters of pastoral labour were primarily concerned with man's relationship to nature, rather than with presenting a radical critique of contemporary rural society. Roberts' paintings of Australian shearers were inspired by this wider European ideal, at the same time as he chose to portray local national heroes. European realism exerted a powerful stylistic influence on his treatment of Australian pastoral workers. Consequently, changes in Roberts' portrayal and conception of the bushman reflected recent developments within European realism, as well as indicating a response to changing local circumstances.

II

Roberts was profoundly impressed by his experience of European art in the early 1880s. During his years abroad, he found it difficult to
assimilate the various influences to which he was exposed and to mould them into a personal style. According to John Peter Russell, who wrote to Roberts in 1887: 'When you were in London you were too much taken up with what others were doing and the manner thereof'. Russell contrasted this eclectic attitude with what he believed was Roberts' present approach: 'And now you ply away thinking only of the matter'.

Despite this remark, Roberts retained an eclectic approach to style and subject matter for some years after his return to Australia. He appeared to adopt a certain style or certain mannerisms in response to his chosen subject. Before 1890 his œuvre encompassed anecdotal narrative paintings in the tradition of mid-Victorian art, Whistlerian subjects and portraits treated in the aesthetic mode, intimate plein-air landscapes in the Barbizon tradition, and pastoral figure subjects. Roberts inevitably found the most appropriate 'style' for his Australian figure subjects within European realism. He had certainly absorbed some of the prevailing philosophical attitudes towards pastoral subjects while in Europe; but his early Australian figure paintings also reveal an eclectic approach in their use of realist sources.

Coming South of 1885-86 (National Gallery of Victoria) was painted by Roberts shortly after his return to Australia, probably from sketches he had made on board the s.s. Lusitania during the voyage home. The painting is one of his first figure subjects of specially Australian interest, while it simultaneously belongs to a broader, contemporary theme of European migration. However, Roberts' treatment of the subject presages certain distinctive features of his later pastoral pictures. He carefully delineated a range of social types and figures of various ages in Coming South. In the left foreground the sad, reflective figure of an old woman dressed in black, possibly a widow, is contrasted with the young child who plays idly at her feet. This pair is, in turn,
contrasted with the two elegant young women in pastel-coloured dresses on the far right of the picture. Amidst the casually grouped throng of figures in the mid-distance may be discerned further social types: a bowler-hatted gentleman of the bourgeoisie leans languidly against the ship's decking to the left, while in the distance on the right stands a husky, bearded figure in working clothes.

Roberts' identification of various social classes in *Coming South* is quietly understated, rather than being awkwardly obtrusive. The casual atmosphere of the scene is united by an almost abstract surface pattern formed by the various masts, ventilator shafts and ship's riggings; the play of light upon the deck is carefully analyzed and rendered to capture precise tonal values. Here the painting, with its elegantly dressed women and its lively, convivial atmosphere, suggests certain affinities with the well-known shipboard scenes by the French-English artist, James Tissot. Tissot had exhibited one of his shipping scenes, 'Goodbye' - on the Mersey, with the Royal Academy in 1881, the year Roberts arrived in England. Indeed, a critic in *The Age* (19 January 1886) saw 'the influence of the French school' in *Coming South*, and described it as 'a very careful and well drawn work, full of character and very tender and harmonious in colour'. Roberts' concern in *Coming South* - to combine a specific social and national content with the 'higher powers of painting' - indicates the direction he was to pursue in his Australian pastoral subjects.

The Splitters (Ballarat Art Gallery) is Roberts' earliest known painting on the theme of rural labour set in an Australian landscape. On stylistic grounds the painting can be dated around 1886, contemporary with his *The Artists' Camp*. Both paintings reveal the strong influence of Bastien-Lepage in their subtle modulation of tonal values, employing a limited cool green, grey, ochre and blue-grey palette. They share
a comparable restricted viewpoint - only a small area of grey sky penetrates the dense bush - and Roberts orders and enlivens both compositions through the presence of long thin saplings and a tracery of undergrowth. The figures are seen against the landscape itself, also recalling the advice and practice of Lepage in his figure subjects.

The poses of the bushman drinking from the upraised bottle and the central figure seen from behind in The Splitters bear a certain resemblance to similar motifs of British navvies in Ford Madox Brown's famous painting, Work. Here we have perhaps the first example of Roberts' adapting the artistic vocabulary of an established realist iconography on the theme of labour, and transposing it into a specifically Australian setting. The subject of men cutting wood had been occasionally painted by European artists like Millet and von Herkomer, while it appeared only rarely in Australian paintings of the period. However, it was often treated in contemporary Australian illustrations and photography, where it assumed a wider associative meaning of 'pioneers clearing the land'. A writer in Bush Tales by Old Travellers and Pioneers, published in 1888, expressed the common admiration for the splitters' pioneering role:

Hard-working pioneers are the followers of the timber splitting industry. Their lot is to clear the land for settlement by felling the large trees of the forest ... the life is a lonely and frequently dangerous one.

Roberts' The Splitters, with its luxuriant greenness, presents an optimistic image of nature's abundance and man's labour rewarded, and is redolent with such pioneer associations. The existence of a sketch for the picture, entitled Turning the Soil (Australian National Gallery, Canberra), further suggests that Roberts intended to portray the land being cleared for human settlement.
One can easily miss the close interrelationship between Roberts' optimistic image of rural labour in *The Splitters* and his treatment of the Australian bush in his landscape paintings. In his landscape, *Evening, when the quiet east flushes faint at the sun's last look of 1888* (National Gallery of Victoria), we note the recurrence of the woodstacks in the foreground, a veiled suggestion of 'man's presence', as the 'suburban bush' around Heidelberg is seen in the process of being cleared for habitation. Roberts was the first member of the Heidelberg School to capture the fragile, delicate beauty of the 'after-glow' in the eastern sky, as opposed to painting the more conventional subject of a brilliant sun setting in the west. He and his fellow Heidelberg artists brought a romantic attitude to their treatment of the native landscape, at the same time as Australian poets were beginning to accept and to enthuse about the hidden beauty of the local gum tree in their poetry. Throughout the letters of the Heidelberg artists in the late eighties and early nineties we find many references to their desire to achieve a profound and lasting communion with Nature. This ideal was indeed partly responsible for the formation of the Heidelberg artists' camps in the eighties; but it also belonged to a contemporary European art philosophy that had prompted the establishment of artists' villages in Brittany and Cornwall. In a letter to *The Argus* (30 September 1893), Roberts described his deep feeling for the Australian bush in distinctively romantic terms:

... and to look into the deep quiet face of Nature; lingering where the winding, almost silent river bathes the feathery wattle branches; sometime on a hillside watching the sun setting over range and valley, the cool shadows rising on the soft pile of the tree-clothed slopes, while the far-off hills go [sic = grow] distant and more distant in the grey dusk until the moon rises in the quiet east; finding beauty in odd corners of some country shanty, or by some lagoon which palely reflects the banks all bathed in a great shimmer of trembling, brilliant sunlight ...
Roberts' reverence for Nature and the Australian landscape informs the generally optimistic spirit of his paintings of rural labour. In 1888, however, he exhibited a painting which stands as a notable exception in his oeuvre through its unambiguous presentation of the pathetic side of rural life. This was his picture, *End to a Career - an Old Scrub Cutter*, exhibited at the Victorian Artists' Society Exhibition of that year.\(^4^6\) Unfortunately, the painting is now lost, but it survives as a line drawing in the exhibition catalogue and was described in the press (*The Age*, 20 April 1888) as 'a large figure subject' showing 'an old man in bright sunshine, felling ti-tree brush'.\(^7\) From the line drawing of the painting, it appears that Roberts developed the pose of the *Old Scrub Cutter* from the profile view of the bushman on the right in *The Splitters*. However, in conceiving the subject, he probably had in mind a specific 'realist' source - the older man in Courbet's *Stonebreakers*, a picture he would have known through reproductions.\(^8\) The pose of Roberts' figure (though reversed) is comparable with that in Courbet's painting, while he echoes the social implications of Courbet's subject by portraying the hardship endured by an old and anonymous rural worker. Roberts' later figure paintings of Australian pastoral labour noticeably avoid such an open appeal to pathos and sentiment in the subject. The *Old Scrub Cutter* nevertheless forges a broad link with his next major figure painting of rural life, *Shearing the Rams*; it reveals his increasing preoccupation with the place of the bush worker within rural society. In *Shearing the Rams* Roberts was to develop his use of realist sources in a more original manner to express a national social ideal. At the same time he was able to assimilate local pictorial influences within the painting.
Roberts' large canvas, *Shearing the Rams*, 1890 (National Gallery of Victoria), is popularly seen today as an archetypal vision of Australian pastoral life. With his considerable capacity for self-advertisement, Roberts did much to foster this notion. He was proud of the fact that he had travelled into the country and spent months working on the picture in an outback shed at Brocklesby, near Corowa, New South Wales.9

In a letter to *The Argus* (4 July 1890), he described his desire to paint a shearing picture: 'So it came that being in the bush and feeling the delight and fascination of the great pastoral life and work I have tried to express it'.50 Once again, his words echo the idea of a direct and sincere communion with nature and rural life that was prevalent in contemporary European art circles. Roberts was not, however, the first Australian artist to depict the subject of shearing sheep. It had been previously treated in a few isolated paintings but, more frequently, shearers were shown at work in photographs and in illustrated newspapers and magazines from the 1860s through to the eighties.51 An exploration of the contemporary pictorial tradition reveals that in the formulation of his painting Roberts followed an established photographic and illustrative convention, as opposed to originating a new subject for artistic attention.

We learn the circumstances under which *Shearing the Rams* was painted in an article in *The Argus* (24 June 1890), evidently based on an interview with Roberts himself. 'The artist', the writer says, 'made good choice of subject. It seemed to him most really and absolutely Australian, and then he went out to the great Australian river to learn it.' Roberts began preparatory studies for the picture at the Brocklesby station during the spring of 1888, when he supposedly made between seventy and eighty sketches of 'the light, the atmosphere, the sheep, the men and the work'.
A signed gouache sketch, inscribed in Roberts' own hand, 'First Sketch for Shearing' (National Gallery of Victoria), helps us to trace the creative process by which his initial idea evolved towards its mature expression in the finished painting. In the sketch the space of the shed seems compressed and confined, compared with the more open and extended space of the painting; the central row of shearsers are crowded together, their bent backs moving unevenly in alternate directions. With the exception of the shearer to the left, the foreground area is only loosely defined. However, the brilliance of the light outside the shed is already suggested through the patch of light on the back wall, which contrasts with the dark and gloomy interior.

During the following spring of 1889, Roberts set out his canvas in the Brocklesby shed and began to paint the final work. He 'picked out the most characteristic and picturesque of the shearsers, the "rouseabouts" and the boys', and carefully posed them in the manner he required. The children of a local stockman were paid to keep the dust kicked up in the woolshed, to create a hazy atmosphere. Roberts' adoption of the practice of painting a large figure subject directly before the motif followed the *plein-air* methods advocated by Bastien-Lepage and his followers. It was not until some time in May 1890 that he eventually finished the painting in his Melbourne studio. Thus, *Shearing the Rams* was a carefully and consciously formulated painting executed over a long period, not an informal 'slice of life' glimpsed in an Australian shearing shed.

Roberts, who worked as a photographer's assistant, may have been aware of shearing scenes which appeared in contemporary photographs. A photograph entitled 'Shearing', by a well-known Melbourne photographer, Charles Nettleton, anticipates the pictorial space found in *Shearing the Rams*. There is the same slightly diagonal thrust into distance,
accentuated by the lines of the floorboards. The structure of the shearing shed roof plays a similar role in the composition, while one gains the same sense of rhythmic interval as the central poles recede into the background. Equally significant is the way the photograph conveys the quality and sources of light in the shed: the light filters through from outside and permeates the atmosphere.

The treatment of shearing scenes in black and white illustration during the period formed a parallel with that of photography; in fact, in some cases, illustrators simply copied existing photographs.\(^5^7\) Towards the end of 1885, Roberts became involved in drawing black and white illustrations for *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*.\(^5^8\) It was for this publication that his acquaintance, George Rossi Ashton, had drawn an illustration of 'Sheep Shearing' around the same time that Roberts began work on his *Shearing*.\(^5^9\) Ashton's illustration contains a large inset of a single shearer engaged in his task. By isolating a single person in this manner, Ashton was able to suggest a certain figure type or character who embodied the 'typical' shearer, his finest qualities and virtues. In Roberts' painting the central shearer is also isolated within his own pool of space, while his pose is noticeably similar to that of Ashton's figure. Consequently, contemporary critics quickly identified Roberts' central shearer as 'the champion of the shed' (*The Argus*, 31 May 1890).

Ashton's illustration also shows to one side a shearer who with apparent ease lifts a sheep above the floor. This figure is foreshadowed in Roberts' initial sketch, but in the painting we find an even stronger resemblance to Ashton's portrayal of the motif. In *The Picturesque Atlas*, Ashton devoted a separate drawing to the figure of a 'Tarboy', who looks cheekily at the spectator. The tarboy is relatively inconspicuous in Roberts' first sketch, but perhaps unwisely the
'human appeal' of the boy's smiling face is emphasized in the final picture. Interestingly, a daughter of a worker on the Brocklesby station originally posed for the figure of the tarboy in *Shearing the Rams*. However, both Roberts' and Ashton's inclusion of the motif may have been influenced by Lepage's paintings of London street urchins and bedraggled peasant children from the French province of Damvillers.\(^{60}\)

A further source which may have influenced Roberts' formulation of *Shearing the Rams* was an illustration of 'Shearing' by William Hatherall that appeared in *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia* of 1888.\(^{61}\) Hatherell's illustration suggests the continuity of the shearing theme in the popular pictorial tradition; his illustration recalls Ashton's treatment of the theme while simultaneously anticipating several features of Roberts' *Shearing*. We note the recurrence of the same dominating figure in the foreground, his face partly obscured as he bends over the sheep. There is a similar suggestion of the rhythmic alternation of the men's bodies as they work, especially in Roberts' foremost three shearsers, who echo the poses and arrangement of Hatherell's figures. We see the robust bearded figure to one side, lifting the sheep in front of him. Even the slightly diagonal organization of space is comparable, in particular the emphasis on the floorboards, which guide the movement of the eye into the picture.

What makes Roberts' treatment of the shearing theme unique is his conscious attempt to achieve the heroic idealization of pastoral labour and his rendering of the light and atmosphere in the shearing shed. The figures are modelled with an academic emphasis on form and clarity of contour, undisturbed by harsh contrasts of light and dark. The controlled manipulation of the square brush-stroke reveals Roberts' technical debt to the tight tonal realism of Lepage. We find, however, a more sensitive and subtle feeling for colour and light values within the general linear framework. Roberts, for instance, carefully
adjusts his tones to suggest the play of light reflected on the floorboards through the open hatches. A touch of real virtuosity is the effect of sunlight striking the oil-filled bottle on the shed post. However, the most dramatic rendering of light occurs in the thick ochre impasto conveying the harsh glare of sunlight glimpsed through the gap in the back wall of the shed.

While Roberts derived the general composition of *Shearing the Rams* from local sources, his treatment of the subject was heavily indebted to a wider European tradition. He lent weight and dignity to his conception by drawing upon an established convention within the Millet/Bastien-Lepage tradition, which extolled the virtues of hard rural labour. The face of Roberts' central shearer is partly obscured as he concentrates on the object of his labour; he is a figure comparable with Millet's heroic but anonymous worker. The repetitive value of his activity is evoked through the rhythmic pattern of the shearers' bent backs. In the foreground of the picture Roberts has consciously presented a variety of types: through these figures he presents an image of youth, manly vigour and old age, all happily engaged in the activity of the shearing shed. Towards the back of the shed may be seen a shearer who drinks lustily from a billy: the figure recalls a similar motif of a navvy drinking in Ford Madox Brown's painting, *Work*. Brown's picture, which explores a moral theme of the place of labour in contemporary society and the significance of different types of work, may have influenced Roberts' conception of his subject. A critic commended his success in suggesting the communal nature of the work in *Shearing the Rams* and praised Roberts' ability 'to differentiate and individualize the methods of work pursued by each' (*The Argus*, 31 May 1890).

The youthful rouseabout on the left in *Shearing* is modelled on the younger worker in Courbet's *Stonebreakers*. Courbet's painting
projects an uncompromising image of the stonebreaker's cruel, back-breaking existence. Roberts, as we have seen, had earlier interpreted and re-presented the pessimistic social implicationos of Courbet's subject within an Australian context in his 'large figure subject' of 1888, *End to a Career - an old Scrub Cutter*. In *Shearing the Rams*, however, there is no sense of exploited labour, nor of the exertion, sweat and grime which might be associated with the scene in real life. Roberts' deliberate reference to Courbet's painting is perhaps best interpreted as a positive counter-assertion of the democratic values of Australian society. One of Courbet's labourers is apparently too old for such arduous work, the other too young. By contrast, the young rouseabout's enthusiastic involvement with his job complements the attitude of the 'old cockatoo farmer', who surveys the scene with a placid sense of enjoyment. Roberts' treatment of the shearing theme also departs significantly from Nettleton's photograph and earlier illustrations which often portrayed an 'authoritarian' figure of the station owner or overseer, standing noticeably apart from his labourers as he supervised their work.\(^6\)

Roberts conceived and painted his shearing subject just as the newly-formed militant Amalgamated Shearers' Union reached the height of its power and influence. Founded by W.G. Spence in 1886, the A.S.U. had attained a membership of almost 20,000 by February 1890.\(^6\) Roberts' political sympathy with that Labor movement was probably formed early in the 1880s, when he began his friendship with the future Labor politician, Dr William Maloney. Like Roberts, Maloney came from a working-class background - his father was a draper - and had to struggle to establish his career. He matriculated by evening classes and, around 1880, he left for London to do his medical training. There he teamed up with Roberts and together they toured Spain in 1883. Upon his return to Australia, Maloney conducted a medical institute for the
treatment of the poor in 1888. One year later, he entered the Victorian Legislative Assembly, where he quickly became renowned for his republican views. Roberts was also impressed by another 'republican', J.F. Archibald of the Sydney Bulletin, who was his fellow passenger on the s.s. Lusitania during his return voyage to Australia in 1885. Although his political views appear to have become more conservative later in life, Roberts still remained proud of his origins as a youth from the working-class Melbourne suburb of Collingwood.

From its inception, the A.S.U. was clearly more militant than the older craft-based unions, but its official policy in the late eighties was one of conciliation rather than direct confrontation and use of the strike weapon. The Shearer's Record continually espoused the harmony of interests between employer and employee, and claimed that conflict between workers and employers was the result of misunderstanding, which it was the role of the union to prevent. In its 1889 Annual Report the A.S.U. stipulated that 'by looking beneath the surface of labour disputes they [employers and employees] discover that their interests are identical'. Here the conciliatory attitude of the A.S.U. reflected the general tenor of the official trade union movement of the eighties. The subject of 'Cooperation' between labour and capital was regularly placed on the agenda of Inter-colonial Trade Union Congresses and passed unanimously.

During the late eighties, the A.S.U. was able to win financial rewards for its members in a time of general economic prosperity, using the strike mainly as a last resort. There is some evidence to suggest that the rank and file of the shearsers were more militant and socialistic in their beliefs than their official representatives. The socialist theories of Henry George, whose book Progress and Poverty was published in 1879, were widely read amongst Australian shearsers and
pastoral workers after 1885. Edward Bellamy's utopian novel, *Looking Backward from the Year 2000*, published in 1888, was even more influential and William Lane serialized it in *The Worker* in 1890. But the socialist ideas of George and Bellamy, though broadly influential upon the Australian masses and upon Lane in particular, posed no real threat to established society. Following the conservative strain of British utopian Christian socialism, Bellamy foresaw the cooperative and mutual reformation of society by all classes, without conflict or social upheaval. Geoffrey Serle has summed up the prevailing notion during the eighties of the harmony of interests between Labour and Capital in this way:

> Despite the number of strikes, which although novel were after all not very numerous, the dominant tone of unionists ... was one of sweet reasonableness, moderation, hope for harmonious relations with employers, and a sense of mutual obligation.

*Shearing the Rams* may reflect this commonly held view of the 'proper' relationship between employer and employee, but it does not give a representative picture of the general state of the Australian pastoral industry of the time. Already, by the late 1880s, there were signs that the pastoral industry was in trouble. Wool prices had been falling for several years, while during the confident expansion of the boom period squatters and settlers had become heavily mortgaged to the banks. In the Riverina, as in other pastoral regions, absentee landlords became a more frequent phenomenon. The image of productivity and general prosperity in *Shearing the Rams* provides no hint of the difficulties and declining fortunes of the rural industry. Nor does Roberts' painting indicate the unsavoury conditions and hard grind of the average shearer's life. Even with the improvements won in conditions and wages by the A.S.U., shearers still worked a physically gruelling eleven- or twelve-hour day as late as the mid-1890s. In his story,
'A Rough Shed', Henry Lawson wrote of the often sordid conditions of the shearer's accommodation and the 'unspeakable aroma of forty or fifty men who have little inclination and less opportunity to wash their skins'.\(^79\) With some exaggeration and sense of irony, W.G. Spence later claimed that 'the horses and dogs of the pastoralist were better housed and cared for than the workmen'.\(^80\)

The Masters and Servants Act of 1845 (discussed in Chapter 4) was still in operation in the 1880s and it served to remind pastoral workers of their contractual obligations to their employers, with its ever-present threat of prison sentences for those who ignored or defied its provisions.\(^81\) Union demands for a 'closed shop' in shearing sheds sometimes met with active opposition from the pastoralists. In August 1888, on the huge Brookong station, some thirty odd miles from Brocklesby, union shearsers had struck and picketed the station to prevent the owner, William Halliday, M.L.C., from using the scab labour he had hired. Halliday's response was to call in the police, who read the Riot Act and arrested the shearing leaders. Nine union organizers were consequently sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from one to three years. In 1890 some of the 'Brookong Rioters' were still in prison as Roberts put the finishing touches to his Shearing picture in his Melbourne studio.\(^82\)

While *Shearing the Rams* conveniently ignores some of the pressing national trends within the pastoral industry, it is probably a fair reflection of Roberts' actual experience of pastoral life in the Riverina. The Corowa district, where the Brocklesby station is situated, remained generally prosperous throughout the late 1880s. Unlike other areas of the Riverina where large land-holdings were still common, the Corowa district was more closely settled with numerous selection holdings. Many shearsers, though members of the A.S.U., were
often local selectors who share part-time to bring in extra income for their properties. They did not see their interests as being necessarily opposed to free enterprise and their neighbouring squatters. The Brocklesby station itself was a relatively small property of some two or three thousand acres by the 1880s and 1890s.\textsuperscript{83}

A contemporary article on \textit{Shearing the Rams} in \textit{The Corowa Free Press} (29 November 1889) indicates that Roberts' image of shared communal work had some factual justification. It identifies the figures 'pressing wool' in the background as being the owner of Brocklesby, Alexander Anderson, and his brother Charles, who are seen working alongside their employees.\textsuperscript{84} Perhaps Roberts' most calculated omission in \textit{Shearing the Rams} is the absence of any reference to recent technological advances in the pastoral industry. The Wolseley shearing machines were being introduced into the Riverina during the 1888 and 1889 seasons; corrugated iron had for many years been the standard roofing material used in the construction of shearing sheds, and here the Brocklesby shed was no exception.\textsuperscript{85} While blade-shearing was probably still employed at Brocklesby in 1888 to 1890, Roberts no doubt considered its use more befitting his aim to portray 'the patience of the animals whose year's growth is being stripped from them for man's use' (\textit{The Argus}, 14 July 1890).

When first exhibited in his Melbourne studio in 1890, \textit{Shearing the Rams} raised a minor controversy in the press. Critics were generally sympathetic and found the subject and its treatment praiseworthy, although they only intuitively recognized the painting's programmatic and didactic concerns. The \textit{Age} critic (\textit{The Age}, 30 May 1890) predicted that the picture would appeal not only to 'the immense majority', but also 'to the small minority who know something of art methods'. His comment may have been particularly relevant, since a report in Table
Talk (30 August 1889) suggests that Roberts may have originally intended exhibiting the painting at the Royal Academy. Letters to the press from the public declared Roberts' subject 'thoroughly Australian' and consequently criticized Melbourne's Gallery for not purchasing the picture.

The most damning criticism of Shearing the Rams occurred in an Argus editorial (The Argus, 28 June 1890) which found the subject 'altogether unworthy of depiction'. Employing the moralistic criteria typical of conservative criticism, the writer stipulated that 'the object of art is not to copy a fact, the object of art is to be artistic and to be artistic is to represent something beautiful or elevating or instructive ...'. He concluded with what he considered to be an irrefutable truth, that 'art should not be for an age (nor a place), but for all time (and all places).

Stung by this criticism, Roberts replied to the editorial in a letter to The Argus (4 July 1890) wherein he argued the 'worthiness' of his subject. He began with a quotation from Lepage to express his deep-felt affinity with pastoral life: 'It seems to me that one of the best words spoken to an artist is "Paint what you love and love what you paint", and on that I have worked'. Had he 'been a poet instead of a worker with the brush', he would have described many facets 'of the great pastoral life and work ... but being circumscribed by my art it was only possible to take one view, to give one portion of all this'. In the shearing shed, with its hum of lively activity, Roberts found the essential meaning of his theme:

... it seemed that I had there the best expression of my subject, a subject noble enough and worthy enough if I could express the meaning and spirit - of strong masculine labour, the patience of the animals whose year's growth is being stripped from them for man's use, and the great human interest of the whole scene.
He defended his attempt to communicate this ideal through a specifically local Australian subject with the assertion 'that by making art the perfect expression of one time and one place, it becomes art for all time and of all places'. He saw *Shearing the Rams* as nationalistic in its specific subject and yet universal in its heroic idealization of labour. Roberts adhered to a realist creed wherein the 'moral' of 'strong masculine labour' could be discerned from a number of realistic but essential details.

Despite his claim that 'it was only possible to take one view' in *Shearing the Rams*, Roberts never presented again such a comprehensive range of distinct figure types in a painting of pastoral labour.

IV

158 *The Breakaway*, 1891 (Art Gallery of South Australia) presents an image of Australian pastoral life which is striking in its visual immediacy and concentrated action: a horseman valiantly strives to thwart the mad death-rush of sheep to a remaining water-hole in a drought-stricken landscape. Looking at the large canvas', enthused a contemporary critic (*Table Talk*, 17 July 1891), 'one feels the story; its impression is conveyed to the eye by the painting'. Roberts had worked on and mostly completed *The Breakaway* during the early months of 1891 while staying at the Brocklesby station, where he had previously painted *Shearing the Rams*.90

With its barren and desolate outback landscape, *The Breakaway* suggests that Roberts' imagination had turned 'further inland' in order to pay tribute to the heroic 'workmen of the Eastern Interior'. Writing in 1893, Francis Adams appeared to capture the spirit of *The Breakaway* when he observed:
Bushman will almost always assert that the happiest hours of their life have been moments of peril - a wild ride through the scrub after 'brumbies' (wild horse), 'rounding up' a refractory steer...  

It was the writers associated with *The Bulletin* who gave the most popular expression to the contemporary desire to locate the 'real Australia' in the outer pastoral regions, far away from the corrupting influences of the cities and towns. They called upon the artist to meet 'the artistic needs of his public' and to paint the true Australia of the interior.  

*The Breakaway* seems to answer the nationalistic demands of these writers at a basic level through the portrayal of the Australian bushman seen in his most heroic aspect. Roberts' attitude to the developing mythology of the bushman was, however, both more critical and more complex than the nationalistic outpourings of *The Bulletin* might at first suggest. In 1890 he had certainly written of his desire to express 'the meaning and spirit' of Australia's 'great pastoral life and work' in his art; but in communicating this general ideal in a single painting, he maintained that 'it was only possible to take one view, to give one portion of all this'. For Roberts, the Australian pastoral ideal could only be manifested in art through a deliberate specificity in the choice and treatment of a subject.  

The originality of Roberts' subject in *The Breakaway* needs to be measured against comparable subjects occurring within popular imagery of the time. The theme of 'a breakaway' by cattle was frequently treated in newspaper and magazine illustrations during the 1870s and 1880s. One such illustration, 'On the Old Man Plain, Riverina - First Scent of Water - Stockmen Restraining Cattle', in *The Illustrated Australian News* (5 November 1881), purported to depict a 'typical episode' in the Riverina district, the scene of Roberts' *Breakaway*. The writer of the accompanying text described how
... cattle coming from some parts of New South Wales to Victoria have to cross what is known as the Old Man Plain, a vast treeless track some 50 miles across, on which there is not a drop of water ... Possessed of the keenest sense of smell, the animals can detect the presence of water at a considerable distance ... animated by an unanimous impulse, [they] make a rush at extraordinary pace, and the men in charge have to gallop to the front to prevent them reaching the water in a body ... For the next hour all the skill of the drovers will be required to check the thirst-maddened animals ...

Here the decided preference of artists for illustrating the heroic feats of the 'cattlemen' above those of the 'sheep drover' reflects the popular culture of the time, which still accorded the figure of the cattlemen a more prestigious position in contemporary folklore than his counterpart, the sheep drover. The secondary status of the sheep drover had its historical origins in the pre-gold rush days, when pastoral properties were mainly unfenced and the solitary, demeaning life of the 'crawler' shepherd was the most despised occupation amongst experienced bushmen. As Russel Ward points out, the cattlemen continued to enjoy a more prestigious position in folklore than the sheep drover even after the introduction of fencing had largely seen the replacement of the lowly shepherd by the mounted boundary rider.94

The intense action of The Breakaway appears to have been dramatically prefigured in Frank Mahony's large canvas, Rounding Up A Straggler of 1889 (Art Gallery of New South Wales), a work Roberts would have known through alternative versions that Mahony drew for the illustrated atlases.95 Rounding Up A Straggler presents a stereotyped image of the fearless Australian stockman, whip flourishing as he rides heroically across the hot and dusty landscape. Popularized by S.T. Gill in his published sketchbooks, the subject was a traditional one in colonial art and also enjoyed a literary precedent in the poetry of Adam Lindsay
Gordon. Newspaper and magazine illustrations continued to treat the theme in the 1870s and 1880s. Within popular literature of the time, writers were quick to identify the event of mustering cattle as 'a scene characteristic of "the Bush" of Australia', and invariably commented upon the 'bold daring' of the stockman and 'the sense of untrammelled liberty which surrounds him'.

However, contemporaries were largely unaware of the American frontier imagery which influenced the portrayal of the stockman in black and white illustrations during the 1880s. The boundary rider of the American West offered a convenient historical parallel with the robust figure of the Australian stockman. The treatment of the American cowboy in popular magazines like Harper's and The Century became increasingly influenced by Edward Muybridge's instantaneous motion studies, after the publication in 1882 of the Stillman-Muybridge book, The Horse in Motion. Under the impact of Muybridge's photography, the traditional 'rocking-horse' drawing of the American prairie pony was replaced by the 'freezing' of instantaneous action, more accurate anatomical detailing and effects of acute foreshortening.

Mahony's style was probably shaped by readily available illustrations of the American cowboy portrayed in vigorous action, at a time when American illustrators were demonstrating the excellence of their work in the Picturesque Atlas in Sydney. In 1885, for instance, the subject and composition of Mahony's painting and illustrations are evident in a drawing in Harper's Magazine of a Montana cowboy rounding up a refractory steer. Frederick Remington, the most famous of all illustrators of the American West, drew an illustration of 'Cutting Out A Steer' for Century Magazine in 1888. With its vigorous movement and dramatic rhetoric, the central motif of Remington's drawing foreshadows that of Mahony's painting. Ignorance of the American pictorial
tradition allowed critics and the public to acclaim Rounding Up A Straggler widely for its distinctively Australian content.\textsuperscript{9}

Compared with the current topicality and imitative nature of Mahony's painting, Roberts' choice of subject in The Breakaway was a discriminating and original one. Very few pictorial precedents existed in either painting or illustration for his particular decision to portray a breakaway by sheep. Indeed, the immediate source of his inspiration to paint such a scene may have stemmed from his first-hand experience of drought conditions in the Riverina in 1888, when the countryside witnessed one of the most severe droughts on record.\textsuperscript{100}

Whether Roberts ever witnessed an actual 'breakaway' remains unknown, but historical circumstances suggest that it is unlikely. By the eighties, the pastoral industry in the Riverina was being rapidly transformed through events such as the widespread introduction of wire fencing, the extension of the railway network to more isolated areas, and the growth of selection holdings. Both squatters and selectors had increasingly turned to the maintenance of sheep rather than cattle.\textsuperscript{101} A newspaper article, written at the same time as Roberts was painting The Breakaway, records that the practice of driving stock over long distances had almost disappeared:

\begin{quote}
Time was, and indeed it is not yet very remote, when poor brutes were very often a week on the roads with ... no water whatever.\textsuperscript{102}
\end{quote}

The stampede of thirst-crazed animals to a waterhole had become a rare event in the Riverina.

The Breakaway therefore pays homage to an anonymous but heroic incident which was fast vanishing in the history of the pastoral industry. Even a detail like the - by then - antiquated type of chock-and-log fence tellingly reveals Roberts' nostalgic feelings for the passing of an era. But while he looked to the romantic past for
inspiration, Roberts did so with the discerning eye of a realist artist. He expressed his admiration of the 'newer men' of historical painting who 'insist that any subject painted, must be done true to the conditions under which it is supposed to have existed'. It was Roberts' commitment to historical accuracy that governed his decision to portray a breakaway of sheep, rather than cattle:

In Riverina, as a rule, only sheep are now depastured. Hence the artist has also chosen to depict sheep rather than cattle - for consistency's sake.

Roberts' choice of subject in The Breakaway was thus a critical one. It entailed a rejection of the 'frontier imagery' popularized by artists and illustrators like Mahony, as well as a desire to lend a new historical veracity to the developing mythology associated with the Australian bushman.

Despite the instantaneous nature of the subject, The Breakaway had evolved through a process of careful, even painstaking preparation. The final picture was not completed in the open air before the motif, but composed and painted in the interior of the Brocklesby shearing shed. However, in order to capture the effect of searing heat and light essential to the picture's meaning, Roberts made preliminary oil sketches in the open air. For example, he painted a rough oil sketch of the 'chock-and-log fence with effects so strongly marked as to suggest fierce overhead sunlight - a dazzling glare'. In The Breakaway the brilliant high-keyed tonality, the broader plein-air brushwork in the landscape, and the presence of distinctive purple-mauve and blue shadows all bear testimony to his initial study in the open air.

Roberts' concern to achieve a specificity of treatment and effect in the finished picture is evident in the separate pencil sketches he made in his sketchbook for more detailed elements of the composition. A pencil drawing of the main horseman suggests that he may have made
selective use of contemporary illustrations in composing the picture.\textsuperscript{106} The motif of horse and rider is uncannily anticipated in an illustration of 'Mustering Sheep' by William Hatherell which appeared in Cassell's Picturesque Australasia of 1888.\textsuperscript{107} Certainly in the painting the careful study which Roberts devoted to the motif is revealed in the unnatural clarity with which the horse and rider stand out against the dust-laden atmosphere. Two further drawings from his sketchbook contain the first seeds of the final composition, and demonstrate that Roberts' initial conception already envisaged the powerful diagonal thrust of the mob of sheep, countered by the opposing, in-sweeping movement of horse and rider.\textsuperscript{108} The interests of a conventional, 'balanced' composition were subordinated to capturing this one moment of dramatic intensity.

While there are few pictorial precedents for Roberts' subject, a possible source for the picture's unusual compositional arrangement exists in an illustration of 'Sheep Farming in Australia' by his friend, C.D. Richardson, published in 1880.\textsuperscript{109} We note a comparable high viewpoint with a pronounced diagonal movement into space; the vertical tree trunks and the strategic placement of the old wooden fence similarly serve as a framing device for the mob of sheep and the figure of the horseman, barely visible through the rising dust in the distance.

For Roberts, the structural ambiguity of The Breakaway (clearly observable in the contradictory spatial relationships) may have seemed essential to the meaning and overwhelming visual impact of the scene. His artistic disregard for 'any conventionality' of effect becomes clear in an article he wrote on the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1891.\textsuperscript{110} He reserved his highest praise for works which produced 'a marvellous seeming reality' and argued that the 'apparently haphazard arrangement' of Dimet's Snake Charmer in fact contributed to its 'sense of freshness and healthfulness'. A contemporary writer acknowledged
a similar freshness and originality underlying Roberts' conception of
The Breakaway: 'In the picture, extremes meet, and the artist has
dared to blend a fierce swirl of excitement with a perfect trance of
repose'.

The image of the bushman valiantly struggling to overcome the forces
of nature in The Breakaway marks a turning away from the broad social
issues implicit in Roberts' treatment of Shearing the Rams, completed in
1890. Shearing the Rams, as we have seen, presented an egalitarian
view of rural society by suggesting the cooperative social relationship
existing between various figures working in the shed. A few months
after Roberts finished his Shearing picture, the Great Maritime Strike
of 1890, involving 50,000 workers, spread over four colonies. It
seriously undermined commonly-held assumptions about the harmony of
interests between labour and capital.

The causes of the strike, which began in August 1890, were complex,
and its significance has been widely debated by Australian historians.
Events leading up to the strike suggest that the A.S.U., under Spence's
leadership, viewed the impending struggle as a deliberate trial of
strength between labour and capital. In July 1890 the A.S.U. delivered
notice to the pastoralists of its intention to enforce the 'closed shop'
during the forthcoming shearing season. The union issued a manifesto
in which it declared its objective of 'drawing such a cordon of
unionism around the Australian continent as will effectually prevent
a bale of wool leaving unless shorn by union shearsers'.

Early in August 1890 the Wharf Labourers' Union agreed to Spence's request that
they should not handle non-union wool, and when the first bales of such
wool reached Sydney on 10 August the dispute escalated. It became
inextricably entangled with a pre-existing dispute between the Marine
Officers' Association and their employers, and the strike soon extended
to include all coastal shipping. On the waterfronts of Melbourne and
Sydney violent clashes took place between the militia, the police and picketing workers, as drayloads of wool were forced through the picket lines and loaded on the ships. Ironically, the shearsers themselves were called out for only a week during September. The strike petered out in November, with the unions soundly defeated. Whatever the justice of their claims, union leaders like Spence later interpreted the events of the Maritime Strike as a deliberate attempt by capitalists and employers to crush 'Australian unionism at one blow'.

An alarmist atmosphere was produced by the general tension of the Maritime Strike, with the threat of civil strife engendering appeals for 'law and order' in the press. The Sydney Morning Herald, for example, ran an editorial under the heading 'Class War - the Commune', wherein it likened striking workers to the earlier 'Communards of Paris':

Little was it then supposed possible that in the happy Australian colonies our working classes - the most fortunate, the best paid, and the most prosperous body of workers in the world - would be summoned by their leaders to take part in a ruinous war against society ...

Events in the Riverina were mild in comparison with those in the cities of Melbourne and Sydney. Closer settlement in the Riverina meant that class divisions between squatters, selectors and shearsers were not as clearly marked as in other Australian pastoral regions. The A.S.U. failed to achieve a 'closed shop' in the majority of sheds, with approximately half the stations being committed to shear under the opposing Pastoralists' Union agreement. All Riverina stations sent away wool during the industrial crises of 1890 and 1891. However, the involvement of shearsers in the strike in the Riverina probably represented the first major break between pastoralists and pastoral workers.
The anxiety-producing events of 1890 may have hastened Roberts' artistic retreat into the rural past portrayed in *The Breakaway*. He found refuge from the complex reality of contemporary urban and rural society in his depiction of an incident in the recent history of the pastoral industry, when truly heroic action still seemed possible in Australia.

Close parallels with the retrospective nature of Roberts' subject may be found in contemporary literature. Two of the most popular poems of the nineties were Paterson's 'The Man From Snowy River' and Lawson's 'In the Days When the World Was Wide'. Both poems celebrate 'a golden age' that had passed, 'a time when it seemed possible to perform great and noble deeds' in the Australian bush. As the 1890s progressed, the rejection of the city by writers and artists became more pronounced. Increasingly, their thoughts turned inland towards the romance and mystery of the inner continent. Arthur Streeton left Sydney in 1891 on a painting trip to the Blue Mountains, where he found inspiration for his large landscape painting, *Fire's On*, *Lapstone Tunnel* (1891, Art Gallery of New South Wales). The brilliant high-keyed tonality, the evocation of intense heat and isolated grandeur of Streeton's landscape rival those of Roberts' *The Breakaway*. During the following year, Streeton wrote to Roberts, explaining:

I want to stay here [in Australia], but not in Melb. ... I intend to go straight inland (away from all polite society'), and stay there 2 or 3 years and create some things entirely new, and try and translate some of the great hidden poetry that I know is here ...

Shortly after completing *The Breakaway* in 1891, Roberts left Melbourne for Sydney, where he was to live until early 1901. During these Sydney years Roberts moved freely amongst the bohemian circles of the *Bulletin*
writers, and established contacts within the upper reaches of Sydney society. As Roberts' ambiguous social situation suggests, the relationship of Australian painters to the nationalism of the Bulletin school was a complex one. Painters did not always identify with the ethos of the Bulletin writers. Arthur José provides a vital clue to the nature of their relationship in his book, The Romantic Nineties:

The truth is that, so far from the existence of a Bulletin Bohemia, each Bulletin celebrity was rather the centre of his own clique ... The artists, on the whole, held aloof from this type of amusement ... The majority of the younger men, George Lambert already their leader, associated mainly with a coterie of more sober and less distinguished writers, among whom were most of the 'Boy Authors'.

The so-called 'Bulletin School', José suggests, was not an homogeneous group, and painters seem often to have moved on the fringes of its various bohemian cliques.

Sydney painters found a necessary means of economic support through drawing illustrations for The Bulletin, just as their journalistic counterparts did through their writing during the depression years. George Lambert's attitude towards illustrative work was probably typical of leading painters. He drew regularly for The Bulletin in the 1890s, but considered the continual pressure of producing drawings to supplement his income, a hindrance to the serious pursuit of painting. The alliance between artists and Bulletin writers was sometimes an uneasy one, and for painters like Lambert, largely a matter of economic necessity.

Underlying this fragile relationship were more fundamental differences in outlook. The brand of nationalism fostered by many Bulletin writers was isolationist, if not narrowly parochial, in its emphasis. On the other hand, more ambitious Australian painters measured local achievements in art against those of a wider European culture. Such
aspirations towards 'high art' were open to the easy ridicule of nationalistically-minded writers. Victor Daley, for example, lampooned the figure of the potential expatriate painter in his poem, 'Correggio Jones', and he condemned the consequent 'desertion' of painters and writers to Europe in another satirical piece, 'London Calls'. Henry Lawson appeared more sympathetic to artists in his article, 'If I Could Paint', written in 1899. He championed the development of an indigenous school of Australian painting, but his conception of the artist's task was limited by his nationalistic bias. The type of paintings he advocated were those in which the role of bush anecdote and narrative appeal were most clearly marked. There was a strong element of philistinism in Lawson's approach to Australian culture and society, perhaps best encapsulated in his remark, 'The rich an' educated shall be educated down'. The bigotry of such attitudes indicates why so many gifted painters left Australia for Europe in the 1890s.

Not all painters found the life of Sydney bohemia so stifling and intellectually crippling as those who fled the country. One of these was Frank Mahony, aptly described by José as 'the most hail-fellow-well-met' of the artists who associated with the Bulletin bohemia. Mahony was a product of the local New South Wales Academy of Art and had never studied abroad. His career finds an overseas parallel in the American, Frederick Remington, who probably influenced his art. For Remington, an historian has commented, 'cowboys were cash'; Mahony appears to have held a similar attitude towards horses. An article in Bookfellow in 1899 described how

... for the last ten years Mahony's ... drawings in The Bulletin have made his name a bush-word over broad Australia. Always his art has hovered round horses.
Roberts, who trained at the Royal Academy in the early eighties, was a more complex person and artist than the apparently likable Mahony. His social contact with the *Bulletin* writers is well documented; during the late nineties he was a prominent member of their various bohemian gatherings in the Dawn and Dusk Club and the Supper Club. 'Banjo' Paterson was also a frequent visitor to his Sydney studio at the time. Unlike other artists moving in the *Bulletin* circles, Roberts was not content to survive financially by drawing illustrations. Julian Ashton later recalled how 'his heart's desire was to paint, for he did not seem to like illustration very much'. Upon arriving in Sydney, Roberts set about establishing a reputation as the city's leading society portraitist. When asked by George Taylor why he painted so many portraits, Roberts supposedly replied 'Portraits pay, George, my boy'. Roberts cultivated friendships with leading politicians like Henry Parkes and Alfred Deakin, while he was also 'on the dining list of most people who had over a couple of thousand a year'. He reputedly told D.H. Souter:

> A man may be able to paint decently well and also know how to comport himself in good society. Besides you don't as a rule sell your stuff to people who rent cottages at 17/6d per week. Business, my dear boy, business.

Roberts' financial pragmatism seems to have bordered on cynicism. However, his statements were part of the convivial banter of the *Bulletin* crowd, and have to be seen within the context of the depression years. Roberts was clearly aware that patronage from a privileged class offered the professional painter the only real alternative to illustrative work and teaching as a means of economic survival.

Illustrative work inevitably encouraged artists to repeat standard motifs and subjects. Some illustrators derived their 'local colour'
second-hand from the frontier imagery of American magazines, others from brief visits to the bush. George Taylor relates the story of four Bulletin writers and artists who undertook a trip to the country to gain personal experience of the 'Bush'. After a short stay it was:

Back to Sydney! Back to Bohemian haunts; and four happy chaps brought back the 'local' colour to tinge their story, verse and picture for ever more.¹³⁵

Roberts' attitude towards the 'Bush' was different from his city counterparts, who often simply viewed it as a convenient source of 'local colour' for their illustrations. He wanted to achieve a specificity of treatment and effect in his major pastoral paintings, which called for a close personal knowledge of rural life. Consequently, during the nineties he made protracted visits to remote country areas, such as the New England district in northern New South Wales. Years later he said, 'I always loved Australia's open spaces and life outback'.¹³⁶ Roberts' genuine enthusiasm for Australia's outback pastoral regions may be compared with 'Banjo' Paterson's optimistic interpretation of the 'Bush' in his poetry. Their friendship in the 1890s was probably based on shared ideas and a mutual admiration for one another's work.¹³⁷

¹⁷¹ The Golden Fleece: Shearing at Newstead, 1894 (Art Gallery of New South Wales), was mainly painted in situ at Duncan Anderson's Newstead Station, near Inverell, during Roberts' stay in 1893-94.¹³⁸ Compared with the tightly-controlled realism of Shearing the Rams, Roberts' broader handling of paint in Shearing at Newstead allows a greater atmospheric unity to pervade the painting. He skilfully orchestrates the warm red-brown and creamy-silver colours to create the mellow shadowy effects of the shed interior. The dark interior is, in turn, contrasted with the blinding silver-white light and heat of the landscape outside. The figures are grouped on either side of the picture
space so that our eye is encouraged to move swiftly between the two rows of shearers towards the back wall. Greater emphasis now falls on the general activity within the shed, rather than on the separate contribution of individuals to the communal work evident in the earlier painting.

In *Shearing at Newstead* Roberts may once again have been indebted to local pictorial sources for the composition of the painting, and his evocative treatment of the landscape background. The basic compositional arrangement of the picture was anticipated in earlier illustrations of shearing scenes, such as the drawing, 'In the Shearing Shed', that appeared in *The Sydney Mail* (15 December 1883). Here the illustrator positions the workers in a comparable manner either side of a central void, while the poses of several shearers are noticeably similar to some of Roberts' figures.129

Shearing photographs by Sydney photographers, Charles Bayliss and Charles Kerry, provide further visual correspondences with *Shearing at Newstead*. Possibly the most decisive influence of photography on Roberts' painting stemmed from photography's technical limitations. Kerry's photograph of *A Shearing Shed* (Private Collection, Sydney) demonstrates how contemporary photographs accentuated the harsh tonal contrasts between the darkened shed interiors and the undifferentiated glare of the light outside. Roberts' exploitation of the dramatic, colouristic contrast between interior and landscape is one of the most successful features of his painting. Because of the long exposure times required by the gloomy shed interiors, photographers were also encouraged to ask certain figures to 'hold' their poses for the camera. Thus one or two shearers are often seen standing motionless as they conveniently sharpen their shears, or tarboys pause in their work and look out towards the spectator. Here the demands of both photographer and painter for clarity of image coalesced, and similar figure motifs noticeably recur in Roberts' shearing scenes.140
Kerry was one of the foremost Sydney photographers of the day, and he reproduced numerous photographs on the shearing theme for commercial sale. One of his separate figure studies, entitled *Shearing Round the Flank* (Private Collection, Sydney), bears a remarkable resemblance to the shearer in the left foreground of *Shearing at Newstead*. Such close formal correspondences between Roberts' painting and contemporary illustrations and photographs point to the existence of an established visual language for shearing subjects. It was a language with which Roberts was familiar and could draw freely upon for his painting.

Roberts' awareness of recent developments within European realism was even more influential in determining the fundamental stylistic differences between *Shearing at Newstead* and his earlier *Shearing the Rams*. By the early 1890s Bastien-Lepage's reputation as the realist artist *par excellence* was beginning to fade. European and English painters increasingly questioned whether Lepage's 'strict, literal realism' prevented the artist from attaining a 'higher' and more profound 'truth'. Some of these doubts regarding Lepage's pre-eminent position in realism soon filtered through to the Australian art scene. In 1892 FrederickMcCubbin wrote to Roberts and discussed Theuriet's recent book on Lepage, which contained essays by the English artists, George Clausen and Walter Sickert. Though Clausen and Sickert differed widely in their estimation of Lepage's worth, both were critical of the limitations of his painstaking methods and style. Clausen saw Lepage's realism as a realism of details, which could convey 'but a number of isolated truths'. Sickert went further, contemptuously dismissing Lepage's work as 'a catalogue of facts'. Both artists contrasted the shortcomings of Lepage's style with the 'general impression of truth' to be found in Millet's broadly painted and deeply felt peasant subjects.
Clausen's own stylistic development away from the dominant influence of Lepage towards Millet's more 'generalized' realism may be seen in his Mowers of 1892, with its freer technique, blurred edges and simple, repetitive shapes. (McCubbin placed a reproduction of this painting in his scrapbook.)\(^{143}\) In a more restrained manner, Shearing at Newstead also follows the tendency of Clausen's art through its greater generalization of the forms and activity within the shearing shed.

Here Roberts' adoption of a more painterly style finds a parallel in the work of E.P. Fox and Tudor St George Tucker, who returned to Australia from abroad in the early 1890s. At local Melbourne exhibitions they showed paintings on the theme of pastoral labour which revealed the renewed influence of Millet's rural subjects on recent English art.\(^{144}\)

As Australian painters gradually absorbed recent developments in realism, their art moved marginally closer to current trends in European painting. However, these developments effectively spelled the end of a 'programmatic', realist interpretation of Australian pastoral labour that had briefly appeared in Shearing the Rams.

When Roberts painted Shearing at Newstead in 1893-94, he probably no longer saw the shearer as such a suitable vehicle for the expression of egalitarian social ideals. The Australian pastoral industry was badly hit by the economic depression of the nineties. Over-investment in the pastoral industry in the eighties, coupled with a steep fall in wool prices in the early nineties, saw many pastoralists in severe financial difficulties, with their properties often heavily mortgaged to the banks and leading pastoral companies. On the industrial front, the shearing unions were overwhelmingly defeated by the employers in the major shearing strikes of 1891 and 1894.\(^{145}\) The 1891 strike, which lasted for approximately five months, was fought over the crucial issue of the pastoralists' right to 'freedom of contract' versus the unionists'
demands for a 'closed shop'. After striking shearers massed in large camps near Barcaldine and Clermont in Queensland, alarmist reports in the city press encouraged the idea that the country districts were on the brink of civil war. The government's response to the strike was to call in the military and the police, who arrested over sixty of the shearers and their union leaders. In May 1891 twelve unionists were sentenced to three years' hard labour for 'conspiracy'; the charges against the men were laid under an imperial statute of George IV, then obsolete in England but curiously still operative in Queensland. By August of that year, the unionists were forced to admit defeat and to concede the pastoralists' right to 'freedom of contract'. The 'new unionism', which held out hopes of greater equality for workers during the prosperous 1880s, had been crushed by the combined force of the employers and government.¹⁴⁶

When first exhibited at the Art Society of New South Wales Exhibition in 1894, Shearing at Newstead was immediately given its alternative title, The Golden Fleece. Precisely how the picture acquired its complementary title is not known, but if Roberts himself did not see the painting as an historical reflection upon a past golden age, then most of his contemporaries certainly did.¹⁴⁷ The portrayal of blade shearing, rather than machine shearing, in the painting was quickly identified as a deliberate allusion to the recent history of the pastoral industry.¹⁴⁸ A writer in The Bulletin (6 October 1894) consequently praised the New South Wales Gallery's acquisition of Shearing at Newstead on the grounds that 'This is emphatically a picture of a phase of Australian life that is rapidly passing away'.

The popular title of The Golden Fleece bestowed upon Roberts' painting probably derived from the writings of the visiting English journalist, George Augustus Sala. Sala had visited Australia in 1885
and in that year he contributed a series of articles on his impressions of Australian society to Melbourne and Sydney newspapers under the evocative title, 'The Land of the Golden Fleece'. So aptly did this phrase seem to sum up the nation's material well-being, that it was commonly quoted in publications of the late eighties to describe Australia's general prosperity and the outstanding contribution of the pastoral industry to our national wealth. It is indicative of the contemporary desire to build myths in the face of a harsher reality that Shearing at Newstead became popularly associated with 'The Land of the Golden Fleece' during the depression. Sala had originally coined the expression in response to the confident materialism of the boom years. By contrast, in 1894 the rural economy was at its lowest ebb, and union leaders were again being gaoled for their part in the 1894 shearers' strike.

The ready identification of a past golden age with Roberts' painting was indicative of a common literary and artistic response to the depression. The flood of light emanating from the open pastures in Shearing at Newstead evokes a promising image of natural abundance and rural wealth. It is echoed again and again in Banjo Paterson's poetic vision of the Australian landscape as a land 'Of waving grass and forest trees/Of sunlit plains as wide as seas'. Paterson's simplistic solution to the economic ills of the nineties was to open up 'the rolling fertile plains' of the interior to closer settlement. Artists too, desiring a respite from a pressing current reality, found solace in the natural splendours of the Australian landscape. Something of this impulse underlies the grand, panoramic sweep of Arthur Streeton's landscape painting of 1896, Purple Noon's Transparent Might (National Gallery of Victoria). Around the time he painted this picture, Streeton wrote to Roberts expressing his love of 'the great gold plains, and
all the beautiful inland Australia'; in the same letter he complained bitterly of the lack of patronage available to local painters.\textsuperscript{151}

While Paterson adopted a romantic, escapist attitude towards the Australian bush, Henry Lawson was equally disillusioned with the present state of both urban and rural society. In his famous literary debate with Paterson, beginning in \textit{The Bulletin} in 1892, Lawson argued for greater realism in the portrayal of the bush, as opposed to Paterson's romanticism, which falsified its true nature.\textsuperscript{152}

But radical thinkers were equally prone to seeking refuge in past glories, or in the creation of some future Australian Utopia. In 1892 William Lane wrote his indictment of the capitalist system, \textit{The Workingman's Paradise}, which advocated the establishment of a socialist society as the only panacea for contemporary ills. Indicative of the divided impulses of the period, Lane's utopian novel was originally published to help raise money for the imprisoned union leaders sentenced in connection with the 1891 shearer's strike. By 1893 Lane and his followers, convinced that they could never achieve a socialist society in Australia, left the country to form a new socialist republic in Paraguay.\textsuperscript{153} Despite the demonstrable failure of Lane's New Australia in Paraguay, utopian dreams of the equality of Australian workers continued to appear in the literature of the nineties and beyond. As late as 1901 Henry Lawson's poem, 'The Shearers', restated these egalitarian ideals based on Lawson's notion of the workers' 'mateship'.\textsuperscript{154}

\textit{Shearing at Newstead} thus bears a curiously ambivalent relationship to the nationalism of the nineties. It appealed to a general nostalgia for a past rural age, when Australia was indeed 'The Land of the Golden Fleece'. In harking back to an ideal past, \textit{Shearing at Newstead} simultaneously romanticized the contemporary rural scene in much the same way as Paterson's poetic interpretation of a 'bountiful' Australian bush had done. The painting acquired associations of the material
prosperity and national wealth of the boom years, despite the current strife-worn and depressed state of the rural industry. Alternatively, the painting's image of rural abundance was not incompatible with a radical utopian vision of the future equality of Australian workers, expressed by writers as different as Lane and Lawson. Roberts' portrayal of blade shearing in *Shearing at Newstead* indicates his own reflective attitude towards the bush worker. However, in idealizing Australian pastoral life, his painting was compatible with both a deeply conservative and a more radical interpretation of the place of the bush worker within rural society.

VI

The progress of Roberts' artistic retreat into a rural past may be followed in his major pastoral paintings. It began with the egalitarian, social ideals manifest in *Shearing the Rams*, then moved to the heroic action of a fading rural past in *The Breakaway* and culminated in his nostalgic, reflective attitude to the bush worker evident in *Shearing at Newstead*. This retreat into the past became more pronounced with his two major bushranging subjects of the mid-nineties: *Bailed Up*, 1895 (Art Gallery of New South Wales) and *Bushranging - Thunderbolt in an Encounter with the Police at Paradise Creek*, 1894-95 (Australian National Gallery, Canberra). Both bushranging pictures are in fact 'history' paintings, rather than being representative of a contemporary phase of Australian life.

The hanging of Ned Kelly in Melbourne on 11 November 1880 was soon recognized by contemporary audiences as marking the symbolic end of Australia's bushranging era. Beginning as early as the 1830s, in folksongs, ballads and popular literature, the apotheosis of the bushranger was firmly entrenched in Australian culture after Kelly's death in 1880.
The picturesque atlases and various histories of Australia that appeared in the late 1880s sometimes devoted a separate chapter to the bushrangers, using Kelly's death as a convenient point to mark the passing of bushrangers from the contemporary scene. Even earlier, in 1882, Rolf Boldrewood's novel of bushranging adventure, *Robbery Under Arms*, had won a popular audience when first serialized in *The Sydney Mail*. Although Boldrewood's novel romanticized the life and exploits of its central characters and thus contributed to the bushranging mythology, it was loosely based on actual events and historical fact. This intermingling of fact and fiction, myth and reality, lies at the heart of the bushranging legend; it was partly responsible for the public's divided response to Roberts' *Bailed Up* when it was first exhibited in the nineties. By January 1886 a stage production of *Robbery Under Arms* had opened at the Royal Standard Theatre in Sydney. (On opening night, the stage backdrop featuring Mt Kosciusko and the Australian Alps came crashing to the ground, but the enterprising actor playing Captain Starlight, the bushranger, galloped his mount Rainbow off the stage, yelling as he went, 'A landslide! Go for your lives!')

The bushranging theme was equally popular within the visual arts during the 1880s and 1890s. As well as being treated in the illustrated atlases and published histories of Australia, bushranging subjects were frequently shown at local art exhibitions. At the 1883 Art Society of New South Wales Exhibition, H.J. Woodhouse exhibited his painting, *Captured*, which portrayed the bushranger's untimely end at the hands of his captor. B.E. Minns followed with a bushranging subject, *Robbery with Violence*, at the Society's 1890 Exhibition. C.H. Hunt, a well-known black and white illustrator, anticipated the subject and title of Roberts' later painting with his drawing of
Bailed Up, exhibited in 1882. It depicted 'the stoppage of a mail coach by bushrangers' and a critic found that 'the terror of the passengers and the menace of the robbers are well represented'.

Paintings and illustrations which emphasized the violence and dramatic action of bushranging episodes followed a long-established pictorial tradition for representing bushranging scenes. S.T. Gill, for example, had published his drawing, *Attacking the Mail (Bushranging, N.S.W., 1864)* in his *Australian Sketchbook* of 1864, and many similar dramatic scenes appeared in the illustrated newspapers up until the 1880s.

Frank Mahony's painting of 1892, significantly entitled *As In the Days of Old* (Art Gallery of New South Wales), portrays the bushranger escaping on horseback from his pursuer, a subject earlier attempted by Gill and often treated in the illustrated newspapers. A measure of the outstanding popularity of Mahony's painting with the public was its immediate acquisition by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. *As In the Days of Old* was described by a critic (*The Argus*, 23 October 1896) as

... a spirited delineation of a stirring bushranging episode ... the galloping horses, cleverly foreshortened, are full of life and motion, and there is character in every line of the attacking horseman.

This enthusiastic response to Mahony's painting reveals something of the public's expectations of bushranging pictures. It was assumed that the depiction of an incident from Australia's romantic bushranging era not only justified, but even called for, any embellishment or rhetorical flourish that the artist might lend to his portrayal of the subject. George Taylor recalled that, during the late nineties, Ernest Favenc regularly entertained the *Bulletin* writers and artists at their bohemian gatherings with his 'fine stock of bushranging yarns'.
As In the Days of Old follows this anecdotal, literary attitude towards a past age, now comfortably viewed from a romantic distance.

Against the literary, theatrical and artistic attempts of the eighties and nineties to enshrine the bushranger in myth, Roberts' original and critically acute pictures are exceptional. In Bailed Up and Thunderbolt, Roberts adhered to the aims of European realists like Lepage, to represent historical subjects 'truthfully' in 'the light of the nineteenth century'.

Bailed Up was a common subject in Australian painting and illustration; but Roberts departed significantly from the local pictorial tradition in his search for specific detail and in his desire to remain true to historical fact.

While staying at the Newstead Station in the early nineties, Roberts is said to have

... expressed a wish that he might obtain some data which would enable him to paint a picture such as 'Bailed Up' typifying the early days of New South Wales in the bushranging era.

The New England district, where he began preparations for Bailed Up in 1893-95, was significantly the location of the earlier bushranging exploits of Frederick Ward, alias Captain Thunderbolt. Ward had bailed up and robbed the local mail coaches on numerous occasions during the mid- and late 1860s. Like other Australian bushrangers before him, Ward held an ideal of himself as a gentleman; even while he was committing his crimes in the 1860s, Ward engaged the sympathy of certain sections of the public. He developed a popular reputation for his pluck and daring, for the fact that he did not shed innocent blood, and for his chivalrous attitude towards women and the poor. This reputation was largely deserved, since bushrangers like Ward knew, and exploited the fact, that public sympathy often enabled them to elude the police. On his death in 1870, Ward was described by the
Melbourne Age as the last of the 'professional bushrangers' of New South Wales.164

Whether Bailed Up was directly inspired by Ward's story remains uncertain, but the incident depicted in Roberts' picture also goes back to the 1860s. Roberts obtained background information of an actual hold-up from a local Cobb and Co. driver, Bill Bates. Bates 'described to the painter the quiet way the whole thing took place'.165 Following the artistic precepts of the realist movement, Roberts then methodically reconstructed the various details of the original scene in order to paint the picture from life. The landscape background was painted from a platform that Roberts erected in a gum tree at a spot along the old Armidale to Inverell road; the coach and driver were then painted at Inverell, and the canvas was finally completed at Newstead, where the station men and horses served as models.166

In Bailed Up Roberts deliberately avoided the portrayal of daring and dramatic action that were popularly associated with the Thunderbolt story and the bushranging mythology in art and literature. Instead, he chose to emphasize the salient feature of the actual bushranging incident related by Bill Bates: 'the quiet way the whole thing took place'. The scale of the figures is reduced so that they remain essentially anonymous characters, while the clarity of the tranquil, sun-drenched landscape provides an emotional foil to the serious episode taking place on the road. The effect of the still heat of day is enhanced by the frieze-like arrangement of the composition, so that the picture becomes unified through a subtle blend of the abstract and real. Roberts' detached, impersonal handling of the subject lends a documentary, almost photographic realism to the scene in Bailed Up.167 In this way he was able to 'typify' an anonymous event from the early bushranging era, while still giving the impression of 'truth' to the specific facts of the actual scene he depicts.
Roberts' approach to history painting in *Bailed Up* was perhaps closer to that of the earlier colonial painter, William Strutt, than to that of his romantically inclined contemporary, Mahony. Strutt's painting, *Bushrangers, Victoria, Australia, 1852* (University of Melbourne), was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1887, only six years before Roberts began work on *Bailed Up*. Like Roberts, Strutt methodically reconstructed a scene from Australia's colonial past, basing his picture on an actual event that took place along St Kilda Road in 1852. While Strutt admittedly lends heroic stature to his bushranger figures, he also emphasizes the unexpected quietness that characterized the real event.\(^{168}\)

The active conflict between the two figures in Roberts' *Bushranging - Thunderbolt in an Encounter with Police at Paradise Creek* is so understated that the second participant is barely visible, being seen as a mere speck on the horizon. Despite his apparent desire to preserve the anonymity of the bushranger in the scene, the painting (as its present title clearly indicates) bears a teasing relationship to the actual events of Thunderbolt's life. Thunderbolt was shot and killed by a Constable Walker in 1870, at a place now called 'Thunderbolt's Rocks' on the Kentucky Creek near Uralla. Some six and a half years earlier he had been wounded in a duel with police at a spot about a mile from where he later met his death. Roberts' choice of subject in *Bushranging* may well have been inspired by local accounts of Thunderbolt's famous encounters with the police. There is also some evidence to suggest that Roberts later encouraged the idea that *Bushranging* indeed portrayed the scene of Thunderbolt's fatal shooting.\(^{169}\)

However, his original intention to 'typify' an anonymous bushranging episode is clearly implicit in the painting's first title, *In a Corner on the MacIntyre*. Roberts exhibited the painting under this title at
the 1895 Society of Artists' Exhibition, alongside Bailed Up. In a Corner on the MacIntyre was appropriately described by a critic reviewing the show as

... another picture with a story, though here the fable is merely suggested - though that dramatically enough - by the tired attitude of the horse whose rider finds himself in a cul de sac. The spectator sees a foreground of still translucent water at the foot of a natural wall of rock, rough hewn and colour stained by wind and water. Roberts presumably intended the picture to form a companion piece, perhaps even a sequel to Bailed Up. Both pictures identify an actual locality (Bushranging depicts a spot on the MacIntyre River, near Newstead), but carefully retain the anonymity of the bushrangers themselves.

The mythic proportions accorded to the bushranger by contemporary audiences are unwittingly revealed in the press criticism of Roberts' bushranging pictures. While the paintings received a somewhat mixed reception, critics were generally perplexed by Roberts' deliberate avoidance of the histrionics and vapid literary allusions usually associated with bushranging pictures. The Age critic (24 October 1896) commented of Bailed Up:

As a narration of an episode in the history of the bush ... there is an amusing lack of any dramatic element. The whole affair is conducted à l'aimable.

The Argus critic (23 October 1896) similarly condemned Bailed Up for its 'utter lack of life and movement', and compared the painting unfavourably with the 'spirited' and 'stirring' action of Mahony's As In the Days of Old. What particularly incensed the Age critic was Roberts' portrayal of the

... member of the long-legged fraternity [who] chats at the coach door to a lady passenger, who ... responds with a tranquillity which Lady Clara Vere de Vere could not have surpassed in the circumstances.
Ironically, Roberts' portrayal of the bushranger's chivalrous attitude towards women may be seen as one of his few obvious concessions to that curious blend of fact and fiction that was the essence of the bush-ranging myth.\textsuperscript{172}

With his bushranging subjects of the mid-nineties, Roberts' imaginative retreat into a rural past was complete. His contemporaries acknowledged the originality of his bushranging pictures, but were strangely puzzled by his departure from the usual pictorial stereotypes.\textsuperscript{173} They were unable to recognize the new historical veracity and critical attitude that Roberts brought to his treatment of the Australian rural mythology.

**VII**

Roberts' paintings of 'strong, masculine labour' are too easily seen as 'representative' examples of the Australian rural mythology of the late nineteenth century. In fact, these paintings stand noticeably apart from the mainstream of popular imagery of the bushman occurring within the illustrated atlases and newspapers of the time. While Roberts was certainly indebted to local pictorial sources in his pastoral paintings, he lent weight and dignity to his conception of the subject by drawing upon European conventions of portraying rural labour. For Roberts, the search for a distinctively national content in art encompassed aspirations towards high art, and disdained the narrow parochialism that so often characterized the nationalism of the Bulletin writers and illustrators.

In formulating his pastoral figure subjects, Roberts was strongly influenced by a wider European ideal of rural labour. The European realists wished to express in their art a deep and lasting communion with Nature. A reverence for Nature's providence consequently informs Roberts' treatment of his shearing scenes, as it similarly underlay the
poetic mood of some of his Australian landscapes. This underlying concern with man's relationship to the soil serves to modify any simplistic reading of the political and social 'message' of Roberts' pastoral subjects. *Shearing the Rams*, for instance, certainly reveals his interest in the place of the worker within rural society, but it is also concerned with man's essential relationship with Nature - or, as Roberts himself put it - 'the patience of the animals whose year's growth is being stripped from them for man's use'.

The influence of European realism, alongside an urban nostalgia for rural life, thus encouraged Roberts to idealize his Australian pastoral subjects. His shearing pictures provide no hint of the economic depression, industrial conflict and harsh working conditions, more representative of the general state of the pastoral industry by the early 1890s. On the other hand, Roberts' adherence to the aims and practices of European realism strengthened his original and critical attitude towards the burgeoning rural mythology. He sought to 'typify' his pastoral subjects through a specificity of treatment and effect in the finished painting. Following the precepts of the realist movement, his major pastoral pictures were painted directly before the motif. Unlike many contemporary illustrations, the 'local colour' of his paintings was derived from first-hand knowledge and observation of the rural scene. This concern for an impression of 'truth' and historical accuracy led Roberts to reject the pictorial stereotypes employed by his contemporaries in favour of more exacting and original solutions.

Roberts was broadly democratic, rather than radical, in his political outlook. The egalitarian social ideals manifest in *Shearing the Rams* reflect commonly-held assumptions about the 'harmony of interests' between labour and capital. Underlying the cooperative relationship between worker and employer in *Shearing the Rams* may be
seen the confident materialism of the boom years when the 'new unionism'
was able to win better conditions and economic rewards for workers.
In this sense, the painting represents an idealized response to
contemporary society, rather than constituting a radical call for
future action.

The economic depression and industrial strife of the 1890s rapidly
eroded common beliefs regarding the 'harmony of interests' between
labour and capital. Like many of his literary counterparts, Roberts
sought refuge from a troubled present in the creation of a 'golden age'
in the rural past. His imaginative retreat into the rural past also
coincided with more recent developments in European realism; the
'programmatic', didactic treatment of *Shearing the Rams* became styl-
istically outmoded. Roberts' bushranging pictures of the mid-1890s
perhaps symbolized his artistic rejection of contemporary themes, but
even here he only partially accepted the prevailing bushranger mythology.
He held true to the realist creed that historical subjects should be
treated with a contemporary 'truth', and his bushranging pictures
brought a new historical veracity to a time-worn stereotyped subject.

It is ironic that the progressive, egalitarian ideals in *Shearing
the Rams* were partly contingent on the confident materialism of the
1880s, when workers and employers were popularly seen engaged together
in the common pursuit of wealth. The 1880s also saw the emergence of
a more conservative rural myth which showed how man might achieve 'true
independence' on the land: this was the pioneer myth, with is the
subject of the next chapter.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1 Arthur W. José, op. cit., p. 25.


4 For example, 'Reminiscences of the past - champagne nine pins' in Illustrated Sydney News (18 March 1882) and 'Knocking down his cheque', Australasian Sketcher (18 November 1882).


8 Roberts left Australia early in 1881, in January or early February, see Victorian Academy of Arts, Minute Books and Rules, op. cit.; the minutes for 1 February 1881: 'The secretary read a letter from Mr T.W. Roberts on his leaving the Colony ...'.

9 Roberts enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy Schools on 6 December 1881, and remained a student for three years; see Ann Galbally, 'Australian Artists Abroad: 1880-1914' in Studies in Australian Art, ed. Plant and Galbally, op. cit., p. 58 and p. 66 fn. 5. For Roberts' friendship with English artists like Buxton Knight and R. Anning Bell, see 'Letters to Tom Roberts', manuscript in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, vol. 3.

10 See a letter written to Roberts in August 1887, wherein Roberts' London friend, John Buxton Knight, expresses his regret at missing the large Millet Retrospective Exhibition staged at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris during May of that year. In 'Letters to Tom Roberts', op. cit., vol. 3.

11 For a summary of contemporary evaluations of Millet's art, see Ann Galbally, 'John Peter Russell and His Circle', op. cit., pp. 177-181. For the notion of the primacy of content over style and technique, see John Peter Russell's comments in a letter to Roberts written in 1887: 'When you were in London you were too much taken up with what others were doing and the manner thereof. And now you ply away thinking only of the matter', in 'Letters to Tom Roberts', op. cit., vol. 3.

12 For Bastien-Lepage, see the following essays in André Theuriet, ed., Bastien-Lepage, Marie Bashkirtseff, London, 1892: A. Theuriet, 'Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art, a memoir'; George Clausen, 'Jules Bastien-Lepage as artist'; Walter Sickert, 'Modern Realism in Painting'.


13 Walter Sickert, op. cit., p. 142.

14 A. Theuriet, 'Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art', op. cit., pp. 73-74.


17 Young English artists who studied in France during this period include George Clausen, Henry Herbert La Thangue, Edward Stott, James Charles and Stanhope Forbes; for a more detailed study of Australian painters studying in Europe at the time, see Ann Galbally, 'Australian Artists Abroad: 1880-1914', op. cit.

18 J.S. McDonald, Introduction to Tom Roberts' Memorial Exhibition Catalogue, Melbourne, 1932, p. 5.


20 The Lepage quotation in my text in fact derives from a contemporary American publication, but numerous similar sayings are recorded in English journals; Theodore Child, 'Some Modern French Painters' in Harper's Magazine, vol. 80, May 1890, p. 838. Cf. a letter from Russell to Roberts in September 1884, where he praises C.D. Richardson's work as being 'very grey and good like Bastien-Lepage', 'Letters to Tom Roberts', op. cit., vol. 3.


25 A letter to Roberts from Russell, dated 11 September 1884, wherein Russell announces a painting trip to Polperro, a fishing village in Cornwall; a further letter to Roberts from R. Anning Bell, dated 5 October 1885, wherein we learn that several of Roberts' fellow students spent the summer of 1885 at Polperro. The above letters to be found in 'Letters to Tom Roberts', op. cit., vol. 3; see Virginia Spate, *Tom Roberts*, op. cit., pp. 20-21, and p. 136, fn. 10.

26 Russell in an undated letter to Roberts, but presumably written in early 1885, 'Letters to Tom Roberts', op. cit., vol. 3. The artistic jargon employed here by Russell echoes the aphorisms of Bastien-Lepage.

27 Madame Elmhurst Goode, who knew Roberts well in the eighties, states that 'just as Roberts had determined to follow the influence of Lepage, came an offer from Barrie and Brown to reorganize the posing, lighting and backgrounds of their photographic studies'. Quoted in R.H. Croll, op. cit., p. 23.

28 Mrs E. Ritchie Harrison, an American and wife of Mr Birge Harrison (also an artist), exhibited *Fisherwoman* at the May 1888 Victorian Artists' Society Exhibition, and *A Breton Peasant* at the 1888 International Centennial Exhibition. For contemporary references to the Harrisons, see *Table Talk* (23 January 1891) and a letter from Charles Conder to Roberts, dated 2 May 1890, reproduced in R.H. Croll, ed., *Smike to Bulldog*, Sydney, 1946, p. 127. Loureiro had arrived in Australia around 1884; his painting of a peasant girl on the heath, *The First Wintry Chill*, was exhibited at the 1886 Artists' Association exhibition, and was described in *The Argus* (7 September 1886) as being reminiscent of Lepage in 'quality of work and in the motif and the sentiment'. By 1893 Loureiro had earned the reputation of being 'an ardent admirer and worthy follower of Bastien-Lepage' (*The Age*, 12 August 1893).


31 Virginia Spate, *Tom Roberts*, op. cit., p. 88. The work of Courbet stands as a notable exception to this generalization but, by the late nineteenth century, the Millet-Bastien-Lepage tradition of rural labour was more influential on contemporary artists.
32 Virginia Spate, *Tom Roberts*, op. cit., p. 32.

33 A letter from John Peter Russell to Tom Roberts, written from Paris and dated 5 October 1887; in 'Letters to Tom Roberts', op. cit., vol. 3.

34 Cf. Virginia Spate, *Tom Roberts*, op. cit. For example, around 1886 Roberts painted *Twenty Past Three* (Private collection, New South Wales, reproduced Spate, p. 74), the subject and its treatment being typical of the mid-nineteenth century narrative painting. During the same year Roberts was painting *plein-air* landscapes like *The Artist's Camp*. Roberts' 'style' sometimes appears an artificial mannerism, ill-suited to the subject he depicts. For example, in his *Jealousy*, 1889 (Art Gallery of New South Wales) the Aesthetic arrangement of the woman seen in profile, the Japanese screen and flowers in the foreground, compete with the narrative interest of two lovers at the back of the room.


37 Roberts was probably familiar with Brown's *Work* through reproductions, although he may have known one of the two original versions. The larger version was purchased by the Manchester City Art Gallery in 1885 (see Lawrence Haward, *Illustrated Guide to the Art Collections in the Manchester Corporation Galleries*, Manchester, 1938). Roberts left England for Australia on 4 March 1885. The smaller version of *Work* entered the Birmingham City Art Gallery in 1927 (see *Catalogue of Paintings, City Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham*, Birmingham, 1960).


39 For example, an illustration of Splitters appears in S.T. Gill's *The Australian Sketchbook* of 1864; 'Selectors Clearing the Forest' in *The Australasian Sketcher* (31 January 1880). Millet's *Woodsmen* in the Victoria and Albert Museum was often used as a pictorial source for illustrations in Australia in the eighties, see further documentation of these examples in the next chapter. Photographers like J.W. Lindt and Nicholas Caire took many photographs of Gippsland timber workers in the late seventies and eighties, which they reproduced in commercial albums, see a reproduction of Caire's photograph of a splitter at work in Michael Cannon, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

40 William Thomas Pyke, *op. cit.*, 2nd ed. 1893, p. 68.
41 The Splitters, in fact, shows bushmen working the soil, rather than splitting timber as the title suggests, cf. the Souvenir Catalogue of the Tom Roberts Exhibition, National Gallery of Victoria, February-March 1948, which records No 56, Turning the Soil, unsigned, Oil on cedar panel 7.1/2" H x 11.5/8" W, lent by Miss Sylvia B. Purves (catalogue, State Library of Victoria).

42 Virginia Spate, Tom Roberts, op. cit., pp. 55 and 139 fn. 22.


44 Cf. numerous references in letters reprinted in R.H. Croll, ed., Smike to Bulldog, op. cit.; Virginia Spate, 'Tom Roberts and Australian Impressionism', op. cit., esp. pp. 21-22; Virginia Spate, Tom Roberts, op. cit., p. 20; cf. an unsigned letter to Roberts from a friend in England, dated March 1887, who writes: 'being so far from all artists and things Artistic, I have the one mistress Nature only ... this isolation from things Artistic brings out what individuality I may happen to have ...' in 'Letters to Tom Roberts', op. cit., vol. 3.

45 Cf. Virginia Spate, Tom Roberts, op. cit., p. 56.

46 Ibid., p. 85; Virginia Spate, 'Tom Roberts and Australian Impressionism', op. cit., pp. 174-175.

47 Victorian Artists' Society Catalogue of Autumn Exhibition, May 1888, No 25, illustrated on p. 7 (Catalogue, State Library of Victoria). The canvas was a large one (142.2 x 99.1 cm) and Roberts asked sixty pounds for the picture, indicating the importance he attached to it. The fact that the picture showed the figure in 'bright sunshine' perhaps suggests a temporary movement away from the style of Lepage.

48 Courbet's Stonebreakers (now destroyed) was acquired by the Dresden Gallery in 1904. In a letter to Tom Roberts of 1st June 1892, McCubbin discusses the Stonebreakers in terms which suggest both artists' long familiarity with the painting; reprinted in R.H. Croll, Tom Roberts, op. cit., p. 173.

49 The following interpretation of Roberts' Shearing the Rams is based on my article, 'Tom Roberts' Shearing the Rams: the Hidden Tradition' in Art Bulletin of Victoria, No 19, 1978.

50 This letter and that quoted in the next paragraph are reprinted in R.H. Croll, Tom Roberts, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

51 For example, see the 1884 Victorian Jubilee Exhibition Catalogue (State Library of Victoria), where J.A. Turner exhibited a series of shearing pictures and a William Pratt exhibited No 274, Sheep Shearing; also see Virginia Spate, Tom Roberts, op. cit., pp. 85 and 140 fn. 14.

52 'First Sketch for Shearing' (gouache and pencil, 22.3 x 30 cm, National Gallery of Victoria). Inscribed in Roberts' hand, 'To my friend, C.S. Paterson, 1890 ... Brocklesby'. The sketch can be dated to 1888, or possibly 1889. I am indebted to Sonia Dean, who pointed out the existence of this sketch. The sketch is reproduced in Leigh Astbury, see fn. 49, p. 49; and in Terry Smith, 'The Divided Meaning of Shearing the Rams: Artists and Nationalism, 1888-1891' in Australian Art and Architecture, op. cit., p. 101.


55 The Argus (31 May 1890) and The Age (30 May 1890). The latter reference is quoted by Virginia Spate, Tom Roberts, op. cit., p. 86; Roberts' practice of finishing the picture in his Melbourne studio is not incompatible with the actual working methods of Lepage, cf. A. Theuriet, 'Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art', op. cit.

56 A photograph inscribed 'Shearing' and signed in Nettleton's hand in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne. I am indebted to Jenny Carew, who drew my attention to Nettleton's photograph. The precise date of Nettleton's 'Shearing' is problematical. According to the entry under Nettleton by Jean Gittins in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, ed. Douglas Pike, Melbourne, 1974, vol. 5, 1851-90, p. 329, Nettleton closed his Melbourne studio in 1889-90, suggesting a possible date for his 'Shearing' photograph before 1890; for Roberts and Nettleton as photographers, see Jack Cato, op. cit., pp. 31-33, 88-89. In Garran (ed.), Picturesque Atlas of Australasia, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 753, there is an illustration of 'Wool-pressing' by A.H. Fullwood, which is possibly based on a companion photograph of Nettleton's 'Shearing', 'Seven Creeks Station', also in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne. If Fullwood's illustration is indeed based on this photograph, then Nettleton's 'Shearing' not only predates Roberts' painting, but was presumably widely circulated, and Roberts is more likely to have known it; Terry Smith, op. cit., p. 109.

57 For example, the illustration 'Sheep-shearing' on p. 473 of David Blair, op. cit., is copied from a well-known contemporary photograph, 'Shearing' by J.W. Lindt, held in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne.

58 He contributed work at an exhibition of paintings and drawings for The Atlas held in George Rossi Ashton's studio; see The Age (5 November 1885) and The Argus (31 October 1885). I owe one of these references to Virginia Spate.

59 Andrew Garran, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 751; Ashton and Roberts had studios in Collins Street and were both connected with the reform of the Victorian Academy of the Arts and the establishment of the Victorian Artists' Society in the late 1880s.

60 Ashton's 'Tarboy' appears in Andrew Garran, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 752; Simon Nasht, op. cit., Kenneth McConkey, op. cit., p. 373; an example of Lepage's paintings of young peasant children is Pas Mèche in the National Gallery of Scotland.

By the 1880s Millet's sympathetic treatment of the rural worker was an established convention within European academic art, and by the early 1890s paintings of rural workers seen in rhythmic movement were frequently painted by 'progressive' English artists like Clausen and Henry La Thangue. Whether or not Roberts actually saw Millet's *Gleaners* is not known (the painting was acquired by the Louvre in 1890), but his familiarity with the later tradition is beyond question.

See Virginia Spate, *Tom Roberts*, op. cit., p. 88; it has already been noted that a similar motif occurs in Roberts' earlier painting, *The Splitters*.

Ursula Hoff, 'Reflections on the Heidelberg School, 1885-1900' in *Meanjin*, vol. 10, No 2, 1951, p. 129; Courbet probably derived the figure from Millet's *The Winnowers* of 1848, cf. R.L. Herbert, 'City vs. Country', op. cit., p. 46; Roberts may also have known the pose from a classical source - it also occurs in a modified form in his *The Sculptor's Studio*, 1883 (Australian National Gallery, Canberra) - but in the context of *Shearing the Rams* the pose almost certainly refers to Courbet's figure.

For example, 'Sheep Shearing in Australia', *The Illustrated Sydney News* (15 October 1864) and an engraving by Samuel Calvert, 'Sheep Shearing at the Yanco', *The Illustrated Sydney News* (18 February 1869), reproduced in Bill Scott, *Complete Book of Australian Folklore*, Sydney, 1976, pp. 375 and 128; see Terry Smith, op. cit., p. 114, who also reproduces the above illustrations. In illustrations of the 1870s and 1880s the station owner or overseer was still portrayed in shearing scenes, but his dominating role and superior social position were not so clearly conspicuous; see E.C. Buley, op. cit., p. 23, for the role of the shearing overseer.

Jean E. O'Connor, '1890 - A Turning Point in Labour History: a Reply to Mrs Philipp', *Historical Studies, Selected Articles*, 2nd series, Melbourne, 1967, p. 142; also see the discussion of the A.S.U. in chapter 5, p. 191, and fn. 1, for bibliographical references.


73 Robin Gollan, op. cit., p. 119, states that 'The Associated Riverina Workers' had as 'part six of their programme "the complete political independence of the United Australian Commonwealth on a basis of pure democratic republicanism"'; cf. Humphrey McQueen, op. cit., p. 215; also Lee Kelly, op. cit.


79 Henry Lawson, 'A Rough Shed', *While the Billy Boils*, second series, Sydney, 1900.

80 W.G. Spence, op. cit., p. 66.

81 G.L. Buxton, *The Riverina*, op. cit., p. 264; see also the discussion in chapter 4, p. 178 and bibliographical references in fn. 76.


84 Terry Smith, op. cit., pp. 116 and 244, fn. 59; I am indebted to Mrs A.H. Leslie of the Corowa Free Press for a copy of this article. Smith incorrectly dates the article in 1890, instead of 1889.
Table Talk (30 August 1889); the report states that a group of artists, including Roberts and Streeton, had become 'tired of the slow progress of Australian art' and intended to send paintings 'with a decided leaning towards nationality' to the Royal Academy and the Paris Salon; quoted by Virginia Spate, *Tom Roberts*, op. cit., p. 86. The 'programmatic', realist aspects of Roberts' *Shearing the Rams* would have been more obvious to informed European audiences; cf. Terry Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106.


The following interpretation of *The Breakaway* is based on my article, 'Tom Roberts' *The Breakaway*: Myth and History' in *Bulletin of the Art Gallery of South Australia*, vol. 38, 1980.

Notes in Table Talk, 27 February 1891 and 15 May 1891, mention Roberts' prolonged stay at Corowa (references owed to Virginia Spate). *The Breakaway* was placed on view at Roberts' Collins Street studio in July 1891, see 'Mr Tom Roberts' New Picture', *Table Talk*, 17 July 1891.

Francis Adams, *The Australians*, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-150; cf. Francis Adams, 'The Labour Movement in Australia', *op. cit.*, where the phrase 'workman of the Eastern Interior' is first used.

See discussion in chapter 4, pp.155-157 and footnotes 15-17.

For example, J. MacFarlane's drawing, 'A Breakaway By Night' in *The Illustrated Australian News*, 13 November 1886.


Mahony's illustrations of the subject are 'Rounding Up a Straggler On a Cattle-Run' in Garran, ed., *Picturesque Atlas*, vol. 2, p. 353, and 'Stockrider Rounding Cattle' in A. Sutherland, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 263; a similar subject is Mahony's 'Scrub Riding' in W.F. Morrison, ed., *op. cit.*, vol. 2, oppos. p. 569; the illustration is republished under the same title in W. Frederick Morrison, ed., *The Aldine History of South Australia*, Sydney, 1890, vol. 1, oppos. p. 70; Virginia Spate, *Tom Roberts*, *op. cit.*, p. 86, suggests that Roberts may have seen Mahony's painting during his trip to Sydney in the autumn of 1888.
Quotations in the text are from William Thomas Pyke, op. cit., p. 87, and the text to an illustration by Montague Scott, 'Overlanders Rounding Up a Straggler', The Illustrated Australian News, 21 May 1872; cf. the illustration, 'Musterling Cattle', Australasian Sketcher, 21 February 1874 and text p. 201; 'Turning a Straggler', The Illustrated Australian News, Supplement, December 1881; 'Musterling Cattle on the Bogong High Plains - A Rough Customer', The Illustrated Australian News, 1 July 1892. Other contemporary paintings dealing with a breakaway by cattle include J.H. Scheltema's Breaking Away (c. 1892), now in the Australia Club, Melbourne.


James Green, 'The Art Society of New South Wales', op. cit., pp. 275-6, where it is declared 'the most Australian of anything in the gallery'; Edward Bevan, op. cit., p. 76.


The Argus, 31 October 1891.

Quotation from a contemporary newspaper article based on an interview with Roberts, reprinted in R.H. Croll, Tom Roberts, op. cit., p. 36.

Ibid., pp. 35-36.

Roberts' pencil sketch for the horseman in The Breakaway c. 1890-91 is held in a private collection in South Australia; it is reproduced in Leigh Astbury, 'Tom Roberts' The Breakaway: Myth and History', op. cit., p. 4.

Cassell's Picturesque Australasia, op. cit., vol. 2 (1888), oppos. p. 220. Further support for this interpretation may be found in the likelihood that Roberts used another drawing by Hatherell in the same Cassell's volume (p. 221) as a source for his Shearing the Rams, cf. the earlier discussion in this chapter, p. 227. A letter dated 22 May 1891 from Charles Conder to Roberts reveals that Roberts experienced 'difficulties' in representing 'sheep in motion' in The Breakaway (reprinted in R.H. Croll, ed., Smike to Bulldog, op. cit., p. 136).

These compositional sketches for The Breakaway are held in a private collection in South Australia, see fn. 97. One is reproduced in Leigh Astbury, 'Tom Roberts' The Breakaway', op. cit., p. 6.

110 *The Argus*, 31 October 1891.


121 Amy Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-20, 26, 30-31, 37.


126 Arthur W. José, op. cit., p. 4.


128 *The Bookfellow*, March 1899, p. 34.

129 George Taylor, op. cit., pp. 10-11, 63.


135 George Taylor, op. cit., pp. 54, 60.

136 R.H. Croll, *Tom Roberts*, op. cit., p. 120.

137 Cf. Geoffrey Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Came*, op. cit., p. 77. The parallels between Paterson's and Roberts' social situations are also interesting; Paterson stood apart from the Bulletin crowd by the late nineties and moved in the upper ranks of Sydney society; cf. Graeme Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush', op. cit., p. 203 and fn. 29.


139 The illustration is reproduced in Bill Scott, op. cit., p. 209, and also in Terry Smith, op. cit., p. 108.


142 A. Theuriet, op. cit., fn. 7. Quotations in my text are from pp. 126 and 141; Kenneth McConkey, op. cit., pp. 377-379.

143 McCubbin's scrapbook is held in the Print Room of the National Gallery of Victoria.

144 Cf. Ruth Zubans, op. cit., esp. pp. 148-149. Tudor St George Tucker's *A Picardy Shrimp Fisher*, exhibited at the April 1893 VAS exhibition in Melbourne, suggests the broader, 'generalizing' influence of Millet's style on recent British realism; Tucker's picture is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, now held in the State Library of Victoria.

146 Michael Cannon, op. cit., p. 233; Julian Stuart, op. cit.; H. Kenway, op. cit.

147 Cf. a review of the exhibition, dated 28 September 1894. from Press Cuttings in the Art Gallery of New South Wales Library, p. 104. The writer mentions 'Mr Tom Roberts' 'The Golden Fleece' - to give his 'Shearing Shed' its second and more poetic title ...'; the exhibition catalogue, now in the Library of the N.S.W. Art Gallery, simply states: 'No 300 Tom Roberts Shearing at Newstead £275-0-0'.

148 Cf. Nat Gould, On and Off the Turf, op. cit., who wrote in 1895: 'Most sheds now have machinery, and the old system of hand-shearing has almost died out'.


150 The Paterson quotation is from his poem, 'Song of the Future', first published in his anthology, Rio Grande's Last Race and Other Verses, Sydney, 1902, pp. 57-65; Graeme Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush', op. cit., p. 203.


152 Cf. Bruce Nesbitt, op. cit.

153 William Lane (pseud. 'John Miller'), op. cit.; R.H. Croll, Tom Roberts, op. cit., p. 165, publishes a recollection of Alick Anderson of the Newstead Station which states: 'Another tall man on the left [in Shearing at Newstead], seen sharpening his shears, when the shed cut out went off to join the first party going to New Australia in Paraguay. These men interested T.R., who often spoke of them afterwards'. Though interesting, this recollection may be faulty; Lane and his followers left Australia on 17 July 1893 and, by the evidence of one of Roberts' letters, he was still at Newstead on 31 December 1893, presumably painting Shearing at Newstead.


159 Woodhouse's Captured is illustrated in the 1883 Art Society of New South Wales Exhibition Catalogue in the State Library of Victoria; B.E. Minns' Robbery With Violence is reproduced and discussed in James Green, 'Art in New South Wales', op. cit., p. 104; C.H. Hunt's drawing, Bailed Up, is described in a newspaper cutting dated 28 April 1882, from Press Cuttings in the Art Gallery of New South Wales Library, p. 80.

160 For contemporary illustrative material on bushrangers see Tom Prior, Bill Wannan and H. Nunn (joint authors), A Pictorial History of Bushrangers, Melbourne, 1966, and a revised and edited version of Boxall's Story of Australian Bushrangers published by Rigby Australia, 1975, esp. p. 94 for an illustration of 'The Australian Dick Turpin - Gardiner's Flight', from the Illustrated Sydney News, 30 August 1890, which presents an earlier rendition of the subject of Mahony's painting. For As In the Days of Old, see Bernard Smith, A Catalogue of Australian Oil Paintings ..., op. cit., pp. 136-137; S.T. Gill's illustration, Bushranger's Flight, La Trobe Library, Melbourne (H 10873, Mc. 4, Dr 9, Env. 1).

161 George Taylor, op. cit., p. 63.

162 Cf. Roberts' discussion on the aims of history painting in his article on the Art Gallery of New South Wales (The Argus, 31 October 1891). Roberts praises luminais' The Sons of Clovis as 'an old subject treated in the light of the nineteenth century'; cf. Bastien-Lepage's attitude towards history paintings: 'If you take subjects from ancient history, at least let them be represented in an altogether human manner, exactly as you see the same things happen around you', quoted by William S. Feldman, op. cit., p. 5; cf. a further quotation from Lepage on history painting quoted by R. Muther, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 25.


165 Quoted in the catalogue, Tom Roberts Exhibition of Oil Paintings, held at the Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, 28 June - 17 July 1928; the catalogue is now in Correspondence of Tom Roberts, vols 4-5, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

A compositional sketch for *Bailed Up* in Tom Roberts' sketchbook (PXA 2481-4 p. 31, Mitchell Library, Sydney) shows a diagonal, curving movement of the coach and horses into depth, cf. a pen and indian ink drawing for *Bailed Up* in the Print Room, National Gallery of Victoria; also cf. *Oil Sketch for Bailed Up* (Private Collection, New South Wales), reproduced in Virginia Spate, *Tom Roberts*, op. cit., p. 94.

*Bailed Up* also bears certain affinities with the 'frozen action' and documentary quality of contemporary photographs of stage-coaching scenes. Roberts' conception of his subject may well have been influenced by photography. Cf. Charles Kerry's photograph, *Coaching South Coast. Coaching On Cliff Road*, La Trobe Library, Melbourne (H 18500 Mc. 2 Dr 11, Env. 1); and an anonymous photograph of *An Omeo Coach* (H 26541 Mc. 2, Dr 11, Env. 1); also an Empire Postcard of a stage coach (H 26551 Mc. 2, Dr 11, Env. 1).


In a letter of 3 March 1979 to the present writer, Mr Ian Ferguson, previous owner of *Bushranging*, has provided the following information on the picture's provenance. The painting was acquired by Mr Ferguson's father in 'about 1925' when he purchased it from Rubery Bennet, an art dealer in Hunter Street, Sydney. The picture was framed when acquired by the Ferguson family, but it is not known whether the painting was given its present title by Rubery Bennet or Roberts himself. *Bushranging* had 'the same heavy gilt frame' when lent to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1965 (received by the N.S.W. Gallery on 17 December 1965 and returned to the owners on 10 August 1971).

Mr Ferguson also supplied a copy of unidentified notes dated 16 August 1933, which read: 'the scene is a short distance from Urala, near Armidale (N.S.W.) and can be seen from the railway. The horse is 'Sir Rufus', a well-known racehorse owned by Mr Duncan Anderson. The picture was painted during Roberts' stay with Duncan Anderson at Newstead in 1894'. This supposed location of the scene in *Bushranging* accords with the site of Thunderbolt's death and one of his well-known duels with police, but is almost certainly inaccurate (see following note).

*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 1895, cf. *Daily Telegraph*, 27 September 1895: 'In a Corner of[sic] the MacIntyre, where a bushman leads his horse to water beneath some overhanging rocks, one sees a tranquil pool with noonday reflections on its surface, painted to perfection'; the painting was exhibited as 'No 17 "In a Corner on the MacIntyre" $31-10-0', at *The Society of Artists' First Exhibition, September 28th 1895*, catalogue in the Library of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. The low price Roberts asked for *In a Corner on the
MacIntyre, compared with the two hundred and seventy-five pounds he
asked for *Bailed Up*, perhaps suggests the lesser importance he attached
to the picture, which is approximately half the scale of the other.

I am indebted to the efforts of Mr Ian Ferguson and family, Sam Alcorn,
Daniel Thomas and Rosanna Grotrian in tracing the original title of
Roberts' *Bushranging*.

171 The MacIntyre River is a short distance from the original Newstead
Station. Paradise Creek, mentioned in the painting's more recent
title, is a tributary of the MacIntyre River and close to Paradise
Station, where Roberts stayed while painting *Bailed Up*, see G.W. Bacon,
ographical atlases; R.H. Croll, *Tom Roberts*, op. cit., p. 167 and also
p. 166: 'Tom Roberts was a great walker and one day arranged to walk
to the MacIntyre River, about four miles away, and spend a day up the
Gorge - rough, rocky, rugged going'; cf. a pencil sketch by Roberts,
etitled in his own hand, 'McIntyre River Opal', in the Print Room of
the National Gallery of Victoria.

172 Sydney critics were generally more sympathetic to Roberts' *Bailed Up*,
but were also puzzled by his restrained treatment of the subject, cf.
*Daily Telegraph* (27 September 1895). For the bushrangers' chivalrous
attitude towards women, see references cited in note 164. For
Thunderbolt's own chivalry and courtesy to women, see R.A. Walker,

173 Cf. Roberts' comments in *Bookfellow* (29 April 1899): 'Painting fixes
one thing for you - one scene, one mood, one idea. And then the
literary critic objects because he cannot see all scenes, all moods,
all ideas'. This statement would appear to indicate Roberts' own
attitude towards his bushranging subjects, compared with the 'literary'
expectations of contemporary critics.
Melbourne's Centennial International Exhibition opened with great pomp and pageantry on 1 August 1888. Within just one week of its opening over 80,000 Melbourne citizens had already filed past the exhibits at the local Exhibition Building.¹

A writer in The Australasian (4 August 1888) felt impelled to speculate upon the reasons for the Exhibition's outstanding popularity.

In the first place [he declared] they were resolved, even at some inconvenience, to honour a public occasion which not only sums up the past, but also prognosticates the future of Australian achievement.

The material progress of the Australian nation formed the leitmotif of the writer's address:

Tall buildings, massive shops, and professional residences occupy the places of what was once a remote settlement by an unknown translucent river ... The unknown wilderness has been made to produce coal and gold, wool and wine ... Out of the barren earth there has come wealth, out of the handful of settlers a great people.

Given the 'indubitable and unprecedented' material advancement of the nation,

It remains now [the writer pontificated] for the new generation, who start with all the advantages that the Exhibition represents, to maintain and to extend the achievements of the country.

The abundant material achievement was thus seen as the major legacy left for the present generation by the original pioneers. 'The work of the pioneers throughout Australia may now be said to be completed, and summed up, and symbolized in the Centennial Celebrations.'

Indeed, the first 'pioneers' of the Port Phillip District were 'honoured and revered' at the subsequent banquets and receptions which
accompounded the ostentatious self-aggrandisement of the Centennial Exhibition. William Westgarth, for example, who had been the first president of the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce in the 1850s, returned to Australia from England after an absence of thirty-one years in order to be present at the Centennial celebrations. His contribution to the early development of the colony was duly acknowledged by a large dinner held in his honour by the current Chamber of Commerce on 31 July 1888. Speakers at the dinner lavished fulsome praise on their guest, for

... they knew how much was due to the early pioneers of the colony [and] we must not forget that those who made this country were the adventurous spirits who came from the fatherland to settle it. These men ought to have a lasting place in our memories.²

Outside the public forum, adulation of the pioneer figure also flourished in celebratory odes and literary pieces written to commemorate the occasion of the Centennial Year.³ H.T. Burgess, writing in the Year Book of Australia in 1888, expressed the popular conception of the pioneer as the purveyor of the benefits and progress of civilization to an 'untrodden wilderness':

Refinements and culture, progress and prosperity, are visible everywhere ... Far away in the interior along every railway and every road, hamlets, villages, towns and busy cities may be found where less than forty years ago the face of the white man had never been seen.⁴

An optimistic faith in the march of material progress is demonstrated in the juxtaposition of civilization and wilderness, a common literary image employed by writers and poets in the seventies and eighties.⁵ The illustrated atlases, such as the Picturesque Atlas of Australasia and Victoria and Its Metropolis published in 1888, included separate chapters on Fawkner, 'The Exploration of Victoria' and 'The Pioneers of 1836'. The repetition of the story of Melbourne's origins in contemporary histories, literature and popular publications encouraged
the creation of a 'foundation myth'. In *Victoria and Its Metropolis*, the writer stressed the pioneer's struggle with the hostility of nature and played down the equally telling economic and social realities of the time. The literary effusions inspired by the events of 1888 served to deepen an already broad reverence felt for the figure of the pioneer within contemporary society.

The events of 1888 have faded from today's consciousness. But the art of Frederick McCubbin, by identifying an image of pioneering life which was enthusiastically celebrated at the Centenary, serves to fulfil its aim of providing the pioneers with 'a lasting place in our memories'. Indeed, McCubbin's paintings on the pioneer theme possibly reflect most clearly certain major assumptions which informed the development of the pioneer mythology. We gain a more profound insight into how and why these assumptions are reflected in his art by placing McCubbin's paintings of the pioneer within their original social context, and by realising the close relationship which his paintings bear to contemporary imagery within the popular media of illustration and photography.

In the 1870s and 1880s, the major dissemination of visual images of the pioneer took place in illustrated newspapers, atlases, magazines and photography, far outnumbering those examples to be found in painting. Here we cannot make too arbitrary a division between the quality and values of 'high' and 'low' art of the period. Illustrative work, for example, engaged the talents of some of the most gifted and able painters of the day, including McCubbin himself. Nevertheless, illustrations in the popular media were necessarily intended to appeal to a wider public, rather than to a cultivated 'fine art' audience. In this basic but significant respect, pictorial renditions of the pioneer in illustrated newspapers and illustrated atlases both catered for and
most clearly reflect contemporary societal attitudes towards the pioneer figure. While the style and content of McCubbin's pioneer paintings were indebted to the influence of European realist artists, the recurrence of their subject matter in local popular imagery made them (and still makes them) readily accessible to a more general audience.

For Frederick McCubbin, Victoria's Jubilee Year of 1884 must have stimulated interest in the figure of the pioneer, and raised questions as to the pioneer's place and role in colonial history. On the evening of 1 November 1884, between 2500 and 3000 people had assembled in Melbourne's Exhibition Building to witness the opening of the Jubilee Exhibition. 'After an introductory performance by a strong brass band', the Argus writer recorded (The Argus, 3 November 1884), 'Mr Arthur Coppin was called on to read a jubilee oration written expressly for the occasion by Mr James Smith'. The pomp of the occasion was just one indication of the pride felt for the colony's remarkable material achievement. Mr R.W. Shadforth, president of the Old Colonists' Association, was in the chair and the theme of his opening address was 'the marvellous progress of the colony during the first half century of its history, and the cause that the present inhabitants had for thankfulness'. Shadforth's speech was followed by a reply from Mr O.E. Wilson, president of the radical Australian Natives' Association. He was present, he said (The Age, 3 November 1884) because

... it was thought fitting that the society of the youngest men in the country should be represented in conjunction with the men who were fast passing away. They were leaving a heritage of which the younger men had every reason to feel proud.

From this symbolic coming together of the representatives of the old and new in colonial society, may be discerned a basic element underlying contemporary response to the figure of the pioneer.
Contemporary response involved a general nostalgia for the past, a desire to understand, record or celebrate a significant but passing phenomenon. The sense of nostalgia was not however always put to work towards the same end. For the image of the pioneer was open to varying interpretations, according to the particular viewpoint or bias of individual politicians, groups, poets, writers and artists. Nor did the image of the pioneer remain unaffected by changes in social and economic circumstances in the late nineteenth century.  

The opinion expressed by the president of the Old Colonists' Association reflects a popular attitude towards the pioneers in the eighties. Blessed with their present material well-being, contemporaries acknowledged their debt to the early pioneers who toiled, not simply for immediate personal or familial gain, but unselfishly so that future generations might inherit the land. The example of the early pioneers could quickly become for the conservative mind an argument in favour of the maintenance of the status quo. A reverence for the past and for the pioneers was not, however, incompatible with the more progressive, nationalistic outlook fostered by the A.N.A. The pioneers could be seen as laying the foundations of the new society and pointing the way to future action.

Contemporary response to the pioneer image during Victoria's Jubilee Year extended beyond the public forum and the celebratory literary ode; it permeated more popular levels of culture. *Once a Month*, a local journal, for example, began a series of articles in 1884 entitled 'Adventures of a Pioneer' which described the tribulations of a squatter in the sixties. When the writer saw fit to end his first-hand account in the July issue of the following year, he concluded:

I have thus given my experience as a pioneer ... It is a fearfully unequal contest for any man to engage in. The warfare with hostile natural laws is incessant.
Here one can detect the emerging myth to be built around the pioneer. The squatter not only assumes for himself the title of 'pioneer' but, significantly, he identifies the main obstacle to success as the harshness of nature. The myth-making process sets man (not a class of rural settler, as the squatter was) against the elements of nature and avoids mentioning other determinants of the 'pioneer's fate': legal and economic ones like the land acts, the availability of capital and the fluctuation of prices.  

While the elevation of the figure of the pioneer to the level of cultural hero took place amidst the self-congratulatory fervour of the Victorian Jubilee and the Centenary celebrations, Graeme Davison has recently pointed out that 'urban progress multiplied inner doubts and with them reflexive yearnings for the supernal charms of the unspoiled bush'. As the city of Melbourne progressed materially and became increasingly sophisticated and complex, so too did writers tend to romanticize the unspoilt wilderness and glorify the deeds of the city's founders. The parallel exists with the painters of the Heidelberg School who, in the late eighties, were essentially city dwellers. Frederick McCubbin, who appears never to have strayed further inland than Mount Macedon, painted his first pictures of pioneering life while firmly ensconced in an urban environment.

The nostalgic reflections on the pioneer figure, evident in both literature and the visual arts in the eighties, were the culmination of a larger historical evolution. A writer in The Australasian Sketcher remarked as early as 1873 that 'the first generation of settlers is passing away, leaving but a meagre history of their personal doings and feelings to those who succeed them'. In 1869 the Old Colonists' Association of Victoria was formed to honour the 'enterprise and energy' of the colony's founders. It was 'to consist of persons
resident in the colony 20 years and upwards'. During the following year Thomas Chuck, a Melbourne photographer, conceived his scheme for a composite portrait mosaic of 'The Explorers and Early Colonists of Victoria', ostensibly to immortalize 'all the old colonists of standing and position from the first year of settlement, 1835, to the end of 1842'. Here the term 'pioneers' had a highly specific application - those particular individuals who were the colony's earliest residents.

Encouraged by the influence of art and literature, an alternative meaning of 'pioneers' entered common usage by the eighties and nineties: those who first settled and worked the land. The anonymity of the group facilitated their apotheosis by writers and artists. McCubbin's paintings of pioneers, for instance, portray and pay tribute to an essentially anonymous group of rural settlers.

While McCubbin's art has today become identified with a quintessentially Australian image of pioneering life, his paintings of the pioneer were, of course, only one contemporary artistic response to the theme. In the 1888 Victorian Artists' Society Autumn Exhibition, for instance, Arthur Streeton exhibited his Settlers' Camp, which was described by a critic as 'a poetical interpretation of a prosaic passage in the daily life of one of the pioneers of agricultural settlement'. Streeton's painting showed the settlers' tent set in the midst of thick bushland, as one of the settlers tends a campfire in the foreground. Compared with the proliferation of picturesque views of settlers' huts painted by artists like Henricus van den Houten and J.H. Carse in the seventies and early eighties, Streeton's picture bears a closer relationship to the close-up viewpoint and quotidian reality of contemporary photographs of settlers' camps by Nicholas Caire. In 1890 Streeton and Charles Conder painted complementary views of a selector seen outside his abode, namely Streeton's The Selector's Hut (Whelan on the Log) and Conder's Under a Southern Sun, both now in the Australian
National Gallery, Canberra. Within their high-keyed tonality, these paintings are more essays in the Australian light and atmosphere, rather than revealing any deeper involvement in the subject itself. Conder, with characteristic wit and irreverence, not only includes a delightful little girl in the foreground but also shows the washing hanging on the line. What so obviously separates McCubbin's treatment of the pioneer theme from that of his two friends is his sincere engagement with the significance of the subject, an underlying seriousness which is more closely paralleled by Tom Roberts' portrayal of the meaning and spirit of rural labour in his famous paintings of shearing scenes.

McCubbin's artistic awareness of the pioneer image must have been stimulated by its frequent occurrence in the eighties in paintings by lesser-known artists and in the field of black and white illustration. In the 1883 exhibition of the Victorian Academy of the Arts, McCubbin's mentor, Julian Rossi Ashton, exhibited his An Australian Homestead. Sydney exhibitions in that year also witnessed works on the pioneer theme: C.H. Hunt, a prominent illustrator, exhibited his painting, The Fate of a Pioneer, at the Art Society of New South Wales Exhibition, while an unknown, B. Chambers, showed a narrative painting, Leaden Persuasion, an Incident of Pioneer Life in the North. Once again, the prolific J.A. Turner presented a trivial forerunner to a theme to be attempted by more capable artists in his time. In 1889 Turner painted a work, now known as Australian Pioneers, which depicts settlers and their wagon making their way through the bush, the golden glow on the horizon suggestive of the promise of the future.

The illustrated atlases, too, presented visual examples of the most appealing, picturesque or dramatic episodes of the pioneer's life. An even more accessible local pictorial tradition lay in the popular black and white newspaper illustrations of settlers' homesteads,
selectors clearing their land, and the vicissitudes of bush life. The Illustrated Australian News of 25 November 1885, for instance, published a tableau of illustrations of 'Incidents in the Life of a Selector' which is prophetic of some of McCubbin's major paintings on the pioneer theme, especially the later Pioneer. Included are insets of 'The Virgin Forest', sawyers clearing the land and cutting up huge logs, and the resultant 'A Home in the Forest'. The detailed explanatory texts which accompanied such illustrations suggest that they were intended for an interested but largely uninformed urban audience.

Contemporary sculptors also shared McCubbin's enthusiasm for the pioneer figure. In 1891, the year after McCubbin painted The Bush Burial, a competition was held by the Melbourne Gallery Trustees to obtain a companion piece to Boehm's statue of St George and the Dragon, which stands outside the State Library in Swanston Street. Charles Douglas Richardson entered (unsuccessfully) a bronze sketch model of The Pioneer, shown reigning in his horse 'while his eyes search the horizon for the fertile country he desires'. Richardson's commemorative group made explicit the relationship the pioneer has to a vision of plenty in the Australian landscape: two bas reliefs on the pedestal presented alternative images of sheep farming and cattle grazing, the fruits of the pioneer's enterprise and labour.26

Two broad themes may be discerned in McCubbin's paintings of the pioneer: first, the struggles, rewards and vicissitudes of the pioneer's life as he settled the land, and second, the closely related theme of the child lost in the Australian bush. In 1890 McCubbin painted his Bush Burial (Geelong Art Gallery), which portrays a group of settlers sadly mourning over an open grave in an isolated bush setting. An old man reads the burial service, next to him a sorrowful mother bows her head in grief as her child clings tearfully to her skirts, while
opposite, a sturdy bushman listens reverently to the service. 'They stand out', noted a contemporary critic (Table Talk, 14 March 1890), 'as types of character'. A touch of Victorian sentiment is suggested by the presence of a dog in the foreground. McCubbin, however, restrains and understates the pathos of the occasion; the mood evoked by the scene is quiet, still and reflective rather than emotionally charged andanguished. The figures are placed well within the bushland setting, so that the painterly description of the landscape provides a foil for the intensity of human emotions portrayed. The description of the landscape provides a foil for the intensity of human emotions portrayed. The carefully modulated blue-green-grey tones of the bush recall his earlier painting, Lost (1886) in the National Gallery of Victoria. Warmer though still subdued tones of the freshly-turned soil relate to the browns of the child's dress and the old man's coat, and help to integrate the figures with the landscape.

McCubbin's practice in placing academically conceived figures against the dense bush background with just a glimpse of grey-blue sky above, suggests the marked influence of Jules Bastien-Lepage and the French realist tradition. McCubbin would have learned the theories and working methods of Lepage from Tom Roberts and Arthur Loureiro. Described by a Melbourne critic as 'an ardent admirer and worthy follower of Bastien-Lepage', Loureiro had in fact been a fellow student with Lepage in Paris. McCubbin, a prodigious reader, also gleaned considerable knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of the realist movement from contemporary magazines and journals. We know, for example, that shortly after he exhibited Bush Burial, McCubbin read an article in Harper's Magazine on 'the contemporary French painters of the new school'. The article outlined the main tenets of the new school: 'the ideas of values' and 'the integrity of the subject' wherein the artist painted what he saw as he saw it - 'truth alone is
sufficient'. The Bush Burial's unaffected realism reveals a shared attitude towards the significance of the subject in art.

In painting The Bush Burial, McCubbin adhered so sincerely to Lepage's *plein-airiste* method that he dug a small grave in his backyard in Blackburn and posed his wife in the role of the grief-stricken mother. McCubbin's action also provides an ironic comment on the nostalgic yearnings of an urban dweller who had chosen a bush subject, necessarily removed from his own daily experience.

McCubbin's Bush Burial may be seen as the culmination of his developing awareness in the eighties of the popular image of the pioneer. In 1886 McCubbin had drawn an illustration for The Illustrated Australian News of a string of loaded woodcarts slowly wending their way towards the city. The accompanying text not only suggests the townsmen's respect for his rural counterpart, but also sounds a note of regret for the passing of an age:

Since the railway has opened up the forests of Gippsland and has enabled them to pour in their thousands of tons per day, the occupation of the woodcarters is in a measure gone.

Gippsland was still in the process of being settled in the eighties, and yet was within comparatively easy reach of Melbourne. It provided the city dweller with the example par excellence of the pioneering spirit in action. An American artist temporarily resident in Australia, Birge Harrison, made good financial use of the situation when he made 'original sketches' of the Gippsland forest scenery in 1891. His sketches were purchased by Scribner's Magazine, while a city audience in Melbourne was treated to a subsequent exhibition of his paintings with titles like The Home of the Gippsland Pioneer and The Selector's Family.

McCubbin's reverence for the pioneer figure was partly shaped by its popular presentations for an enthusiastic urban audience. Shortly
after his *Bush Burial* was exhibited, McCubbin collected a reproduction of Caire's well-known photograph of the *Selector's Hut, Gippsland* from, ironically, the American publication, *Harper's Magazine*. Caire's photograph had formed the source for numerous depictions of 'the pioneer at home' in the illustrated atlases.\(^{26}\) The text which accompanied Caire's illustration repeated the usual clichéd views of Australian life - it drew attention to the 'weird melancholy' of the bush, spoke of the 'greater fascination' of the age of the pioneer, the selector, the squatter and, not insignificantly in McCubbin's case, mentioned the 'north wind' that brings heat.\(^{27}\)

The *Bush Burial* had been preceded in McCubbin's *oeuvre* by an earlier image of pioneering life, his painting of *Lost* in 1886. One can, however, easily miss the close interrelationship of various themes in his art by seeing his pioneer images in isolation from other related works. At the 1888 V.A.S. Exhibition, McCubbin exhibited an important subject picture, *The Midday Rest* (now in the Lionel Lindsay Gallery, Toowoomba).\(^{28}\) It shows a sturdy peasant figure reposing on a hillside in the bright sunlight. He awaits the arrival of his little girl, visible in the distance, with his dinner. The controlled and tonal brushwork in the painting of the figure suggests the realism of Lepage, perhaps transmitted to McCubbin through Roberts' example. Roberts exhibited a 'realist' work, *End to a Career - the Old Scrub Cutter*, at the same exhibition. McCubbin and Roberts, however, appear to have responded in these two works to different aspects of the European realist tradition. Against the pessimistic implications of Roberts' subject, McCubbin reacts to an optimistic idea of *labour rewarded*.\(^{29}\) More especially, he embraced the ideal of warmth, simplicity and sincerity to be found in the domestic situation of the peasant family living close to the soil. *The Midday Rest* follows the realist manner of a painting like George Clausen's *Labourers After Dinner* of 1884,
which depicts a group of peasant workers around a campfire, taking respite from their toil. Transferred to a specifically Australian context, these elements of domestic warmth and labour rewarded become a *leitmotif* in McCubbin's images of the pioneer.

Contemporary newspaper illustrations form a significant precursor to McCubbin's paintings, in introducing a wider awareness of a European realist tradition to the local pioneer story. In 1882 George and Julian Ashton combined their talents in an illustration of 'The Selector at Work' for *The Australasian Sketcher*. A stalwart selector is shown taking a break from his work of clearing the land, while in the background his two children advance towards him. The accompanying text picks up various strands of the burgeoning pioneer mythology. The land, we are told, is 'reclaimed from the wilderness and reduced to the uses of man'. The selector's labour is rewarded, sweetened as it is 'by the consciousness that he is making a home for himself and for those who belong to him and will in time take his place'. Through the individual effort of his toil, the selector finds a democratic means of achieving 'ultimate independence' and freedom. These sentiments are to be echoed in McCubbin's later paintings, especially in *The Pioneer* of 1905-05.

*The Bush Burial*, with its theme of death set in an Australian landscape, follows a tradition long established in colonial art and literature. A clumsy example exists in the irrepressible S.T. Gill's *Bush Funeral*, published in his *Australian Sketchbook* in 1864. William Strutt's sketches for *The Burial of Burke* also appeared frequently in popular reproductions in the eighties. McCubbin's painting bears certain compositional similarities to Strutt's drawing in the grouping of the figures over the open grave and in the implements and freshly dug soil and rocks seen in the foreground. If McCubbin derived inspiration from Strutt's work, he nevertheless chose to depict anonymous domestic figures rather than public heroes.
McCubbin's painting may be seen as a local adaptation of the graveside or funeral theme which occurs frequently in Victorian art. In its emphasis on the simple dignity and piety of the event, *Bush Burial* finds a parallel overseas in the portrayal of comparable ritual occasions within the Cornish fishing community by members of the Newlyn School.  

McCubbin was not alone among his contemporaries in presenting an Australian variation on a traditional Victorian subject. In the Spring Exhibition of the 1890 Art Society of New South Wales, Percy F.S. Spence showed a large oil painting of *The Comrade's Grave*, depicting 'a stalwart stockman' who had dismounted from his horse to contemplate the rough headstone of his friend's grave.  

John Mather, a landscapist, exhibited his painting of *Deadman's Cliff, Kilcunda*, at the local V.A.S. Spring Exhibition in 1888; the scene represented 'the grave of a pioneer upon the top of a high cliff, against which the waves are furiously lashing' (*Table Talk*, 2 November 1888).

The degree to which McCubbin tapped contemporary community feeling for the pioneer figure may be gauged from the overwhelmingly enthusiastic critical reception given to *The Bush Burial*. Sidney Dickinson (admittedly heavily biased in McCubbin's favour) claimed (*The Argus*, 24 April 1890) that

> The picture strikes the first dominant note that has been heard in purely Australian art, and should stimulate others to investigate the life of this continent.

Critics praised *The Bush Burial*'s 'touching and tender' sentiment in the same breath as they applauded its 'thoroughly national' character; the pathos of the scene served to deepen its nationalistic appeal.

One critic went further, to group *The Bush Burial* with John Longstaff's *Breaking the News* and Richardson's *Sick Shepherd* as 'indicating one channel at least in which coming Australian art will find expression'.  

A popular appeal to sentiment thus underlay and united their different
nationalistic subjects. The figure types of Longstaff's *Breaking the News* (1887, Art Gallery of Western Australia) recur in *The Bush Burial* in the bearded old pioneer, the grief-stricken woman and child, and the sturdy onlooker. McCubbin's picture, too, creates a unique relationship between the figures and the landscape setting. The critic of *The Argus* (5 April 1890) commented on 'the serene indifference of the leafy trees in their fullness ... to the pathos of the scene depicted'. Unlike Longstaff's painting, however, *The Bush Burial* cannot be accurately described as a Victorian narrative picture. This is illustrated by the fact that individual critics reconstructed the 'story' to their own satisfaction, and yet failed to agree on who was being buried and the familial relationship between the characters.

Contemporary critics perceptively identified the 'elegiac' mood of *The Bush Burial*; as the Argus writer put it (5 April 1890): 'The picture is a little poem without words'. By giving his picture an alternative title - *The Last of the Pioneers* - McCubbin indicated that he wished to commemorate the fast fading of the original pioneers from contemporary life.\(^{37}\) His pictorial tribute to the pioneers at the same time celebrates the heritage they leave behind them. The presence of three generations of mourners and of the dray which will shortly carry them away from the burial ground, implies a continuity of life and 'better things to come'.\(^{38}\)

In *The Bush Burial* McCubbin manages to hold in subtle balance both realistic observation and the lyrical mood of the scene. His achievement was rarely matched in Australian literature of the time. The grave-side episode in Henry Lawson's story of 1893, 'The Union Buries Its Dead', could perhaps be seen as providing a pessimistic and cynical alternative to the essentially elegiac mood evoked in McCubbin's picture:
I have left out the wattle - because it wasn't there. I have also neglected to mention the heart-broken old mate, with his grizzly head bowed ... I have left out the 'sad Australian sunset', because the sun was not going down at the time. The burial took place exactly at midday.\textsuperscript{39}

II

There is a temptation to identify McCubbin's pioneer paintings with the role of the 'small-holder' in Australian history. Contemporaries rarely did so, although the figure of the selector was popularly known and discussed.\textsuperscript{40} Writing in 1893, Francis Adams commented: 'Everywhere in the Australian towns the good superficial people are calling for the settlement of the interior by a yeoman class'.\textsuperscript{41} Coral Lansbury has recently argued that Australian writers in the nineteenth century derived their vision of the Bush from the Arcadian dreams of English imagists who projected a rural utopia on to a far-off land.\textsuperscript{42} Similarly, one popular view of the selector in the nineteenth century appears to have been fashioned by a cloying sentimentality which bore little relationship to the facts of the situation. The writer in The Australasian Sketcher (15 July 1882), for instance, exalted the 'small proprietor' who 'displays those virtues of industry, thrift, and perseverance which the possession of a landed estate, however small it may be, is found to encourage'.

Such a view of the general well-being of the selector's life in the late nineteenth century is flatly contradicted by much contemporary evidence bearing testimony to the relative failure of the Selection Acts of 1861 and 1862 in Victoria and New South Wales.\textsuperscript{43} In literature one can point to stories by Henry Lawson describing the grinding poverty of the selector's existence. Francis Adams similarly drew attention to 'the selection of Droughtland' where the 'average selector finds it
possible nowadays to gain little more than a mere living by the
exercise of unremitting and monotonous toil'.  Nevertheless, the
selector was popularly acclaimed in contemporary newspapers, illus-
trations, photographs and literature for his pioneering role in settling
the land. The dilemma posed by these customary views of the selector's
status can perhaps be resolved. The selector as 'the wretched small-
holder, eking out a miserable existence' and the selector as 'the pioneer
settling the land' appear to have formed interrelated and yet distinct
traditions in late nineteenth century art and literature.  

McCubbin's *North Wind* (National Gallery of Victoria) was painted in
1891, when the economic recession was beginning to cast its shadow of
gloom over the city of Melbourne. The low tones of the French school
in his *Bush Burial* have given way to a higher-keyed palette in *North
Wind*, a somewhat fainter echo of the brilliant colour of Roberts'
*Breakaway* and Streeton's *Fire's On* of that year. A settler on foot
is shown slowly leading a horse and cart across an arid and windswept
desert landscape. The settler's wife protectively cradles their small
baby as she sits amongst the family's meagre possessions in the cart.
Whether McCubbin intended to present a pessimistic image of the
selector driven from his land is open to interpretation. Alternatively,
the painting may be seen as a tribute to the endurance and stoicism of
the pioneer settlers in the face of natural adversity.

The image of rural hardship McCubbin depicts was certainly a fact
of life among selectors, some of whom were forced off their land by
the disastrous effects of drought and bushfire. 'Driven From His
Selection' was the title given to an illustration which appeared in
*The Australasian Sketcher* (20 February 1875). It foreshadows the
theme and composition of McCubbin's painting by portraying the selector,
his wife and baby huddled together in their horse-drawn cart, which
is piled high with domestic belongings. In the foreground may be seen a bushfire, the all-too-obvious cause of their abandoning their property. The accompanying text stringently criticises the politicians 'who undertook the task of trying to find "homes for the people" in parched and scorching deserts'. Then attention is drawn to the 'fierce hot-wind day' with precipitates the final crippling blow, the bushfire.

Some newspaper drawings purported to illustrate specific events, such as the tableau of drawings entitled 'The Recent Bushfires: Scenes and Incidents' appearing in the Sketcher in 1879 (15 March); inevitably, it contained melodramatic scenes of 'A Coach Drive for Life' and 'The Return of the Burned-out Selector'.

To consider North Wind as a specific rendition of the 'plight of the selector is, however, a far too narrowing interpretation. The painting contributes to the myth-making of the pioneer ethos; its subject has its origins in a long tradition in colonial art and culture, predating the emergence of the selector in Australian history. The hot north winds, peculiar to the Antipodes, were noted by early literary observers in Australia who were introducing their audience 'at home' to the curious facts of existence in a far-off land. For example, writing in 1846, E. Lloyd remarked on the 'hot winds, which invariably come from the north' and 'traverse an arid and burning desert in the interior, before reaching the settlement'. He was followed in 1855 by William Howitt, who also discussed the hot north winds from the interior, 'hot as out of a furnace'.

One catastrophic event in Victoria's history helped raise the idea of the 'fierce north wind' to the level of popular myth. On Black Thursday, 6 February 1851, the colony was the victim of terrifying bushfires which devastated an area of fifty square miles near Mount Macedon. The colonial artist, William Strutt, traversed the scene after the fires had subsided and made on-the-spot sketches. Some of
these were to be used as the basis of his large oil painting, Black Thursday, finally completed in 1864 after his return to England. Black Thursday suggests an apocalyptic vision of death and destruction. Its treatment finds some justification in contemporary written sources:

Many timid persons flying from the fires of Black Thursday, and terrified with the blackness and darkness around, believed that the end of all things was at hand, and that the Great Day of Wrath was come.  

Arranged in the manner of a battle piece by Meissonier or Vernet, Strutt’s Black Thursday is a history painting depicting the values and achievements of civilization overwhelmed and destroyed by the forces of nature. Explicit reference to the theme is made in the lower right-hand corner, where domestic accoutrements are discarded before nature's vengeance.

Black Thursday was well known to McCubbin, since the painting was exhibited on several occasions in Melbourne during the eighties and nineties. The motif in The North Wind of the mother clinging to her child in a cart is anticipated by a similar motif occurring in the right-hand side of Strutt's picture. A new wave of interest in the events of Black Thursday was stimulated by the appearance in the eighties of publications outlining Victoria's history. Invariably these accounts mentioned (as Strutt's own written account did) the 'fierce north wind' which precipitated the catastrophe. One of Strutt's original sketches, given the title 'Riding Through the Blazing Bush', was reproduced as an illustration in Cassell's Picturesque Australasia in 1888. Other illustrations of Black Thursday, such as that by J. Davis in Victoria and Its Metropolis, suggest a familiarity with Strutt's painting. Davis, however, emphasizes a more anecdotal interest in the narrative, including the settler's burning homestead in the background. On the right, though, he shows a wife and baby being rescued from their cart as they flee the fire.
By the seventies and eighties, then, a popular awareness of the
destructive power of the hot north winds had become yet another facet
of that reflexive empathy felt by the urban dweller for those suffering
the hardships of rural life. Indeed, the theme found an urban counter-
point in pictures and illustrations of sophisticated, elegant city
women, languidly fanning their way through the discomfiture of a 'hot-
wind day'. Artists like J.W. Curtis and F. Woodhouse painted
numerous landscapes of bushfires during the period, while the prolific
200 J.A. Turner glibly produced anecdotal narrative paintings like Burnt
Out, inevitably concentrating the story interest on the battle
(successful or otherwise) to save the settler's homestead.55

McCubbin may have found more immediate inspiration for his North
Wind in major subject paintings reflecting memories of the severe
drought of 1888. David Davies' Under the Burden and Heat of the Day
of 1890 (Ballarat Art Gallery) presents a comparable image of human
suffering within a drought-stricken, outback landscape. In the same
year J. Llewellyn Jones exhibited a work, presumably a landscape,
entitled Evening After North Wind. The theme of the 'hot wind' was
also given specific expression in allegorical female figure subjects
by Conder and Richardson. In 1889 Conder exhibited his Hot Wind,
which showed a half nude female figure blowing fire from a brazier
across a desert landscape. Later in the same year, Richardson followed
with a wax sculpture of The North Wind at the 9 x 5 Exhibition.57

McCubbin's North Wind, then, ultimately stems from a diverse Aus-
tralian tradition; the painting evidences his familiarity with pictorial
sources and ideas which enjoyed wide circulation within contemporary
culture. While The North Wind may well suggest the plight of selectors
in the Droughtland, McCubbin avoids specific reference to the status of
his settlers. Instead, he creates a general image of the pioneer
settler's struggle with the harshness of nature. The spirit of the
painting was echoed in the rhetoric of Henry Lawson's poem, 'How the Land Was Won' (1899):

They toiled and they fought through the shame of it -
Through wilderness, flood and drought;

Lawson's poem provides no differentiation of the settlers; what is important is that 'they' won the land 'for us'.McCubbin's North wind provides few, if any, 'narrative clues' as to the immediate outcome of the pioneers' situation but, in paying tribute to their courage in the face of natural adversity, it implies an ultimate victory.

The bushfire theme (to which the theme of the 'north wind' can be closely related) was swiftly incorporated in the pioneer mythology in art and literature. In 1898 the imagination of artists was again stirred by further disastrous bushfires in Gippsland. A fresh spate of works reflected the dramatic possibilities of the event: J.A. Turner found the occasion irresistible and painted a large picture, The Home- stead Saved: an Incident in the Great Gippsland Fire of 1898 (Private collection, Melbourne); John Longstaff responded with a sure gallery winner, Gippsland, Sunday Night, February 20th 1898 (National Gallery of Victoria); and Theo Brooke-Hansen created a melodramatic subject composition, Burnt Out, an Incident in the Gippsland Bush Fires in 1898 (1901). Regardless of their dubious quality, these paintings serve to remind us that the frequent treatment of the bushfire theme in art was born out of a living experience of the land.

In 1896 McCubbin returned to the theme of rural settlement with his large subject picture, On the Wallaby Track (Art Gallery of New South Wales). It was painted at Brighton, the seaside suburb to which he and his young family had moved the previous year. The 'outback' setting in the picture probably represents a view of the ample grounds surrounding their home, Brighton being still a semi-rural area at the time.
On the Wallaby Track reflects the continued influence of Lepage, with its large-scale figures 'posed' within the landscape; but there is now a new painterly attention given to integrating figure and landscape, so that the picture 'carries' at a distance. This painterly quality is especially noticeable in the attempts to soften contours and in the flecks of colour applied with the palette knife over the main figures, to locate them more easily within the landscape. McCubbin employs the palette knife to create effects of broken colour, to be characteristic of his later manner. Through flecks of strong blues, greens and pinks over local colour areas, McCubbin renders the dappled light filtering through the bush. His new sense of liberated colour may owe something to the quasi-impressionist colour theories expounded by E.P. Fox and Tudor St George Tucker on their return to Australia from Europe. On the other hand, McCubbin's favourite compositional method of massing trees and undergrowth to provide a view through the centre to a patch of more brightly lit landscape beyond was a traditional one. It could be found, for instance, in the compositions of Corot, whom McCubbin admired. Equally important for McCubbin, the device was frequently employed by contemporary 'academic' British painters, like the - by then - conservative Millais.

The term 'on the wallaby' was usually reserved to describe itinerant workers and swagmen who survived by doing piece work, receiving handouts from homesteads or 'living off the land' as they wandered from place to place in the bush. Their usual abode at night was a camp under the stars. While in contemporary usage 'on the wallaby' may have suggested a certain poverty and hardship associated with the itinerant worker's existence, the term also carried with it more optimistic connotations of a democratic lifestyle 'tied to no man' and of a land of plenty which would provide. McCubbin would have been well acquainted with numerous paintings and illustrations which bore the
title *On the Wallaby*, and yet he chose to depart from this local pictorial tradition by devoting the major part of his painting to the figure of a mother and child.65

His treatment of the theme, however, could have been influenced by realist subjects by English artists, who frequently portrayed families from the rural poor wandering the countryside in search of work. In 1887 the Newlyn artist, Stanhope Forbes, had painted *Their Ever-shifting Home*, which was shown in Melbourne in 1890 and subsequently acquired by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. It depicts a procession of vagrants along a country lane, headed by the pathetic figure of a mother and young child. Even closer to the spirit of McCubbin's painting is Herbert von Herkomer's famous picture, *Hard Times* (1885), which McCubbin is likely to have known via a reproduction. Herkomer shows a poverty-stricken family group resting by a country road, the mother sitting despondently on the ground as she nurses an infant.66

While their subject matter may ostensibly be the same, the mood evoked in *On the Wallaby Track* seems quite distinct from the pessimistic air of Forbes' and Herkomer's paintings. One can perhaps detect in McCubbin's picture a bitter-sweet expression of resignation on the mother's face, but there is a more general atmosphere of domestic warmth as the two figures perform their assigned, if not stereotyped, roles of minding the child and boiling the billy. McCubbin does not disguise the down-to-earth simplicity of their life, nor the meagreness of the worldly possessions, for these appear as positive, 'homely' virtues rather than the first signs of abject poverty. The baby on the mother's lap suggests the new life to come, while the glowing pinks and yellow of the plains in the background offer promise for the future.

The noticeable optimism of *On the Wallaby Track* may at first appear unrelated to the current economic depression, which was creating
misery in city and country alike. However, as Graeme Davison has so succinctly put it: 'The rural dream was the reflex of the urban nightmare'. As the depression deepened its hold over the city, 'Melbournians began to yearn for the bucolic innocence of rural life, the secure but independent station of "petty yeoman"'.\textsuperscript{67} Struggling to support his young family as he plied his teaching work in the city, McCubbin may have shared these feelings.

The worst years of the depression (1892-1895) witnessed an actual drift of people away from the city.\textsuperscript{68} One manifestation of urban disillusionment was the village settlement movement of the early nineties. Given theoretical justification in utopian novels by David Andrade and the Reverend Horace Tucker, the movement attempted to establish families in cooperative rural communities, as a panacea to the current economic ills and unemployment in the city. The city-dweller was to be removed 'out of the town and into the country, where he could begin from the beginning'.\textsuperscript{69} Once restored to the land, he would find a new inner peace, at one with both nature and his fellow man.

On the Wallaby Track conveys a similar spirit of cooperation and well-being. Living close to the soil, the man and his wife and child have pitched their tent as they live their life together in the heart of the bush. This sense of establishing new life in the Australian bush relates the picture's subject to the contemporary pioneer ethos.\textsuperscript{70}

McCubbin particularly emphasizes the significant role played by the mother. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women held an esteemed place in the pioneer mythology, their praises being sung in literature and histories. A glowing sheen was placed over the degrading reality of many women's lives in rural areas during the period. Francis Adams described the life of selectors' wives as 'pitiable'. Henry Lawson wrote of the 'land where gaunt and haggard
women live alone and work like men' while their husbands were away droving. On another level, however, Lawson contributes to the pioneer myth. He consistently maintains that the bush is 'no place for a woman' in stories like 'The Drover's Wife', but simultaneously pays tribute to the bush woman's stoicism and courage. Barbara Baynton's short story, 'Squeaker's Mate', graphically dramatized the fact that women were frequently brutally exploited by their husbands. Some, no doubt, became brutal and insensitive in return. Contemporary photographs also attest to the poverty and appalling physical conditions under which many women lived in outback areas.

McCubbin, however, chose to present an idealized image of Australian womanhood. In On the Wallaby Track, his wife probably posed for the picture of the mother, but the sturdy physical type in the painting also bears affinities to the idealized peasant women of Lepage and Clausen. McCubbin portrays woman in her traditional, domestic role. No doubt his conception was in some measure influenced by his personal experience as father of a young family. In the wider sense, the figure reflects a prevalent attitude towards women in colonial society: she assumes the role of bearer of civilization's moral values and virtues to the Australian wilderness. This concept, implied rather than forcibly suggested in McCubbin's painting, was later to find more unrestrained literary expression in George Essex Evans' gushing eulogy to the women pioneers, 'The Women of the West'.

III

The title of McCubbin's On the Wallaby Track makes no specific reference to the pioneers, and yet it has been argued above that the picture embodies the spirit of the contemporary pioneer ethos. That an itinerant worker, his wife and family, should be seen in the guise of the pioneer role does not invalidate this argument; rather, it
demonstrates the successful mythologization of the pioneer figure during the period. The application of the term 'pioneer' became increasingly more general and arbitrary as the nineteenth century wore on. By the late nineties and early twentieth century, the meaning of 'pioneer' now included people who were at present engaged on the land and, more especially, those on new farms in remote areas.\textsuperscript{73}

The specific status of the pioneer was less important than what he or she stood for. \textit{On the Wallaby Track} provides just one example of how artists and writers felt a generalized nostalgia for the past, which was idealized in order to contrast and sometimes condemn a bleak present.\textsuperscript{74} Banjo Paterson's poem, 'Song of the Future', published in 1902, was intended as a hymn of praise to the early pioneer settlers, and yet the ordinary bushman appears to achieve the stature of a pioneer:

\begin{quote}
We yet may find achievements grand
Within the bushman's quiet life.
\end{quote}

In Paterson's eyes, the land itself becomes a vision of plenty - 'sunlit plains as wide as seas' - awaiting the liberating touch of the pioneer's hand.\textsuperscript{75} This interpretation of the pioneer's relationship with the land had been prefigured in Richardson's earlier sculpture, \textit{The Pioneer} (with its relief panels of the provident landscape), and in George Lambert's large painting, \textit{Across the Black Soil Plains} of 1899 (Art Gallery of New South Wales).

Lambert depicts an heroic image of hefty draught-horses pulling a laden wool wagon through the rich, fecund soil of the plains, their forms dramatically silhouetted against the blue sky above. In the foreground landscape the sombre tones reflect the abiding interest in Sydney and Melbourne in the dark tonal painting of Velasquez, sometimes transmitted through the modern example of the English painter, Sargent. \textsuperscript{76} As a youth Lambert had considerable experience of the Australian bush. His choice of subject stemmed from an earlier memory in 1890, when he saw wool teams crossing the Snakes' Plain between Warren and
Nevertire, some two hundred miles north-west of Sydney. This memory was 'refurbished' by a further trip to Warren in 1899. Lambert's painting, however, finds a parallel theme, title and compositional arrangement in a contemporary photograph by Charles Kerry, *Wool Teams Crossing Plains on the Warrego* (Private collection, Sydney). Even closer to the epic drama acted out in *Across the Black Soil Plains* is a painting by the English artist, W. Frank Calderon, now entitled *Crest of the Hill* (Queensland National Art Gallery). Calderon's painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1898, and Lambert may have known it via a reproduction. *Crest of the Hill* shows powerful draught-horses hauling timber; its horizontal format and device of silhouetting forms against the sky noticeably anticipate features of Lambert's work.

A measure of the popularity of *Across the Black Soil Plains* with the public was its immediate acquisition by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. By an odd quirk of fate, Lambert came to write his own press critique for the picture:

'It is strong, 'masculine' if you like; the horses are well drawn and painted, the movement and action is 'all there' ... the subject is popular.

Lambert had, perhaps opportunistically, manipulated the image for a popular 'epic-heroic' effect. He later admitted as much: 'On the whole, although I consider it an altogether immature effort, I like the action and the drawing of the grey leader'. Lambert's treatment captures the romanticism of the pioneer ethos, an attitude perhaps at odds with his own practical experience of the bush. It was Lambert's rhetoric and exaggeration of fact which incurred the criticism of Joseph Furphy. In his own writing on the Australian bush, Furphy placed value on realism and a mood of ironic detachment:

'It is pathetic to see in Lambert's fine picture 'Across the Black-soil Plains', that his wool wagon is a
magnified lorry, that he has no levers on the ropes, and (if the wool is greasy) about nine tons on thirteen horses, with the tracks axle-deep.\textsuperscript{60}

Lambert's work is an important precursor to McCubbin's later painting \textit{Hauling Timber, Macedon Heights} of 1911 (Private collection, Victoria), which is redolent with heroic pioneer associations. McCubbin may have been equally inspired by Tom Roberts' earlier treatment of the theme, for he described a Roberts watercolour of a similar scene as a 'splendid subject'. \textit{Hauling Timber}, with its rich impasto, scumbling and palette knife work, belongs however to McCubbin's late manner, and the picture may also claim to be an essay in light and atmospheric effects.\textsuperscript{61}

The events leading up to Australia's Federation in 1901 brought with them a renewed burst of patriotic feeling, aided not a little by the fact that the country found itself involved in the Boer War, which began in 1899. A literary effusion celebrated the birth of the new Commonwealth, but the contribution of artists seems negligible.\textsuperscript{62} Only two major paintings, Roberts' 'big picture' of the opening of Federal Parliament and McCubbin's \textit{Prince's Bridge}, commemorate the actual event of Federation. The situation was hardly helped by the fact that some of Australia's most talented artists chose to live in exile overseas.

In the visual arts, the response to Federation appears more diffused than in literature. One can perhaps detect in certain artistic works an 'end-of-century reflectiveness', but the subject matter rarely lends itself to clear distinctions between local and national achievement. In the art of the early twentieth century, the continued portrayal of the pioneer theme suggests a latent awareness amongst artists that a new nation had emerged, a nation built by the endeavours of its early pioneers. Nevertheless, as J.B. Hirst has pointed out, 'The pioneer legend has served local, Australian and imperial patriotisms.'\textsuperscript{63}
Charles Douglas Richardson's sculptural group, *The Discovery of Gold* (Bendigo), can be used to demonstrate a curious blending of different strands of patriotism early in this century. Completed in 1906, the group was commissioned as a memorial to the Bendigo Gold Jubilee.

The dominant figure in the group represents Victoria. She is seen standing with her left hand resting on a rock of quartz, in which attitude she is supposed to indicate her right to the mineral resources of the State. Out of the richness of her store she bestows a nugget on the gold seeker below, who is seen rinsing the alluvial sands of Time. 84

The concept behind the statue is historically appropriate, not only to the city of Bendigo but also to the state of Victoria. There is also an element of wider nationalism as the gold-seekers, portrayed in the role of historical founders of the colony, assume some of the associative meaning usually reserved for 'the pioneers of the land'.

McCubbin's *The Pioneer* (National Gallery of Victoria) is fittingly interpreted as the culmination of his paintings on the pioneer theme. The critic of *The Argus* (22 April 1904) said:

*It is a triptych ... telling its own legend of the useful toil, the homely joys and destiny obscure of the pioneer, who does not live as the rude cross in the third panel indicates, to see the growth or share in the prosperity of the fine city seen in the background panel.*

The front panel shows the young pioneer and his wife, who have pushed into the depths of the bush. McCubbin emphasizes the hardships endured by the women pioneers in the expression of the wife, who stares disconsolately into space.

*She is thinking of the home she has left far away, of the many human ties broken, that part of this gigantic forest may be cleared for human habitation* (*The Age*, 16 August 1905).
In the next panel,  
... the despondency of the twilight hour has gone. The new life and the child have paramount claim on her energies.

The land has been cleared and the homestead has been built.

The last panel is the triumphal stanza of the whole colour poem... In the distance the spires and bridges of a glorious young city and the stooks of a rich harvest field tell of the joys that another generation is reaping from the toil of the once lusty pioneers now gone to dust.

_The Pioneer_ recalls two of McCubbin's earlier works: the left panel refers back to _On the Wallaby Track_ and the right panel to _The Bush Burial_. Some retrospective justification is thus provided for including _On the Wallaby Track_ in his group of 'pioneer paintings'. More importantly, _The Pioneer_ brings to fruition and celebrates the quiet mood of optimism discernible in these earlier works. Its organization repeats a formula for depicting the settler's 'progress' used previously in newspaper illustrations, and also echoes a popular interpretation of Australian history to be found in the illustrated atlases of the eighties.

McCubbin began work on _The Pioneer_ at Macedon in 1903, but he was not to finish the painting to his own satisfaction until some two years later. During this time, he continually questioned his most important artistic influences, his working method and the significance of the 'subject in art'. For the last time in a large-scale painting, he was to follow the realist methods advocated by Lepage, in order to paint the entire canvas in the open air.

His conception of the picture's subject and composition, however, appears to have been influenced by contemporary photography. For the central image of the pioneer and his wife clearing the land, McCubbin
213 was possibly influenced by a photograph entitled *The Pioneer's Wife* by a Sydney photographer, George Bell. The pose of the mother is almost the same, the settler and the fallen tree are similarly placed, while just a glimpse of sky is seen through the dense bush. The noticeable similarities between the two images certainly reveal a shared response to the pioneer figure occurring in different contemporary media.⁸⁸

When McCubbin exhibited his painting for a second time in 1905, critics remarked upon a recent alteration in the right-hand panel. The view of Melbourne has been overpainted 'in the manner of Turner', whose works he had studied in a special issue of *The Studio* magazine of 1903-04. His reworking of a section of *The Pioneer* under the influence of Turner heralds the beginning of McCubbin's late style.⁹⁹

*The Pioneer* was immensely popular with both the public and the critics. Described in an *Age* editorial (27 March 1906) as 'by far the most significant picture yet produced in the history of Australian art', a strong campaign was waged in the press to have the picture purchased by Melbourne's Gallery. The public enthusiasm with which *The Pioneer* was received suggests how deeply ingrained the pioneer legend was in contemporary cultural mores. In the press, writers repeated yet again their particular idea of 'labour rewarded' - that the pioneers had toiled for us so that we might inherit the land.⁹⁸ Of the Australian pictures already in the collection, the *Age* editorial asserted,

... none has essayed the complex task of painting the spirit of our short history in association with our characteristic landscape ... that of Mr McCubbin, which stands out conspicuous amongst pictures yet painted on Australian soil by a largeness of conception, sympathy of feeling and intense insight into the inner beauties of our bush.
Not only was *The Pioneer* significantly identified as 'an historical work treated decoratively' (*The Age*, 22 April 1904), but the landscape itself appeared redolent with associations of the pioneer spirit.  

Contemporaries recognized in the painting a further aspect of the pioneer story - that through the individual effort of his toil, the pioneer achieves his final independence on the land. The *Age* writer (30 March 1906) summed up the painting as 'a poem of democracy'. The democratic ideal attributed to the man on the land owed as much to the pioneer myth created by artists and writers as it did to any substantial foundation in fact. Contemporaries occasionally identified *The Pioneer* as a 'selector', but his achievement was nevertheless discussed in terms of his 'pioneer' role. In 1895 Steele Rudd had contributed to *The Bulletin* the first series of sketches which later appeared in book form in 1899 under the title, *On Our Selection*. From this time on, the portrayal of the small selector in art and literature was to become an increasingly distinctive tradition, distinguishable from that of the pioneer. Paintings reflecting the influence of Rudd's stories tend to be anecdotal, rather than following the more heroic strain of the pioneer image.

Close parallels with *The Pioneer*, can be found in contemporary literature. McCubbin, in fact, exhibited the painting in 1904 with accompanying verse written especially for the occasion by his friend, Blamire Young:

Old trees arising grey and grand,  
The organ-pipes of wonderland,  
Beneath your shade our house shall stand  
....  
When comes the end, as come it must,  
To earth again we turn, and trust  
The flowers will not disdain our dust.

McCubbin must have felt the poem expressed something of the essence of
his painting. One is also reminded of the eulogistic mood evoked in
the earlier *Bush Burial*.

Juxtaposed images of the untamed bush, the first homestead ('An Eden
in the wilderness') and the resultant flourishing city, formed a tired
literary cliché in contemporary verse early this century. The *Pioneer*
clearly reflects the current literary convention in its pictorial organ-
ization. On the other hand, the painting made its own original contrib-
ution to the prolonged existence of the pioneer ethos well into the
century. When George Essex Evans, for example, wrote his ode 'Queen of
the North' to commemorate Queensland's Jubilee of 1909, he once again
turned to the pioneer image. Not only do the sentiments expressed in
the verse echo those of The Pioneer, but the accompanying illustrations
to the poem by Alek Sass appear indebted to McCubbin's painting. In one
illustration Sass repeated the format of The Pioneer's third panel; he
depicts a primitive grave marker partly hidden in a secluded foreground
area, while a fine city may be viewed in the distance. In 1906 the National Gallery of Victoria finally purchased The
Pioneer. The laborious effort involved in its execution and the consi-
derable delay before its eventual acquisition weighed heavily on
McCubbin. He considered the picture his *magnum opus*, 'my best effort
in Art'. When at first he failed to sell the painting, he inveighed
bitterly against 'the indifference that is allied to contempt [which]
underlies all that Melbourne cares for in Art'. He became more
sceptical of the practice of painting large-scale pictures following the
painstaking methods of Lepage. In November 1904 he wrote to Roberts
maintaining that in art 'quality is Love of the thing expressed, not
how it's done'.

His former realist outlook towards art gave way to the increasing
influence of Turner's romantic evocation of light, colour and atmosphere.
Early in 1906 he again wrote to Roberts, this time proudly announcing
that 'I am painting a Turnerian gem of landscape from studies ... Its
fine to get away sometimes from literal transcript'. McCubbin's trip to England the following year served to confirm and deepen his love for Turner's art, while it added to the respect he already felt for the work of George Clausen. He also found praiseworthy the French Impressionists Manet, Monet and Sisley. On his return home from abroad, McCubbin's late style was established, consisting of an impressionistic yet poetic rendering of lights and atmosphere, brilliant broken colour and palette-knife effects, and a rich textural paint surface.

After The Pioneer, McCubbin abandoned the 'literal transcript' of nature typified by Lepage's working method. Nevertheless he continued to paint large canvases in the studio, a number of which can be associated with the pioneer theme. Lost, a major subject picture, was painted in 1907. From this time too dates the beginning of a series of paintings depicting men cutting wood in the Australian bush. The subject was possibly suggested to him by Millet's well-known Woodsawyers (Victoria and Albert Museum). With his large canvas, The Pioneer's Home (Melbourne Club), painted in 1914, he returned to a subject common in the late nineteenth century Australian art. Its romantic fuzzy light and furry textured effect may owe something to the later works of George Clausen. Certainly that concern with literal fact, that may have fascinated him many years ago in Caire's photograph of The Selector's Hut, has been left far behind.

IV

The pioneer theme preoccupied McCubbin for much of his working life. His artistic portrayal of the subject certainly reflected his consciousness of the country's living experience and history. However, it was the significant departure from, or modification of, the actual reality of the pioneer's situation that elevated the pioneer figure to the level
of a popular cultural myth. In his paintings McCubbin chose to depict an essentially anonymous group of 'pioneer settlers', rather than focusing specifically on the Australian 'small-holder', whose living conditions were openly acknowledged by contemporaries to be 'pitiable' and degrading.

An urban nostalgia for the past, and for the simple values of rural life, encouraged the transformation of historical reality into a utopian rural dream. Within contemporary culture, the anonymous settler came to symbolize a democratic means of achieving 'true independence' on the land. The 'pioneer' also assumed popular significance as the purveyor of the benefits and achievements of civilization to an Australian wilderness. He was seen engaged in an heroic battle against the forces of nature; this labour was not motivated by selfish greed, and his main reward was the sure knowledge that he toiled so that new generations might inherit the land. The Australian bush thus became a vision of plenty awaiting the liberating touch of the pioneer's hand.

Pioneer women, too, played an equally stereotyped role within the contemporary rural dream; they were apotheosized as the moral agents of civilization, and the bearers of new life to the previously untrodden wilderness. Underlying the popular conception of the Australian bush as a vision of nature's abundance was a more telling social reality: the faith in urban progress and material achievement that so characterized the thinking of Marvellous Melbourne in the 1880s.

The most important elements of the developing pioneer mythology are all to be found in the contemporary media of black and white illustration and photography. Frederick McCubbin's vital part in the creation of a pioneer legend lay in his unique ability to combine local popular imagery with the style and iconography of European realist
painting. His pictures of pioneer men, women and children were enthusiastically acclaimed by the public. It is through his art that the original pioneers, revered and lauded at the Centenary Celebrations, have gained 'a lasting place in our memories'.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1 The above chapter is based on my article, 'Frederick McCubbin: the Spirit of the Pioneers' in *Australia 1888*, Bulletin No 7, April 1981. For their information and advice I should like to thank Dr Ann Galbally and Dr Graeme Davison. My general interpretation in this chapter is heavily indebted to J.B. Hirst, *op. cit.* The attendance figure at the Exhibition quoted above is based on the official attendance figures published in *The Argus* between 2 and 9 August 1888; cf. Geoffrey Serle, *The Rush to Be Rich*, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-287.


5 Graeme Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, *op. cit.*, see Chapter 10, esp. pp. 240-244.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 239; Francis Adams, despite his more radical outlook, carries the literary nostalgia for Melbourne's pioneers into the 1890s in *The Australians*, *op. cit.*, p. 26: 'The old Anglo-Australian generation which founded its prosperity is quietly but swiftly passing away'.


8 The best analysis of the manifold conceptions of the pioneer figure during the period is to be found in J.B. Hirst, *op. cit.*

9 *Once a Month*, 15 July 1885.


11 G. Davison, *op. cit.*, pp. 241, 244.


See Catalogues of the V.A.A. and the Art Society of New South Wales at the State Library of Victoria.

Turner's work, signed and dated 1889, is reproduced in colour in Joel's Auction Catalogue of May 1975.

See Graeme Sturgeon, The Development of Australian Sculpture, 1788-1975, London, 1978, p. 62; also The Australasian Critic, 1 August 1891, p. 266; The Argus, 7 July 1891, for the commissions for the State Library; Ernest S. Smellie, 'An Australian Artist: Mr C.D. Richardson' in The Magazine of Art, 1900, pp. 467-470; V.A.S. Catalogue, May 1892, where R. Kretzchmar also exhibits No 380, a sculpture of 'An Australian Pioneer'. For a possible compositional source for Richardson's and Kretzchmar's statues, see the illustration 'A Snake in the Grass' in The Illustrated Australian News, 1 January 1891; Table Talk, 17 July 1891, described Kretzchmar's 'Australian pioneer, a bushman reigning in his horse as a snake rises up from a tree stump'; E. Fysh, op. cit., p. 8.

The Argus, 7 September 1886; The Age, 12 August 1893.


Alexander Colquhoun, Frederick McCubbin, op. cit.; The Age, 26 November 1932; R.H. Croll, Tom Roberts, op. cit., p. 44; cf. 'Lothian Papers', Box 31, in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne. An unsigned article on McCubbin states that it was painted at Box Hill.

Illustrated Australian News, 6 January 1886. I owe this reference to Dr Ann Galbally.

Table Talk, 8 May 1891 and 15 May 1891.


Dr Ann Galbally drew my attention to the whereabouts of this picture.

The argument is confined to these two paintings. Other works of Roberts also suggest the theme of 'labour rewarded'.

Clausen's painting is illustrated in The Magazine of Art, 1895, p. 417. The pose of the peasant on the left of Clausen's painting and the compositional arrangement foreshadow McCubbin's painting.

The Australasian Sketcher, 15 July 1882; first quoted by David Thomas, op. cit., p. 72.

In his poem Orara, for example, Henry Kendall pauses to meditate on the pioneer's lonely, isolated grave.

34 McCubbin would have been well aware of the Victorian tradition in funeral scenes; his scrapbook contains a reproduction of a painting by Michetti which appears to be a funeral scene. An example of a funeral scene by a Newlyn painter is Frank Bramley's *For of Such Is the Kingdom of Heaven*, 1891 (Auckland City Art Gallery), a work, incidentally, much admired by Abby Altson.

35 Cf. James Green, 'Art in New South Wales', op. cit., p. 102; Spence's painting is illustrated in an exhibition catalogue held in the Library of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

36 *The Melbourne University Review*, vol. VI, No 2, May 1890, p. 82 (previously quoted by Virginia Spate).

37 *Exhibition of Works of Victorian Artists and a Loan Collection of Pictures* ... 20 December 1890, Catalogue No 203 (State Library of Victoria). Cf. David Thomas, op. cit., p. 72; similarly, in 1890 one of Folingsby's students exhibited *An Old Colonist of 50 Years*.

38 *The Age*, 29 March 1890; contemporary critics generally noted the way in which the melancholy of the scene was mitigated by a sense of ongoing life and hope for the future.

39 Lawson's story was published in 1893 in *Short Stories in Prose and Verse*.

40 An almost singular exception is that of Edward Bevan, writing in 1894: 'A Bush Burial is an almost too faithful reproduction of an incident in the life of a selector'; from his article, 'Art in the Antipodes', op. cit., p. 77.


42 Coral Lansbury, *Arcady in Australia*, op. cit.; especially relevant here is chapter 11.


45 This idea is fully discussed in Hirst, op. cit.

46 Enquiries to the National Gallery of Victoria have failed to reveal the origins of the painting's present title. Contemporary exhibition catalogues do not record a McCubbin painting by this name. My argument assumes that the present title of the painting reflects McCubbin's original intentions, but the argument is not necessarily invalidated if the painting were known under another name.

47 This source was first noted by David Thomas, op. cit., p. 72. An interesting comment on the urban consciousness of the country may be seen in the tableau of illustrations which shows on the same page the effects of fire in both city and country.
48 E. Lloyd, *A Visit to the Antipodes with Some Reminiscences of a Sojourn in Australia*, by a Squatter, London, 1846, pp. 142-143; chapter XI is significantly entitled 'Hot Winds'.


51 Cf. E.J. Wivell, *William Strutt's Great Historical Picture 'Black Thursday'*, Melbourne, 1883, in Art Pamphlets, vol. 19, State Library of Victoria; a sketch of the picture appeared in the Melbourne Herald, 6 February 1883; *Black Thursday* was exhibited, for example, at the 1884 Victorian Jubilee Exhibition, significantly subtitled in the catalogue: 'an episode in the history of Victoria', and at the Royal Anglo-Australian Society Exhibition in 1890.


54 Sutherland, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 267.


56 Curtis' painting, now entitled *Running Before the Fire*, is reproduced in *Joel's Auction Catalogue*, May 1978, p. 12; Woodhouse's *Fire and Flight* is illustrated in *The Australasian Sketcher*, 20 February 1875; J.A. Turner's painting, now entitled *Burnt Out*, was No 147 at the Joel Auction, November 1975; Stanley Berkeley exhibited an *Australian Bush-fire* at the Royal Academy in 1896, illustrated in *Royal Academy Pictures 1896*, p. 191.

57 Jones' painting was No 6 at the V.A.S. Winter Exhibition 1890 (Catalogue, State Library of Victoria); Conder's *Hot Wind* was exhibited at the May 1889 V.A.S. Exhibition and is illustrated in Frank Gibson, *Charles Conder: his Life and Work*, London, 1914, plate 3; at the May 1888 V.A.S. Exhibition, Frank Goldstraw exhibited No 95, *The North Wind*, which was probably an allegorical female figure subject, and No 94, *Narcissa* (illustrated in the catalogue); cf. *Table Talk*, 20 March 1891, A.E. Aldis paints a landscape entitled *A Hot Wind Day*. 
Longstaff journeyed through the devastated area. No 37, Bush Fire Study was exhibited at the Exhibition of Paintings by Sir John Longstaff Held at the Fine Art Society's Gallery, September 1936, Melbourne, catalogue, State Library of Victoria; Hansen's work was exhibited at the 1901 V.A.S. Annual Exhibition and at the Victorian Gold Jubilee Exhibition, Bendigo, 1902. It is reproduced in Joan Torrance, op. cit., p. 2. Appropriately it illustrates lines from her 'Ode to the Pioneers of Victoria'. A contemporary description of the Gippsland Fires may be found in Harry Gordon, An Eye-Witness History of Australia, Rigby Australia, 1976, pp. 141-143.


David Thomas, 'Frederick McCubbin's Winter Sunlight', op. cit., p. 37. McCubbin collected a reproduction of Sir J. Everett Millais' painting, Dew-drenched Furze (1890), a landscape showing light filtering through the forest, in his scrapbook.

Cf. the rustic Arcadian vision of an English writer in 'On the Wallaby' in All the Year Round (9 February 1867), who described how 'a good bushman can earn at piece-work from two pounds to three pounds per week, clear of rations', quoted in Lansbury, Arcady in Australia, op. cit., p. 135; E.C. Buley, op. cit., chapter VI 'On the Wallaby Track'; cf. Francis Adams, The Australians, op. cit., where he describes the hospitality of the squatters as 'a dim tradition'.


Forbes' painting was exhibited at the Royal Anglo-Australian Society of Artists' Exhibition in Melbourne in 1890. It was reproduced in The Magazine of Art, 1887, p. 289; Herkomer's Hard Times was reproduced in The Magazine of Art, vol. XI, 1887-8, p. 216; cf. Christopher Wood, op. cit., p. 251.

Graeme Davison, Marvellous Melbourne, op. cit., p. 251.

69 Ibid., pp. 251-253. The quotation is from Tucker, as cited by Davison, p. 252. A passage from Andrade's novel, The Melbourne Riots and How Harry Holdfast and His Friends Emancipated the Workers (1892) is reprinted in Turner's The Australian Dream, op. cit., pp. 184-189. Andrade describes his 'pioneers' living in tents, prior to building their homes (p. 187); he deliberately uses the term 'pioneers' to denote his settlers.

70 The title, On the Wallaby Track, suggests that McCubbin depicts itinerant workers, but he may have intended to show the first phase of the pioneer's venture before the homestead was built. The left panel of The Pioneer illustrates this scene; cf. The Illustrated Australian News (25 November 1885), 'Incidents in the Life of a Selector', p. 202: 'His first work on arriving at his land is to build a house, for till this is done he and his family must live in tents'.


72 Cf. George Essex Evans' poem, 'The Women of the West':

But they have sung with silent lives the song all songs above -
The Holiness of sacrifice, the dignity of love -

The hearts that made the Nation were the Women of the West.

From George Essex Evans, The Collected Verse of G. Essex Evans, Sydney, 1928, pp. 2-3. At the 1894 V.A.S. exhibition, McCubbin showed No 59, Maternity; McCubbin was later to write: 'Woman is the great civilizing agent of nature ...', 'Lothian Papers', op. cit.

73 J.B. Hirst, op. cit., p. 332.

74 Ibid., pp. 327-329.

75 A.B. ('Banjo') Paterson, 'Song of the Future' in Rio Grande's Last Race, op. cit., pp. 60, 58. Numerous verses reiterate the idea of the land as a plentiful bounty.

76 Cf. Bernard Smith, Australian Painting, op. cit., p. 156; cf. an undated letter from McCubbin to Roberts (c. 1904), Tom Roberts' Correspondence Mitchell Library, Sydney, vol. 2.

77 The Art of George W. Lambert, A.R.A., Part I by Arthur José and Part II by Julian Ashton, pp. 7-8, 20; Amy Lambert, op. cit., pp. 16-17, 22; Arthur W. José, op. cit., p. 8. The date of Kerry's photograph is not known, but it presumably predates Lambert's painting; an original sketch for Across the Black Soil Plains was exhibited as No 75 in the Loan Exhibition National Art Gallery of New South Wales, April 1918 (Catalogue, State Library of Victoria).
78 Illustrated in *Queensland National Art Gallery Illustrated Catalogue*, Brisbane, 1908, No 4; cf. Royal Academy Pictures 1898, London, p. 11, where it is reproduced under the title *Foil*.


82 Gavin Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo: the Initiation of Australia 1901-19*, Sydney, 1976, pp. 22, 48-49, 114-115; black and white artists in the local press were necessarily more deeply involved with the issue of Federation, but their response was generally divided and ambiguous; see Marguerite Mahood, *op. cit.*, chapter 16.

83 J.B. Hirst, *op. cit.*, p. 336; cf. Russel Ward, 'Two Kinds of Australian Patriotism', *op. cit.* Ward argues that imperial patriotism can be identified with leading citizens and local patriotism with the common people.

84 Reproduced in *Sturgeon*, *op. cit.*, p. 79, also text pp. 79-80; the quotation is from William Moore, *Studio Sketches*, *op. cit.*, 'The Making of a Statue', p. 31; cf. E. Fysh, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

85 David Thomas, 'Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.*, p. 73; McCubbin also exhibited *Motherhood*, No 11 at the July V.A.S. Exhibition, 1903, reproduced in the catalogue (State Library of Victoria). This was the same year in which he began *The Pioneer*, to which the maternity theme can be related, as well as to an earlier work, *Maternity*, of 1894.

86 Cf. the thematic organization of the tableau of illustrations 'Incidents in the Life of a Selector' in *The Illustrated Australian News* (25 November 1885).

87 Letter from McCubbin to Roberts, written at Macedon and dated 6 September 1903, in *Tom Roberts' Correspondence*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2; David Thomas, 'Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.*, p. 73, says that McCubbin used to dig a trench so that he could reach the top of the canvases.

88 Leigh Astbury and Suzanne Spunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86; Jack Cato, *op. cit.*; Cato dates Bell's photograph at 'about 1878', but this appears too early; a more reasonable date would be c. 1890-1898, when Bell was field operator for Charles Kerry; cf. Quentin Burke, 'Charles Kerry' in *The Australasian Photo-Review*, March 1952, p. 155; also see 'Our Artistic Workers - Mr George Bell' in *The Australian Photographic Journal*, 21 December 1908. Bell's *Pioneer's Wife* is reproduced on p. 367, so the date 1908 provides the latest possible date for the photograph; see David P. Millar, *Charles Kerry's Federation Australia*, Sydney, 1981, p. 82, where *The Pioneer's Wife* is reproduced. McCubbin's scrapbook also contains a photograph of his wife standing
holding a baby; family groups posed in bushland settings were a
common subject in contemporary photography. McCubbin's *Motherhood*
can be compared with photographs of pioneer families by Charles Kerry,
e.g. a reproduction of a Kerry photograph in C.M.H. Clark, *In Search

Ann Galally in *Frederick McCubbin*, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96, has suggested
Alexander Colquhoun's illustration, 'The Anciency, or The Old Brigade'
in *The Tatler*, 21 May 1898, as a possible source for McCubbin's
painting.

89 Ursula Hoff, 'The Phases of McCubbin's Art' in *Meanjin*, September 1956,
p. 304; letter from McCubbin to Tom Roberts dated 14th January 1904,
in *Tom Roberts' Correspondence*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2.

90 Cf. *The Age* (27 March 1906: 'Mr McCubbin's pictorial interpretation of
our most notable national achievement so far, that of conquering the
bush by the labours of those brave men and women ...', etc.


the selectors were 'ready to throw themselves in with their hereditary
enemies, the squatters, rather than admit the equality of the new
democracy'. This point is fully discussed in Hirst, *op. cit.*

93 Judith Woodward, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128. Rudd's stories were originally
illustrated by artists including Lambert, Mahony, A.H. Fullwood, A.J.
Fischer and Fred Leist. Generally, their illustrations tend to be
humorous caricatures. A number of contemporary paintings reflect
Rudd's stories: at the 1900 V.A.S. exhibition Hal Waugh showed *Dad's
Return*; Waugh's painting *Our Selection* is reproduced in Moore's *Studio
Sketches*, *op. cit.*, p. 46; J.A. Turner painted *On Our Selection* (present
whereabouts unknown).

94 *Mr Fred McCubbin's Exhibition of Australian Paintings*, 22 April 1904
(Catalogue, State Library of Victoria).

95 The line 'An Eden in the wilderness' comes from Victor Daley's pioneer
poem, 'The Old Wife and the New' in *At Dawn and Dusk*, Sydney, 1910,
in *Rio Grande's Last Race*, *op. cit.*, p. 62, and Joan Torrance's 'Our
Ancients' in her *op. cit.*, p. 3.

96 George Essex Evans, *Queen of the North: a Jubilee Ode* (Queensland, n.d.
[1909]), *Decorations by Alek Sass*. Evans' poem emphasizes the
pioneer's role in populating the land as a means of securing the

97 Letter from McCubbin to Roberts, dated 14 January 1904, *Tom Roberts' Correspondence*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2.

98 *Tom Roberts' Correspondence*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2. Letters from McCubbin
to Roberts, dated 4 September 1904 and 7 November 1904. On 4 September
McCubbin wrote in defence of the idea that studies from nature are
pictures: 'quality can only be got by love ... I must paint smaller
pictures for the future'.


99 *Tom Roberts' Correspondence, op. cit.*, vol. 2. Letter from McCubbin to Roberts dated 8 January 1906.

100 Box 987/1, La Trobe Library, Melbourne; various letters written by McCubbin from England to his wife in 1907; cf. Ursula Hoff, 'The Phases of McCubbin's Art', *op. cit.*, pp. 305-306.

101 David Thomas claims that even in the later landscapes allusions to the pioneers became something of a 'hidden reference'. See Thomas, 'Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.*, p. 73, and 'Frederick McCubbin's Winter Sunlight', *op. cit.*, pp. 35 and 42-43, fn. 14.


Chapter 8
THE LOST CHILD: NATURE'S ENTICING BUT TREACHEROUS BEAUTY

In the previous chapter, it was shown how McCubbin portrayed the pioneer set in battle against nature, eventually triumphing in the name of 'progress' and 'civilization'. The pioneer's wife, though enduring considerable personal hardship, plays a supportive if not stereotyped role in relation to her husband. In McCubbin's oeuvre, the vulnerability of innocent children to the potential dangers of nature is acknowledged as one of the costs of the pioneer's ultimate victory over the land. He painted at least three major works which deal specifically with the lost child theme: *Lost*, 1886 (National Gallery of Victoria); *Found*, 1892 (present whereabouts unknown); and *Lost*, 1907 (National Gallery of Victoria), as well as several other works which explore the fairy-tale aspects of the theme. These paintings belong to a long Australian literary and artistic tradition, a tradition that necessarily owes its existence to the frequent occurrence of the event in the daily experience of Australians during the period.¹

The simultaneous appearance of the lost child theme in literature posed problems of interpretation for both artists and their public. For contemporary audiences, paintings on the theme were as much open to a literary interpretation as to one which concentrated more closely on the formal qualities of the works themselves. An artist was nevertheless restricted to one viewpoint in his actual painting. Unlike the writer, he could not change or successively modify his stance, nor could he undercut the strident emotional appeal of a subject with the literary device of ironic detachment. Lost children as a subject can suggest potential pathos, if not a painful tear-jerking sentimentality. The artist's choice of viewpoint was therefore crucial to his successful treatment of the subject.
The distinction between the 'literary' and the purely 'visual' was never clearly marked in late nineteenth-century Australian art criticism. However some painters were aware that a predominantly literary interpretation of a subject could bias a critic's judgement against a painting. Tom Roberts, for example, discussed this potential bias in an interview with A.G. Stephens (The Bulletin's leading literary critic) published in The Bookfellow (29 April 1899). He objected to the 'literary' appreciation of art on the grounds that

... the painting fixes one thing for you - one scene, one mood, one idea. And then the literary critic objects because he cannot see all scenes, all moods, all ideas. He may admit the force of the artist's idea as far as it goes; but why does it not go further? ... it can't.²

This chapter therefore traces the interaction between literary and artistic versions of the lost child theme, but also suggests vital differences between their treatment of the theme.

The most significant early literary expression of the lost child theme is found in Henry Kingsley's novel, The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn, first published in 1859. It tells of a little boy about eight years old who wanders away from the homestead in order to explore the bush across a nearby river. He is eventually found dead by members of the search party:

There he lay, dead and stiff, one hand still grasping the flowers he had gathered on his last happy play-day, and the other lay as a pillow, between the soft cold cheek and the rough cold stone ... He had found out at last what lay beyond the shining river he had watched so long.

Redolent with Victorian pathos and sentimentality, Kingsley's account establishes some of the main elements of the literary tradition. The innocence of young children picking flowers as they wander through
the bush is set against an image of nature which is beautiful, beckoning, but still potentially destructive and treacherous:

Under some ferntrees they buried him, on a knoll across the river, in the treacherous beautiful forest which had lured him to his destruction.³

As the story is recounted, the bush becomes a mirror of the child's feelings and imaginative response to his situation. Kingsley too makes more oblique reference to the parents' refuge in fantasy as they attempt to cope with their grief.⁴

An actual event in 1864 ensured the theme of children lost in the bush a permanent place in Australian culture. This was the disappearance and eventual finding of the three Duff children, who were lost in the bush near Horsham, in Victoria's Wimmera district. On Friday 12 August 1864, about nine in the morning, three of the Duff children were sent by their mother to cut some broom, a little distance from their bush hut. The children, whose ages ranged from five to nine years, were to be lost in the bush for 'nine long days and eight weary nights'. With the aid of black trackers, the father found the children alive on the ninth day, sleeping together in a little clump of trees. The successful recovery of the children prompted an overwhelming public response. The second child, Jane, became a heroine: 'Seldom has brotherly or sisterly affection been so beautifully illustrated', said the writer in The Illustrated Melbourne Post (22 September 1864). 'The girl had regularly taken off her frock to cover the younger one when he complained of the bitter cold'. By public subscription, two hundred and twenty-six pounds were raised to further the children's education.⁵

Artists, too, quickly responded to this tale of 'so much patient suffering'. For The Illustrated Melbourne Post (22 September 1864), 218 Nicholas Chevalier drew 'Lost in The Bush', choosing the scene where
Jane Duff covered her brothers with her frock as they lay on the ground. William Strutt, although in England at the time, remained sympathetic to stories of the inherent dangers of the Australian bush. He was inspired to paint his picture, *The Little Wanderers or The Lost Track*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1865. A drawing for the picture (Nan Kivell Collection, Canberra) shows the three children asleep on the ground, suggesting Strutt's familiarity with Chevalier's earlier illustration. In 1876 Strutt also began work on a manuscript for a children's story called 'The Trackers of Glenferry', in which the aborigines are the heroes, being the ones who find the lost children. (The story was never published, but the original manuscript and accompanying drawings are now held in the National Library, Canberra.)

For the Victorian mind, the story of the Duff children could appear as a living example of 'one of the most amazing acts of Divine preservation which we ever had brought under our observation'. It was this Christian motive which inspired an English publication in 1866, *The Australian Babes in the Wood*, which retold the story in rhyming verse with accompanying illustrations. Details of the narrative had been culled from an issue of the Melbourne *Argus*. In particular, the writer seized on the fact that Jane Duff had supposedly repeated the well-known child's prayer, 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild' every evening before they went to sleep. The successful rescue of the children was interpreted as 'A living test our faith to prove/In God's almighty hand'. Thus the story was incorporated into the larger contemporary preoccupation with Christian morality and fate.

*The Australian Babes in the Wood* picks up the various strands of the emerging tradition. In the verse, the innocence of the children is juxtaposed with images of nature's beauty which entices them into danger. An illustration follows Strutt's and Chevalier's example in
showing the children asleep on the ground. Other illustrations depict
the children gathering wildflowers and broom, while one illustration
portrays the mood of despair when they finally realize they are lost. 7

Perhaps the most permanent pictorial record of the Duff story was
that created by S.T. Gill; his sketch of The Duff Children was published
in 1864 in his Australian Sketchbook, and hence enjoyed wide circulation
during the later part of the century. Gill's sketch is unashamedly
melodramatic: he chose to portray the moment immediately after the
father discovered his children alive. The father, still on horseback,
is shown with hands clasped and eyes turned heavenwards, offering a
prayer of thanksgiving for the safe recovery of his children.

Not all the incidents of children lost in the bush ended as happily
as that of the Duffs. For instance, on 30 June 1867 three boys aged
between four and six years old became lost in the bush near Daylesford,
Victoria. Their remains, horribly mutilated by marauding dogs, were
eventually found some two and a half months later. 8 The melancholy
disposition of a writer like Marcus Clarke found more appeal in such
macabre episodes. His story 'Pretty Dick', which recounts a tale of
a small boy found dead after six days lost in the bush, was first
published in The Colonial Monthly in 1869. Clarke's knowledge of
Kingsley's earlier treatment of the theme is clearly evident. Francis
Adams further noted 'his efforts at applying the predetermined pathos
of Dickens to colonial subjects like "Pretty Dick".' In the sense of
malignant power lurking behind Australian nature, there are echoes of
another of Clarke's favourite writers, Edgar Allan Poe.

The pathos and sentimentality of the story are held in check by
Clarke's skilful switching of points of view. Events are alternately
seen through the eyes of the narrator, through the sympathetic eyes of
those who knew the child, and finally through the subjective response
of Pretty Dick himself. Clarke's use of irony adds poignancy to the story while saving it from facile sentiment. In a bitterly ironic touch, Mr Gaunt, who rides by in the distance, fails to answer Pretty Dick's cry for help when he mistakes it for the scream of a parrot or some other creature in the bush. When the story first appeared, contemporary reviewers seem not to have found its emotional appeal too mawkish or maudlin. The Argus reviewer (2 April 1869), however, saw fit to take Clarke to task for his mistake in fixing the age of Pretty Dick at twelve years:

Bush lads of that mature age are generally strapping fellows who do not easily get lost, and are more likely to wander in the direction of the public house. Prompted by this criticism, Clarke was to change the child's age to seven for book publication.

II

McCubbin's Lost of 1886 (National Gallery of Victoria) thus forms part of a continuing literary and pictorial tradition of the time. During the period he was producing his now famous works on the theme, the subject of children lost in the bush was frequently treated by lesser-known artists and illustrators. For instance, in 1882 a Miss Devine won ninth prize for her drawing Off The Track entered in a competition held by the Sydney firm, Gibbs, Shallard and Company, publishers of The Illustrated Sydney News. It followed tradition in showing two girls who

... have strayed from a bush track while gathering wild flowers, and are shown as they stand laden with graceful blossoms peering through thick forest, darkening with shades of approaching night, to try to discern the path they have left. Some years later, in the Spring Exhibition of the Art Society of New South Wales held in 1890, J. Godfréy Rivers exhibited Bushed, painted
in a tight Pre-Raphaelite manner, depicting 'a red frocked child who
has lost her way amid the scrub'.

Contemporary sympathy with the lost child theme was also reflected
in the eighties in the theatre and literature. The popular pantomime,
_Babes in the Wood_, was still being performed as a Christmas show, an
event incidentally which had left a distinct impression on McCubbin as
a child. In 1885, the year before McCubbin painted _Lost_, Richard
Rowe published his novel, _The Boy in The Bush: A Tale of Australian
Life_. Partly illustrated by Frank Mahony, the novel contained a
separate chapter entitled 'Lost Maggie', relating an episode of a young
girl lost in the bush. Resembling a sentimental rehash of Kingsley's
and Clarke's incidents, the story tells how the child is found alive
by a black-tracker:

Pooh little Maggie was sound asleep; her fat little
face, and neck, and arms, and legs, were sadly scratched.
In a scratched, podgy little hand she held a posy of
withered wild flowers.

The reference to the wild flowers is an obvious legacy from the earlier
literary tradition.

McCubbin's _Gathering Mistletoe_ of 1886 (present whereabouts unknown)
appears to fit the established literary model for the lost theme. It
shows a young girl, dressed in a pinafore, in a bush setting; over her
shoulder she casually holds branches of flora she has gathered in her
stroll. Given the thematic link and stylistic similarities between
the two works, _Gathering Mistletoe_ can be conveniently interpreted as
a companion piece to McCubbin's _Lost_, painted in the same year. The
young girl in _Gathering Mistletoe_ is comparably clothed, while she is
similarly viewed in a bush clearing in the mid distance. Tall gum
saplings on either side firmly locate her figure within the overall
composition of the picture. Like _Lost_, only a glimpse of sky can be
seen through the dense bush background.
There is no record in contemporary catalogues of McCubbin showing a work with the title, *Gathering Mistletoe*, and he probably exhibited the painting under another title. The missing picture could possibly be the work entitled *Whisperings in Wattle Boughs*, which he exhibited at the Australian Artists' Association in September 1886. The title of the painting was derived from Adam Lindsay Gordon's poem of the same name, and the painting therefore has the virtue of suggesting a specifically Australian subject. Interestingly, Gordon's sentimental poem includes a lament for the poet's young sister, from whom he had been parted since childhood.\(^{15}\)

The subject of McCubbin's *Gathering Mistletoe* also finds parallels in contemporary European and Australian art. Pictures of young children gathering flowers in forests or fields formed a common genre in European paintings and illustrations, while Australian painters occasionally tackled the subject in the 1870s and 1880s.\(^{16}\) *Gathering Mistletoe*, however, may have been inspired by local variations on the theme occurring in the illustrated papers. Illustrations of Australian children gathering wild flowers or wattle blossoms appeared regularly in the press during the period. Some portray young girls carrying flowers in their pinafores, hence anticipating the recurrence of the motif in McCubbin's *Lost*. Most of these illustrations appear to be straightforward representations of the idyllic wanderings of children, usually enjoying the pleasures of spring, or at other times they are seen gathering flowers or mistletoe for use as Christmas decorations.\(^{17}\)

McCubbin's paintings of lost children formed part of an established literary and pictorial tradition, but they also reflected the keenness of his response to contemporary events. The press in the eighties and nineties continued to carry reports of children lost in the bush.\(^{18}\) One incident appears particularly relevant to McCubbin's treatment of the subject. On 12 May 1885, a twelve-year-old girl named Clara
Crosbie became lost in the bush near Lilydale, Victoria. The ensuing search was unsuccessful and eventually abandoned after the child was presumed dead. Almost miraculously, on 2 June she was found alive, after surviving for three weeks alone in the bush without food. The details of her misadventure demonstrate that the traditional literary rendering of the theme was strongly grounded in fact. By one of those odd quirks of fate which seem to typify the lost story, she was finally found by two men who were out riding looking for a stray horse. One of the men heard her feeble cooee for help, when they chanced to pause for a moment in order to examine a dead native cat.\textsuperscript{19} Similar to the incident in 'Pretty Dick', she had become disoriented on the first day in the bush when she stopped for a sleep, and on awakening found that it was nearly dark.

Clara Crosbie's experience was seized upon for the subject of an illustration in \textit{The Australasian Sketcher} (29 June 1885), showing the moment of her discovery by one of her rescuers. In the following year, the story was again illustrated by W.S. Stacey, a well-known black and white artist, for a popular publication, \textit{Australian Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil}. Stacey's drawing, simply entitled 'Found', seems to be a loose adaptation of the earlier illustration in the \textit{Sketcher}.\textsuperscript{20} McCubbin's \textit{Lost} (1886) was thus painted at a time when contemporaries had gained a fresh awareness of the actual event of children lost in the bush. With his sensitive awareness of the black and white media, McCubbin may have been inspired in his choice of subject by illustrations of the Clara Crosbie story.

Completed at Box Hill in 1886, \textit{Lost} also invites comparison with Tom Roberts' painting of the same year, \textit{The Artist's Camp} (National Gallery of Victoria).\textsuperscript{21} The pictures share obvious compositional similarities in the placing of the main motif well in the mid distance,
in the high horizon line and in the use of 'framing' saplings to stabilize the composition. From Roberts, McCubbin has also absorbed a concern with 'relative values'; the colour in Lost is delicately handled. There are harmonious, subdued tints of blue-green, mauve and grey in the bush setting, while warmer ochre orange and brown tones may be seen in the clearing. McCubbin employs the fine tracery of branches, also seen in the foreground of Roberts' painting, to different effect in Lost. The foliage partially limits the spectator's access to the lost child, evoking a sense of the dense bush enclosing and enveloping her.²² A description written in the same year, outlining Clara Crosbie's plight, creates a similar mood:

... so she slipped out, got off the track easily enough, and was soon hopelessly involved in the reedy fens, which this part of the country is intersected.²³

McCubbin's choice of viewpoint in Lost deliberately underplays the pathos and sentimentality of the scene. There is no obvious clue or telling detail to suggest the eventual outcome of the child's situation. Instead he seems more intent on capturing 'a quiet corner of nature'; the mood of the picture is intimate and quietly lyrical. A contemporary critic remarked upon the restrained role assigned to the lost child, 'who constitutes the forlorn centre of a grove of saplings, and an underground of withered grass and scrub' (The Argus, 5 March 1887). McCubbin's detached and objective treatment of the subject serves to reinforce the strong thematic link between Lost and Gathering Mistletoe. In Lost the child's pinafore contains flowers, the obvious cause of her wandering away and becoming lost. In this key respect, Lost provides a parallel with the literary treatment of the theme: an image of an innocent child is juxtaposed with that of nature's beauty which lures her away to possible tragedy.

In 1892 McCubbin painted a sequel to Lost with his large canvas entitled Found. The painting is now known only in reproductions, but
was fully described in the daily press when it was first exhibited. According to The Argus (20 April 1893), Found depicted

... a poor little derelict who has wandered away into the bush, and has now fallen to the ground exhausted by hunger and fatigue, has been discovered by one of the search party, an aged man - possibly her father - who is lifting her tenderly in his arms while a comrade at the end of the vista, formed by a grove of young saplings, is signalling the happy event to scouts in the distance.

Compared with the earlier Lost, Found focuses more intently on the narrative implications of the story. The Age writer (21 April 1893) described the action of the rescuer: 'With his left hand he is feeling the child's pulse to determine whether life has entirely abandoned the frail little form'. Her eyes are closed and her face expressed a 'deathly pallor'.

The dominance of the 'subject' in Found reflects McCubbin's artistic development from the time he painted Lost in 1886. Found was painted at the height of Lepage's influence on his work and McCubbin's consequent preoccupation with large figure subject compositions. In 1891 he had written to Roberts: 'I do not think my way lies in direct inspiration but rather what I can see the possibilities of in the way of a subject'. That year he conceived the idea of Found and the actual execution of the painting was to occupy him for several months of the following year. Found thus continued the pattern of development begun with his large Australian figure subjects, Down on His Luck of 1889 and The Bush Burial of 1890. He described the painting as 'better than I have previously done in most ways', illustrating the value he attached to its place in his oeuvre.

In McCubbin's choice of the lost child subject there is clearly a residue of the typically Victorian interest in the plight and misfortune
of innocent children.\textsuperscript{27} He would have been familiar with sentimental Victorian narrative paintings like Thomas Kennington's \textit{Homeless}, 1890 (Bendigo Art Gallery), which shows a street waif, slumped exhausted upon the wet footpath, being comforted by a kind and concerned woman.\textsuperscript{28} The pathos of \textit{Found} creates a comparable mood. McCubbin was probably equally familiar with narrative paintings such as James Sant's \textit{The Children in the Wood} (1854 and another version [? 1856], or Richard Redgraves' two companion pictures of the same name (1860), which owe their inspiration more directly to original European fairy tales involving children lost in the woods.\textsuperscript{29}

From the time of S.T. Gill's \textit{The Duff Children} of 1864, however, the subject of lost children found in the bush was frequently treated in Australian paintings and illustrations.\textsuperscript{30} In the foreground of W.S. Stacey's illustration of the Clara Crosbie story, entitled \textit{Found}, the child is portrayed lying asleep or unconscious in the undergrowth. A horse and rider are seen in the mid distance against the dense bush background. Both the conception of the subject and the basic compositional arrangement of McCubbin's \textit{Found} could have been influenced by its namesake in this illustration.\textsuperscript{31}

At the beginning of a new century the lost child theme continued to hold its fascination for Australian artists and writers. Just before the turn of the century in 1897, Barcroft Boake's volume of poems, \textit{Where the Dead Men Lie}, was published and Frank Mahony, George Lambert and A. Fischer collaborated in providing the illustrations. Boake's general sense of the malevolence of the Australian bush assumes a more sentimental guise in his poem, 'The Babes in the Bush'. It tells of two small boys who stray into the bush and become trapped in a mine shaft. Events are narrated as if seen through the children's eyes, but in the concluding stanza, Boake switches to a slightly more independent view in order to imply a pessimistic ending to their story.\textsuperscript{32}
The year 1900 saw the publication of Henry Lawson's poem, 'The Babies in the Bush', in The Bulletin. It had been inspired by an actual event, the loss of Walter Head's three children in the Gippsland bush in January 1894. Lawson repeats the traditional motif of the children being enticed away by the beauty of flowers. A more original touch is the mother's resorting to fantasy of bush fairies caring for her children in order to accommodate their death. Lawson wrote a prose equivalent to the poem in a story of the same name, published in Joe Wilson and His Mates in 1901. His exploration of the mother's psychological refuge in a world of fantasy is understandably more extensive and complex in the prose version. So too does Lawson's ironic detachment in prose distance the reader from a too indulgently sentimental response to the story. One learns of the guilt experienced by the father, who was away on a drinking bout when the children were lost.

Joseph Furphy's novel Such Is Life was not published until 1903, although he had written it by 1897. Such Is Life contains a series of episodes of lost children, the tales being related in succession by characters in the novel. The method of narration necessarily means that the same theme is approached from different angles. Personal reactions to these past events are presented in a more studied and reflective manner. A further dimension is added as Furphy's characters draw out the long-term repercussions of events, and suggest feelings of guilt experienced by the participants. One episode is complicated by the fact that the parents of a child who dies in the bush share an unhappy personal relationship. Furphy's manipulation and careful structuring of these incidents suggests his clear realization that the lost child theme had assumed the proportions of a national myth by the turn of the century.
Furphy's method of narration was not, however, available to the artist; in painting it was only possible to present one view of the theme. McCubbin's *Lost* of 1907 (National Gallery of Victoria) would appear to make a direct contribution to the myth-making process. A large figure composition, the picture follows the tendency of his *Pioneer* in treating the subject on the scale of a traditional history painting. Compared with the restrained narrative interest of the early *Lost* (1886), the later picture emphasizes the subject's ready appeal to the spectator's sense of pathos. The spectator is presented with a close-up view of the despairing child who has been overwhelmed by the dense bush which offers no way out. This portrayal of the conspicuously barefooted child recalls a similar moment in 'Pretty Dick': 'Utterly tired and worn out, he sat down at the foot of a tree and sobbed with sheer fatigue'.

While the subject of *Lost* has a clearly recognizable popular appeal, McCubbin was no doubt equally concerned with the picture's formal qualities. The pose of the lost boy had been foreshadowed in the figure of a child in *Motherhood*, painted in 1903. McCubbin delights in capturing the effect of misty dappled light which filters through the bush undergrowth in *Lost*. Strong vibrant hues of purple, pink, blue and yellow, applied as broken colour with the palette knife, combine to create a rich sensuous paint surface.

McCubbin's painting fixed one view of the subject. With his image of the lost child, McCubbin is able to sum up and symbolize an occurrence which had become part of the national legend by the turn of the century. A measure of the extent to which the lost child theme entered the country's popular mythology can be seen in its occasional appearance in the Australian novels of Mary Grant Bruce early this century. Her novels were intended primarily for children and adolescents, and she consequently treats episodes involving lost children
in a less selfconsciously critical manner than did earlier writers like Lawson and Furphy. McCubbin's *Lost* (1907) provides a contemporary parallel with Bruce's writing in offering a single, direct and uncomplicated conception of the subject; its meaning is immediately accessible to a wide general audience. In this respect, the painting both reflects and perpetuates the aura of myth which surrounds the lost child theme even today.

A further aspect of the rapid mythologization of the lost child theme may be found in Ethel Pedley's popular children's story, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, published in 1899. The story tells of a little girl who becomes lost while gathering flowers in the bush; fortunately, she is befriended and cared for by a kangaroo. As mentioned above, this element of fantasy was anticipated in the bush fairies first mentioned by Kingsley, and later to be taken up by Lawson. *Dot and the Kangaroo* was illustrated by Frank Mahony, demonstrating once again the significant interrelationship between literary and pictorial interpretations of the theme. Two years before the publication of Pedley's charming story, Atha Westbury had already published the first edition of her *Australian Fairy Tales*. One tale, entitled 'The Laughing Jackass', noticeably prefigures Pedley's better-known story. It relates an episode where a lost boy is first cared for and then guided safely home by the Australian native animals. The conflict between illusion and reality, to be more seriously explored in Lawson's slightly later story, is gently touched upon by Westbury. When the boy returns home, the relieved parents quietly and understandingly dismiss his incredible account of his adventures.

The flight into a world of fancy and enchantment as a refuge from the harshness of reality thus emerges as an alternative strand in contemporary literary interpretations. There may then be some justification for the inclusion of McCubbin's *Childhood Fancies* of 1905.
(Private Collection, Melbourne) amongst his group of pictures dealing with lost children.\(^{40}\) Childhood Fancies depicts a sylvan glade with two children in the foreground watching fairies who flit about in the mid distance. In 1913 McCubbin exhibited another version of the subject called Fairies Away (present whereabouts unknown), employing a more vertical arrangement of the composition as distinct from the horizontal format adopted in Childhood Fancies. Since the picture shows only a single figure of a little girl in the left foreground, it may well be the missing painting of 1904 known by the title What the Little Girl Saw in the Bush.\(^{41}\)

Childhood Fancies and Fairies Away can be conveniently related to aspects of the contemporary Australian literature on the lost child, in particular to Lawson's 'bush fairies'. In literature, however, the successful rendition of these 'flights of fancy' is ultimately dependent upon contextual relationships set up within the prose or verse - for instance, the flux of time and space, the interplay between illusion and reality. McCubbin's pictures, on the other hand, fix one thing - one scene, one mood, one idea - and without any additional information, it is not possible to assign with certainty these works to the lost child theme.

The subject of fairies existed as an independent genre in nineteenth century Victorian painting.\(^{42}\) Even in the early eighties some Australian black and white illustrators had 'localised the fairies and elves of northern mythology in a moonlit fern-tree gully in an Australian forest'.\(^{43}\) By the turn of the century, elves and fairies had been so completely absorbed into our local folk-lore that they occupied a central place in many Australian children's fairy tales. These tales are usually devoid of any reference to the lost theme.\(^{44}\) During the same period McCubbin had young children of his own, and was probably familiar with the black and white work of the talented Ida Rentoul
(Outhwaite) who illustrated so many children's fairy tales early this century. The fairies in McCubbin's paintings are indeed very close to those types commonly employed by Rentoul in her illustrations. 45

Given the extensive variety of sources available to McCubbin, one can only tentatively ascribe the original inspiration for Childhood Fancies and Fairies Away to the lost theme. However, these paintings serve to counterpoint those works by McCubbin and others which deal more directly with the lost child motif. Underlying various pictorial interpretations of the lost theme is an apprehensive and pessimistic response to the unknown of the bush. They exploit the vulnerability and innocence of small children enticed by beauty to death. Conversely, variations on the theme of bush enchantment delight in the unknown quality of the bush. The unknown becomes a means by which everyday reality is transcended and fear of the bush replaced by confident delight in its magical possibilities.

III

For Australian artists and writers the theme of the lost child held a prolonged fascination. As we have seen, the frequent and dramatic occurrence of the event in the actual experience of the country gave impetus to literary and pictorial renditions of the subject. Despite the increasing urbanization of Australian society in the late nineteenth century, children continued to become lost in the bush (if more rarely) and to provide fresh inspiration for artistic endeavour. Nevertheless, the fact of children's being lost in the bush does not by itself seem sufficiently vital to impel the mythologization of the theme which had begun by the turn of the century.

It was the manner of interpreting the facts, rather than the facts themselves, which helped create the myth of the lost child. While the earlier version of Lost (1886) was deliberately low key in its approach
to the subject, McCubbin's *Lost* of 1907 has more in common with the stereotyped portrayal of the lost child in Mary Grant Bruce's novels and other children's stories, than with its more penetrating treatment by Lawson and Furphy. The lost in the bush episodes in Bruce's novels are conceived for her young audience as 'typically Australian' events which are acted out in a peremptory fashion, rather than being deeply experienced and analysed (they conclude happily, of course). The subject of McCubbin's *Lost* (1907) also makes its immediate appeal to the spectator's sense of the 'typical' situation; the child remains anonymous. Being fixed, the visual image can evoke a direct, empathetic response from the viewer, without the necessity of probing and completing the narrative content. *Lost* may offer the spectator's imagination the possibility of eventual rescue and hence the full horror of the child's ordeal is diminished.

There are no known paintings which concentrate explicitly on the grisly physical details of the children's dead bodies, though such details were sometimes part of the real experience, as we have seen. Nor is this aspect dwelt upon in those literary accounts in which the children are found dead. McCubbin's *Found* of 1892, for instance, showed the girl with her eyes closed and a 'deathly' pallor on her face. As evident in the contemporary press criticism of the picture, the spectator's response was manipulated so that he felt the immediacy of the moment, simultaneously fearing the worst and hoping for the best possible outcome.

The visual image did offer paintings of the lost child a distinct advantage over their literary equivalents. The single fixed image could weld symbolic meaning to a compelling visual immediacy. In most literary versions of the lost theme, the same symbolic meaning had to be portrayed through the forced use of metaphor. A painting like
McCubbin's *Lost* of 1907 simultaneously celebrates childish physical beauty and the natural beauty of the bush, while mourning the probable demise of one through the other.

What raised the status of the lost child motif to the level of myth in Australian culture, then, was its symbolic value and not its simple factual existence. The lost child occupies a significant place in the larger contemporary preoccupation with questions of man's mortality against the forces of nature. Through their innocence, children were oblivious to the potentially destructive power of the bush and therefore most vulnerable to it. The plight of lost children thus raised for its contemporary audience the fundamental question of God or Nature's providence versus fate.

In the late nineteenth century there arose a popular conception of the pioneer who waged an heroic battle, first to survive and then to conquer nature. It was felt that, while the pioneers' immediate gains may have been small, their hard-earned independence laid the foundations for the future Australian nation. The lost child in McCubbin's art symbolizes the cost of that battle in its most poignant form. The theme of children lost in the bush in a wider sense becomes a means of questioning and coming to terms with the nature of the Australian bush.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1 Sections of this chapter have been published in my article, 'Frederick McCubbin: the Spirit of the Pioneers', *Australia 1888*, Bulletin No 7, April 1981. The chapter was written too early to include the research findings of Dr Ann Galbally, *Frederick McCubbin*, published in 1981; see her interesting account of the lost child theme in chapter 5, 'Bush Creatures'.


3 Henry Kingsley, *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn*, London, 1859; the passages quoted are from pp. 287-289. An earlier literary example may be found in William Howitt, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 193; Howitt's approach is annalistic and he makes very little of the incident.


7 *The Australian Babes In the Wood, by the Author of 'Little Jessie' etc.*, illustrated by Hugh Cameron, A.R.S.A., J. McWhirter, G. Hay, J. Lawson, etc. and engraved by R. Paterson, London, 1866.


9 'Pretty Dick' was originally published in *The Colonial Monthly*, vol. 4, No 20, April 1869, pp. 128-41. In the preface to his novel *Long Odds* (Melbourne, 2nd ed. 1969), Clarke acknowledges his general indebtedness to Kingsley's *Geoffrey Hamlyn*; see Francis Adams, *The Australians, op. cit.*, p. 105; Professor Bernard Smith has made similar points in reference to Clarke's 'Pretty Dick' in his B.A. (Hons) thesis, 'Interpretations of nature in nineteenth century Australian literature', Sydney University, 1945, pp. 54-56.


12 Cf. James Green, 'Art in New South Wales', op. cit., p. 103. Numerous other works on the lost theme were exhibited during the period, but their titles do not designate whether they refer specifically to children or adults, e.g. at the 1877 V.A.A. exhibition, E.N. Gerard showed Coo-oo-ee; at the Art Society of N.S.W. exhibition in October 1883, Blagden Chambers showed Lost; at the V.A.S. exhibition, 1892, C.D. Richardson showed a sculpture, Coo-ee; at the Art Society of N.S.W. exhibition, Spring 1893, C.H. Hunt showed Coo-ee (Catalogues, State Library of Victoria and Art Gallery Library, New South Wales); cf. J.A. Turner's Coo-oo-ee-ee, No 4, p. 38, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery Descriptive Catalogue (Illustrated), March 1891, copy in State Library of Victoria.

13 David Thomas, 'Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., p. 72; J.S. MacDonald, The Art of Frederick McCubbin, op. cit., p. 38. The pantomime was still playing in Melbourne as late as 1915, see Table Talk, 2 September 1915; see John West, Theatre in Australia, Sydney, 1978, p. 106.


16 Cf. the illustration 'Gathering Wild Flowers' in The Magazine of Art, vol. v, 1882, p. 232; McCubbin was also a regular reader of the American publication Harper's Magazine, which contained illustrations of children gathering flowers, e.g. 'Picking Wild Flowers' and 'Gathering Arborus' in vol. LXI, 1880, pp. 73, 74; the illustration to a poem in vol. LXV, 1882, opposite p. 325. Australian painters who treated the theme include Oswald Rose Campbell, who exhibited Gathering Wildflowers at the 1872 V.A.A. exhibitions; J.J. Gibbs, a Melbourne Gallery School student, exhibited Wattle-blossom Gatherers at the 1884 Ballarat Fine Art Exhibition (catalogues, State Library of Victoria).

17 For example, 'Gathering Wattle for Christmas', Illustrated Australian News, 2 January 1871; 'Christmas Eve - Hanging the Mistletoe', Illustrated Australian News, 31 December 1872; 'Wattle Blossoms', Illustrated Australian News, 2 September 1878; 'Blossom Gathering: the First Wattle Bloom', Australasian Sketcher, 28 August 1880; 'Springtime in Australia', Australasian Sketcher, 22 October 1881; 'Gathering Mistletoe for Christmas', Illustrated Australian News, 21 December 1881; 'Homewards', Illustrated Australian News, 11 July 1883; 'Innocents Abroad', Illustrated Australian News, 26 December 1884; 'Wattle and Wild Flowers', Illustrated Australian News, 13 November 1886. Gathering mistletoe for Christmas was an old English custom, rather than a specifically Australian one; hence, in Gathering Mistletoe, the child may actually be collecting wattle blossoms.

18 For example, the report of the seven-year-old boy lost near Healesville in The Australasian Sketcher, 22 September 1884, quoted in David Thomas, 'Frederick McCubbin', op. cit., p. 72.

19 The Australasian Sketcher, 29 June 1885, p. 102.
20 H. Willoughby, *op. cit.*, p. 218; this source has been noted previously in Leigh Astbury and Suzanne Spunner, *op. cit.*, p. 84.


22 Cf. David Thomas, 'Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.*, p. 67.


24 Letter to Tom Roberts, dated 26 March 1891 in *Tom Roberts' Correspondence*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2; this letter also mentions his continued enthusiasm for Lepage's work.


26 Letter from McCubbin to Roberts dated 3 July 1892, *op. cit.*

27 Leigh Astbury, 'George Folingsby and Australian Subject Painting', *op. cit.*, p. 48; the Victorian subject interest in McCubbin's lost child paintings can be compared with the debt Clarke and Lawson owe to Dickens in their treatment of the theme.

28 Kennington's work is reproduced in Renée Free, *Victorian Social Conscience*, Exhibition Catalogue, Sydney, 1976, p. 56; cf. Christopher Wood, *op. cit.*, chapter 8, 'Foundlings'; Kennington's picture may actually show a mother and child, but the sentimental import is the same.

29 James Sant exhibited *The children in the wood* at the Royal Academy in 1854 and a picture with the same title in 1856, see Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts*, *op. cit.*, vol. 7, p. 20. The present whereabouts of the picture is unknown; a detail of the picture is reproduced in Leigh Astbury, 'Frederick McCubbin', *op. cit.*, p. 42.


30 For example, a Harold Brees exhibited *Found in the Bush* at the 1884 Exhibition of the Art Society of New South Wales. The work is illustrated in the catalogue in the State Library of Victoria. In 1891 J.H. Scheltema exhibited *A Bush Incident*, which depicted the return of the successful search party. Information from *Catalogue of Oil Paintings of Australian Scenery* by Signor Rolando and Mr J.H. Scheltema (copy in the State Library of Victoria).

31 H. Willoughby, *op. cit.*, p. 218; Stacey's drawing of Clara Crosbie's figure is echoed in an illustration of a young girl asleep with a
basket of flowers under her arm, called 'Tired Out' by H.J. Johnstone, which appeared in the supplement of The Illustrated Australian News, November 1887.

32 Barcroft Boake, Where the Dead Men Lie and Other Poems, ed. with notes and a memoir by A.G. Stephens, Sydney, 1897.


34 The earlier 1886 picture is sometimes known today as The Lost Child, but both versions of the subject were originally exhibited under the same title, Lost.

35 'Pretty Dick' in Michael Wilding, ed., Marcus Clarke, op. cit., p. 565. Both Clarke and Furphy dwell on the pathetic appeal of the children's little feet, and Furphy on the finding of 'the child's little copper-toed boots'.

36 The picture, now mostly destroyed, is reproduced in the catalogue of the Victorian Artists' Society Exhibition, Winter 1903 (catalogue in the State Library of Victoria).


38 Ethel C. Pedley, Dot and the Kangaroo, London, 1899.

39 Atha Westbury, Australian Fairy Tales (illustrated by A.J. Johnson), London, 1897.

40 Childhood Fancies is reproduced in J.S. MacDonald, The Art of Frederick McCubbin, op. cit., p. 79; cf. David Thomas, op. cit., p. 72. Childhood Fancies is not included in the catalogue of Mr Fred McCubbin's Exhibition of Australian Paintings, Athenaeum, Upper Hall, 22 April 1904 (catalogue in the State Library of Victoria); however, the painting is mentioned by this name in a report of the exhibition in The Argus, 22 April 1904. This report may be erroneous, or the painting may have been inadvertently left out of the exhibition catalogue. Alternatively, the Argus critic may have been referring to McCubbin's What the Little Girl Saw in the Bush, which was shown at the exhibition. A painting entitled Childhood Fancies was exhibited as No 80 at McCubbin's studio, Shipley Street, in November 1905. Childhood Fancies was exhibited as No 15 at the 1906 V.A.S. exhibition, and a description of the painting in The Age, 13 July 1906, confirms that this is the same painting reproduced under this title in J.S. MacDonald, op. cit. above. At the 1955 McCubbin Centennial Exhibition, the painting Childhood Fancies appears as No 21 in the catalogue, see Ursula Hoff, Frederick McCubbin Exhibition, Melbourne, 1955: 'No 21. Childhood Fancies, 1905. Oil on canvas, 28 x 55 in.; signed and dated l.r.' (catalogue in the State Library of Victoria). The dating of the picture to 1905 has been confirmed in a letter to the writer from David Thomas, 14 November 1978.
A coloured photograph of a McCubbin painting, in the possession of the writer, shows a little girl looking at fairies in the mid-distance of the bush. This photograph has been reproduced in Leigh Astbury, 'The Art of Frederick McCubbin and the Impact of the First War', op. cit., p. 81, and in Ann Galbally, Frederick McCubbin, op. cit., p. 115. In both cases, the painting has been reproduced under the title, What the Little Girl Saw in the Bush. However, the painting in the photograph is inscribed 1912 (or 1913?) at lower right. This painting is almost certainly the painting entitled Fairies Away that McCubbin exhibited at the Australian Art Association's First Exhibition of Pictures in 1913, see the Age critic (7 May 1913) who described the work as an important exhibit - 'a bush subject, Fairies Away'. McCubbin's What the Little Girl Saw in the Bush was first exhibited as No 16 at Mr Fred McCubbin's Exhibition of Australian Paintings, Athenaeum, op. cit., cf. the description of the painting in The Age, 22 April 1904. In J.S. MacDonald, Art of Frederick McCubbin, op. cit. p.96, the painting is assigned to McCubbin's Macedon period; because of the close similarity between the 1912 painting and contemporary newspaper descriptions of What the Little Girl Saw in the Bush, one can only conclude that McCubbin painted another version of the subject, or alternatively redated the original 1904 painting and exhibited it at the 1913 A.A.A. exhibition. The latter interpretation is more likely.


The Australasian Sketcher, 19 December 1883, p. 219, the illustration 'Fairy Gully, a Dream of Christmas Eve'.

For instance, the story 'The Wishing Cap' in Atha Westbury, op. cit., esp. pp. 164-165.

For example, A.I. Rentoul and I.S. Rentoul, Mollie's Bunyip, Melbourne, 1904, and Mollie's Staircase, Melbourne, 1906; Tarella Quin, Before the Lamps Are Lit (Illustrated by Ida Rentoul Outhwaite), Melbourne, 1911.

Cf. the analysis of propagandist elements in her novels by David Walker, 'War, Women and the Bush: the novels of Mary Grant Bruce and Ethel Turner' in Historical Studies, vol. 18, No 71, October 1978.
CONCLUSION

The Heidelberg artists' pastoral figure subjects present a highly selective image of contemporary rural life. Their paintings avoid significant social and political realities that determined the day-to-day existence of the rural settler or bush worker. The rapid industrialization of the rural economy, recent technological advances in the pastoral industry, the social effects of the various land acts, the growth of pastoral workers' unions and class conflict between pastoral employers and employees, are all ignored. This is simply to state the obvious. Without a selective portrayal of Australian pastoral life, the rural myth would not have emerged to play a dominant role in art of the period.

Rather than focusing upon the practical and mundane realities of rural existence, the Heidelberg artists concentrated upon man's relationship with nature and the Australian land. Roberts' shearing pictures of 'the great pastoral life and work' emphasized the provident and generative powers of nature. Alternatively, the harsher aspects of rural life that were allowed a central place in their paintings were those belonging to the destructive forces of nature - fire, flood and drought, and the loss of human life at the hands of the land. Contemporaries were thus able to identify an archetypal symbology in McCubbin's paintings on the pioneer theme. McCubbin sets man in a battle against nature, woman plays the role of the bearer of new life and civilization's values to the wilderness, and the lost child serves as a poignant symbol of the cost of the pioneer's achievement in settling the land. Within the pioneer myth, nature exhibits her dual powers - she is both generous provider and malevolent destroyer. Similarly, paintings of men 'on the wallaby track' remove the bush-worker from the social context of a master-servant relationship and concentrate instead
on portraying the itinerant bushman eking out an existence from the land, ennobled by his detachment from society.

Uniting the distinctive strands of the rural myth in late nineteenth-century painting is a preoccupation with Australian nature: a notion capable of generating at the same time a cosmology with 'universal' meaning, but peculiarly Australian expression, and one with ready appeal for contemporary audiences. Like all myths, the value and meaning of the rural myth of late nineteenth-century Australian art depends only marginally on the accuracy of its depiction of rural life at the time. What is central is the psychological veracity of the myth, not its documentary qualities. Of necessity, the rural myth is an encapsulation or abstraction of certain aspects of rural life, but even more it is the means by which artists expressed and illuminated deeply rooted human fears, wishes and preoccupations in concrete images of life in rural Australia.

A general urban nostalgia for rural values made both a cultivated fine art élite and a more general public especially responsive to the mythic qualities of the Heidelberg artists' pastoral subjects. These paintings mirrored some of the dominant values of contemporary urban society. The average urban dweller was able to project his own aspirations towards economic independence in a romantic, idealized view of bush life. He could empathize with the 'freedom and independence' of the itinerant bush-worker 'on the wallaby track' portrayed in paintings and illustrations. Alternatively, he might recognize that 'true independence' could be achieved by owning and working the land, a leitmotif of McCubbin's pioneer paintings. During the 1880s, the egalitarian impulses of contemporary society also found expression in the popular belief in the 'harmony of interests' between labour and capital, an idea which I have argued is reflected in Roberts' treatment of Shearing the Rams.
There were, then, decisive elements of the rural myth in late nineteenth-century painting which have their roots in alternative, if not competing, popular urban ideologies. In reality, the urban middle and working classes were more likely to seek actual independence through owning 'a home of one's own' in the city or its suburbs. In the 1880s, at least, the Victorian faith in the march of material progress has as its corollary a belief in a 'property-owning democracy'. At first, this urban ideal of home ownership may appear diametrically opposed to the homeless existence of men 'on the wallaby track'. Yet beneath these apparently opposed ideals and values may be found a common source of the rural myth's appeal. From a safe urban distance, the life of the itinerant bushman could offer a romantic escape from the materialistic imperatives of urban society, while never being considered as a serious alternative to that society.

The rural myth reflected the nostalgic dreams and yearnings of the urban dweller, not his actual aspirations. Precisely because these dreams required no fulfilment in real life, the myth was able to encompass and hold together apparently irreconcilable values. The myth's attractiveness depended largely on the emotional release afforded by fantasy, by what might be or might have been in Australian life. Consequently, it did not have to heed the circumscriptions demanded by historical accuracy, social justice or even theoretical coherence. So that while the myth was generally 'democratic' in its bearing, its egalitarian impulse could both recognize and approve the worth of individual initiative.

The figure of the 'pioneer' was 'rewarded' for his individual enterprise on the land, at the same time as the myth idealized the bushman 'on the wallaby track', whose very existence was proclaimed by his lack of worldly possessions. These idealized conceptions of rural 'types' ignored the reality of class divisions within rural society.
The economic interests of the bush-worker, organized into a modern pastoral union by the late 1880s, were often in conflict with those of his landowning employer. Amongst the 'pioneer' landowners there were further significant social divisions, between the squatter and the selector who fought for control of the land and the pastoral industry. Only within the realm of myth could the ideological and social contradictions inherent in the urban view of the Bush be reconciled and finally resolved.

No single interpretation of the Heidelberg artists' pastoral figure paintings can, then, sufficiently explain their appeal to contemporary audiences. A Marxist interpretation or a narrow art historical approach will not account for the flexible appeal of a popular myth. Immune from the actual experience of rural life, an urban art public was able to respond freely and imaginatively to distinctive elements of the rural myth in these paintings. To some extent, this open sympathetic response had already been prepared by the widespread recurrence of comparable visual imagery and rural idealism within the popular media.

More importantly, by the late 1880s contemporaries associated the rural myth in painting with the expression of nationalistic feeling and thought. The Heidelberg artists' distinctively Australian figure paintings thus became accessible and meaningful to a wider audience than a cultivated fine art élite. The nationalistic appeal of a painting's subject could transcend ideological issues and modify contemporary response. The portrayal of the landscape and human sentiment were of central significance in this process of modification. Contemporaries were encouraged to identify a 'typically Australian' landscape in these paintings through the interaction of the figure with its landscape background. An entreaty to sentiment in the subject similarly deepened a painting's nationalistic meaning by investing it with a more human, yet universal dimension. The social implications of a painting were then
often absorbed by that larger preoccupation with 'Australian nature' and man's destiny.

A critic could thus group Richardson's *Sick Shepherd* with Longstaff's *Breaking the News* and McCubbin's *Bush Burial* as 'indicating one channel at least in which coming Australian art will find expression'.¹ Though these paintings portray different social types - the pastoral labourer, the miner and the pioneer - their subjects were united by their common nationalistic appeal, a decisive factor which tended to override purely 'aesthetic' considerations of style and technique. The artistic origins of the 'foreign' *plein-airiste* style, often employed in the landscape backgrounds of such works, could be conveniently laid aside in nationalistic estimations of their worth.

Because contemporaries usually identified their nationalistic yearnings with these pictures, the rural myth in figure painting had a broad appeal across class distinctions and social barriers. We have seen how the sentimental narrative interest of Folingsby's students' national subjects made them immediately accessible to a wider public. One of these paintings, Longstaff's *Breaking the News*, may at first appear to present a grim indictment of an industrialized rural society. And yet the power of its sentiment was so strong that Henry Lawson was persuaded to ignore the painting's possible social criticism in favour of praising the subject's nationalistic appeal. By the mid-1890s, Longstaff's painting was reputedly 'known by reproduction in every mining township in Australia', an ironic comment on the widespread popularity of the rural myth.²

Ann Galbally has noted that McCubbin's images of *Down On His Luck* and *A Bush Burial* ostensibly deal with the pessimistic themes of 'death and defeat'.³ But this does not discount a strong measure of rural idealism behind McCubbin's choice and portrayal of such subjects. As
we have seen, the reflexive empathy felt by the urban dweller for his rural counterpart was a vital component of nationalistic feeling. Urban audiences could thus identify with the hardships, as well as the rewards, of bush life portrayed in art. For the themes of death on the land or rural poverty and simplicity held a romantic attraction compared with the existence of death and poverty around them. In McCubbin's 'elegiac' treatment of *A Bush Burial* they could locate promise of 'life hereafter and better things to come', or alternatively they could admire the 'independence' of the lone bushman in *Down On His Luck.* When the economic depression of the 1890s brought widespread poverty and serious social dislocation to the cities, the imaginative identification with rural life and its vicissitudes became even more pronounced in art and literature.

This general empathy with rural life was drawn upon and exploited by the proponents of different types of nationalism throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Contemporaries often projected their own nationalistic aspirations and values on to the Heidelberg artists' pastoral figure paintings. In the materialistic climate of Marvellous Melbourne during the 1880s, Folingsby's students were able to meet the expectations of that contemporary alliance of provincial, Australian and imperial patriotism. Analogously, when Roberts' *Shearing at Newstead: The Golden Fleece* was first exhibited in Sydney in 1894, it was equally admired by a fairly conservative art establishment and by writers from the Sydney *Bulletin.* Both groups identified in the painting their own particular vision of a past golden age or the promise of some future utopia. In the process, they both overlooked the currently depressed state of the rural economy and the presence of rural class conflict, marked by the major shearing strikes of 1891 and 1894. To some extent, the rural myth in painting was as much the creation of contemporary audiences as it was the conscious intention of the artists themselves.
It was often to the professional advantage of artists to have their paintings evaluated in nationalistic terms. Roberts' and Mahony's pastoral figure subjects, for instance, were commonly praised by critics for their nationalistic qualities. Major paintings by both artists were consequently purchased by the Art Gallery of New South Wales at the time. But, as we have seen, their individual attitudes towards the painting of rural subjects were quite different, even though these differences passed largely unnoticed in contemporary assessments of their work. Nationalism and the appeal of the rural myth tended to obscure rather than clarify the individual merits of their paintings.

After the First World War the process of mystification continued, as the original Heidelberg artists began to weave an aura of myth around the creation of their pastoral figure subjects. Encouraged by the tide of nationalistic sentiment after the war, and anxious to establish their rightful place in Australian art history, the Heidelberg artists now saw their earlier paintings as an expression of untrammeled national feeling. This later interpretation dissolved or minimized distinctions between competing types of late nineteenth-century nationalism. In the place of a complex web of nationalistic thought, the Heidelberg artists, alongside later writers, now posited a sudden 'breakthrough' to a 'pure' vision of Australian national life in the mid and late 1880s.

Their engagement with nationalistic subjects was, in fact, the result of a much more gradual development. Only slowly did their artistic interests move away from 'academic' historical painting in the 1870s towards an involvement with local, contemporary subject matter and European plein-airisme by the early 1880s. Further, their painting of Australian pastoral themes in the 1880s developed in tandem with, not in opposition to, a complementary interest in painting the local urban scene.
While the Heidelberg artists made a conscious effort to reveal an Australian national identity in their pastoral subjects, their original inspiration lay in their growing awareness of European art movements as much as it did in some pristine nationalistic impulse. They generally disdained the narrow parochialism of the 'up country' national ethos popularized by the Bulletin writers. Frank Mahony, who readily accepted the financial rewards of drawing for The Bulletin and embraced its ethos, was a notable exception. Leading Heidelberg artists invariably measured their achievements in art against those of a wider European culture.

Through the European realist tradition, the Heidelberg artists found a means of endowing their Australian bush subjects with a more profound and universal meaning. The European realist painters emphasized the simple dignity, the hardships and rewards of the peasant's life lived close to the soil. In practice, the influence of European realism was instrumental in the Heidelberg artists' 'abstraction' of the mundane exigencies of Australian pastoral life. Changes in their artistic portrayal of the Bush were as much a response to recent developments within European realism as they were a straightforward reaction to local events. On the other hand, Roberts' adherence to certain principles of European realism could bring a critical edge to his treatment of the rural myth. In particular, his concern for conveying an impression of 'truth' and historical accuracy in his bushranging paintings succeeded in setting them apart from the usual pictorial stereotypes favoured by the myth.

Another aspect of the European realist tradition was central to the popular interpretation of the Heidelberg School early this century. This was the artists' practice of painting their large-scale figure subjects 'on the spot' directly before the motif, according to the plein-airiste principles of Bastien-Lepage. Curiously, the emphasis placed upon this
practice enhanced the Heidelberg artists' claims to 'originality', although it effectively obscured a vital issue in any consideration of originality, namely the extent of their debt to previously existing pictorial sources. And as we have seen, the specifically Australian nature of their pastoral subjects originated in local popular imagery in black and white illustrations and photography. It was also through the popular media that links were forged between the Heidelberg artists' paintings and earlier colonial traditions in art.

What separated the Heidelberg artists' figure paintings from their sources in popular imagery was perhaps a matter of ambition, rather than quality. Indeed, some of the most skilled artists of the time drew regularly for the illustrated press. But large-scale figure paintings involved artists in considerable time and expense. The Heidelberg painters, together with supportive critics like Sidney Dickinson, wished to establish the validity of nationalistic figure subjects within the realm of 'high art'. Adequate recognition meant official patronage from public art galleries or patronage from a wealthy privileged class of society. The fact that the Heidelberg artists painted comparatively few large-scale pastoral pictures indicates the pressing nature of these financial constraints.

Today nearly all these paintings are housed in 'high art' institutions in Australia's state and provincial galleries. Here they continue to provide a city-based nation with a popular image of its national identity;
NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1 Melbourne University Review, vol. VI, No 2, May 1890, p. 82.

2 The Argus, 29 June 1895.


4 The Argus, 5 April 1890; The Age, 29 March 1890.
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