The Hidden History of an Australian Painter: Louisa Haynes Le Freimann (1863-1956)[1]

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Abstract

This article seeks to reconstruct the story behind *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide* (1896), a small-scale Impressionist painting from the Pictures Collection of the National Library of Australia in Canberra, created by the 'forgotten' Anglo-Australian painter Louisa Haynes Le Freimann. First described by feminist art historian Joan Kerr as a "modest little oil painting," the picture challenges social norms, especially traditional gender roles, in complex ways. It provides a previously unacknowledged counter narrative to the emerging national discourse of the pre-Federation years as famously captured by Australian Impressionism. By contextualizing the painting, and by providing biographical details on Haynes Le Freimann's formative years at Birmingham Municipal School of Art, a fuller picture emerges of an artist who was influenced by, and participated in, two major innovative movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the Arts & Crafts Movement in Birmingham, England, and the Theosophical Society in Sydney, NSW.

I. Introduction

1 The first person to acknowledge the life and works of the 'forgotten' Anglo-Australian artist Louisa Haynes Le Freimann was the renowned Australian feminist art historian Joan Kerr. In her seminal work *Heritage* (1995), intended as an "active agent for change" (Introduction ix), dedicated to "retrieving forgotten Australian women artists" and "putting them back into the picture" (vii), Kerr included the painter in the biographical section, where she briefly paraphrased some biographical details; Kerr also discussed Haynes Le Freimann's enigmatic painting *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide* (1896) which she included (somewhat erroneously) in a thematic section on "Happy Families." The artist and her picnic painting

[1] Due to the – in the truest sense of the word – esoteric nature of the life and works of Louisa Haynes Le Freimann, my ongoing research relies strongly on access to various archives, both public and private, and thus on the support of a number of institutions and persons. I therefore particularly wish to thank librarians, archivists and academics at various institutions who have been inestimably supportive during research trips to London and Birmingham while I was on research leave in the winter semester of 2014/15. These include Dr. Fiona Waterhouse (archivist, Art & Design Archives, Birmingham City University), Dr. Sally Hoban (art historian, Birmingham University), Alison Wheatley (archivist, The Schools of King Edward VI in Birmingham), and staff at the following institutions: Cadbury Research Library/Birmingham University, Wolfson Research Centre/Birmingham Library, Birmingham University Library and National Art Library, London. Moreover, I wish to thank the following institutions and persons who have made archival material accessible to me in Australia during earlier stages of the project: Jennifer Hissey (librarian, Campbell Research Library), staff at Adyar Lending Library, and the team at TS National Headquarters in Sydney; staff at Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney; staff at Australian National Library and Pictures Collection, Canberra; Dr. Jenny McFarlane (art historian, Canberra). Last but not least my heartfelt thanks go to three generations of descendants of Louisa Haynes Le Freimann (commencing with her grandchildren), who have so generously shared their private recollections, family archives and collections with me; without their encouragement and support this project would have never been possible. I also wish to express my gratitude to Klaus Lubbers, professor emeritus of American Studies at the University of Mainz, Germany, who during several years of collaborative teaching, and through his distinguished research on (*inter alia*) the cultural dimension of American art opened up a whole new field of investigation to me that has clearly inspired my research on Louisa Haynes Le Freimann. This essay is dedicated to him on the occasion of his birthday.

resurfaced more than twenty years later in John Clark's *Picturing Australia* (2009), an Australian National Library publication showcasing selected paintings from the Library's Pictures Collection. If Haynes' *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide* was chosen from the "most significant watercolours, oils and lithographs in the collection" (Clark 5) to represent a specific moment or story that "chronicles Australian history and society and the people, places and events that have shaped the nation" (4), why do we know so little about the life and works of the painter who was born in Birmingham, England, in 1863, emigrated to Adelaide, South Australia, in 1892 and from there to Sydney, New South Wales, in 1897 where she died in 1956? Why is it still so difficult to trace women's lives and their lifetime achievements, and what are the factors that prevent women from gaining public recognition?

2 In the following, I will sketch the artist's life that spanned almost a century, from mid-Victorian England to post-WWII Australia, and thus brings colonial England into conversation with postcolonial Australia. I will briefly outline the artist's formative years at the renowned Birmingham Municipal School of Art (BMSA), Britain's first municipal art school that defined itself in opposition to the traditional academic schools of painting. BMSA was highly renowned for the quality and innovation of its teaching; it was also a hothouse of progressive ideas. From these premises, I will analyse *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide*, the artist's most famous, and most controversial, painting, which is also the only one to date that is part of a public collection. The painting gestures towards the ideology and belief system Haynes Le Freimann became associated with in her Sydney years, where she was a long-standing member of the Theosophical Society. As I will show, *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide* is strongly expressive of ideas that question traditional notions of gender, society and the nation in both Victorian England and pre-Federation Australia. In doing so, I will pay particular attention to conditions that hindered Louisa Haynes Le Freimann from realizing her full potential as an artist, and effectively prevented her from being considered as what she undoubtedly was, namely one of Australia's important painters.

II. Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman

3 If Joan Kerr was the first academic to acknowledge Louisa Haynes Le Freimann, it is worth noting that she based her assessment of both the artist's life and her only publicly accessible painting on one single source, as did John Clark more than two decades later: their common source is a one-page biographical sketch provided by the artist's nephew Cyril Herbert Haynes Franklin. Franklin was the son of Louisa's sister Emily. Like his mother before him, he stayed in touch with the artist, and also visited her once in 1914/15. A picture from the artist's photo album of a tea party in Louisa Haynes Le Freimann's Croydon home

shows the artist surrounded by her nephew Cyril and his brother Arthur, who had emigrated to Australia in 1912 and was to marry Louisa's daughter Gladys in 1919, together with Ian Davidson, a prominent member of the Theosophical Society in Sydney. Clearly visible on the wall behind the tea party are a number of the artist's paintings. Another photograph from the same source shows the artist in her studio surrounded by sketches, drawings and oil paintings from her student years at BMSA to around the year 1900, indicating that the picture may have been taken in her early Sydney years. Louisa Haynes Le Freimann is depicted regarding her large-scale oil painting of Welsh mountain scenery rather soulfully, and thus reflecting on her past, with indications of her life in Australia visible via the small canvas of *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide* that is hanging on the wall behind her. The artist seems to have bequeathed the latter painting to her nephew who, in turn, donated it to the National Library of Australia in the 1970s as he was approaching the end of his life. Franklin's gift to the National Library's Pictures Collection was accompanied with said "Biography" as well as a number of documents pertaining to his trip to Australia. Without his bequest, the rediscovery of the painter would never have happened. Unfortunately, the two art historians who obviously felt that Louisa Haynes Le Freimann's painting captured a significant moment in Australian (art) history, failed to look beyond, or read between the lines of, the sketchy biographical note supplied by her nephew.

Ill. 1: "The Artist in Her Studio" (c. 1900)

4 Born into the family of George Haynes, a Birmingham gun barrel maker, and his wife Emma, née Dowler, an observant Baptist, Louisa was the youngest of the couple's six surviving daughters. The parents were in many ways representative of what Birmingham stood for in the nineteenth century. The so-called 'workshop of the world' typically consisted of small businesses that produced goods for the British Empire, and sported the world's busiest gun-manufacturing industry located in Birmingham's Gun Quarter, for many years home of the Haynes family. The city was famous for its Dissenters (and riots against them), among them Quakers, Presbyterians and Baptists; it was also associated with technological innovation and a strong Protestant work ethic. Significantly, Louisa as well as her sisters were educated, trained in specific professions, and earned their own living or contributed to the family income, among them a nurse (Elizabeth), a school teacher (Emily), a grocer (Mary), while the younger daughters were a music teacher and qualified pianist (Martha) and an art teacher and qualified painter (Louisa). It may seem surprising that the youngest daughter of an increasingly financially distressed family of girls was able to attend art school over a period of more than a decade. This can partly be explained through the progressive ideas BMSA stood for: school fees where based on whether a student took morning, afternoon or evening classes. This meant that students, like Louisa Haynes, who were dependent on a regular income were able to attend classes after work. Edward R. Taylor, who was first headmaster of BMSA from 1877-1903, ran the school on a number of highly innovative principles including: belief in equality of the sexes and equal opportunities for students from low-income families, an outstanding educational system, providing 'fast-track' career opportunities for talented students who were able to work as 'pupil teachers,' and teaching the fine arts side by side with crafts and design. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Birmingham was thus not only the 'workshop of the world' but also a hothouse of progressive ideas, and an important centre in the art world, increasingly successful in training and recruiting artists. BMSA was strongly associated with the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts & Crafts movement. Birmingham-born artist Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris had strong ties to the school and visited BMSA on numerous occasions.[2]

5 In 1892, Louisa Haynes completed her stage III exams at BMSA, after more than a decade of studying and simultaneously teaching art classes at a prestigious independent school for girls. Record books of BMSA, today part of the Art & Design Archives at Birmingham City University, list numerous prizes won by Louisa Haynes who in 1887 was

[2] The biographical information provided in this section is a summary of archival material studied by the author in various Birmingham libraries and archives while on research leave in the winter semester of 2014/15 (see note 1 for detailed information on institutions consulted).

also one of ten advanced students to be awarded free admission to classes for the new academic year. She was thus not only an extremely talented young artist who earned prizes for her work in local and national competitions, she also belonged to a highly successful generation of BMSA graduates that would see some of her male peers rise to lasting fame (among them Sidney Meteyard and Arthur Gaskin), while some of the other female graduates from BMSA continued to work as painters, book illustrators and designers (including Georgie Gaskin, the sisters Myra and Kate Bunce as well as the Holden sisters, Violet, Evelyn and Edith). As Sally Hoban argues convincingly, these women "made a much larger contribution to The Arts and Crafts Movement in Birmingham than is currently acknowledged" (164). Louisa Haynes, however, emigrated to South Australia with her sister Martha in 1892. Why would an immensely talented and successful young artist leave her native city, and thus refute what could have been a successful career as a painter? Why leave after many years of training, and give up the secure teaching position for that matter, for an uncertain future 'Down Under'? The answer is simple: because of her gender.

6 Victorian England's restrictive gender norms necessitated migration to Australia's unknown and distant shores for reasons that can be read between the lines of the minutes recorded by Louisa Haynes' employers:

> After considering a letter from Miss Haynes the Committee recommend the Board to pass an order regretting the cause of Miss Haynes' leaving, and expressing their appreciation of her efficient work in the School. The Committee having been informed that *Miss Haynes' health had broken down, that she was about to proceed to a warmer climate* […]. It is ordered that the Board regrets the cause of Miss Haynes' resignation of her post as Drawing Mistress at the Aston Girls' School. It recognizes its appreciation of Miss Haynes' long continued & valuable services as one of the Mistresses at the Gem Street School, & subsequently Drawing Mistress at the Aston School, extending over a period of 14 years. *The Board trusts that residence in a warmer climate may restore Miss Haynes' to health* and in recognition of her long faithful services have pleasure in ordering a payment to her of £ 30. ("Minutes No. 12;" emphasis added)

Significantly, the phrases employed by the School Board in about 1892 are almost identical with the wording chosen by the artist's nephew, Cyril H. H. Franklin, who in his brief biographical sketch of 1972 refers to "much ill health" in the Haynes family, and the fact that Louisa and Martha "decided to emigrate to the warmth & clean air of Australia in 1892." He additionally endows Louisa with a weak heart, which she had allegedly strained during an excursion to Mount Snowdon, an ailment "from which she never recovered." In his brief memoir the artist appears to be an invalid, which is clearly contradicted by the fact that she did not only survive the strenuous voyage to Australia, but also went on to live, and paint, there until she eventually died two weeks before her 93rd birthday. Franklin's phrases are thus

clearly euphemistic; they are also reminiscent of the claims made by Victorian women travellers, such as Isabella Bird, who complained eloquently about their delicate health before embarking on the most extraordinary voyages. The case of Louisa Haynes, however, was somewhat different. Given the fact that Louisa gave birth to a son soon after her arrival in Adelaide, who died before his first birthday, it seems that references to the artist's 'delicate health' and Australia's 'healthy climate' were in fact polite allusions to the artist's delicate state, i.e. her pregnancy.[3] Since pregnancy out of wedlock, and giving birth to an 'illegitimate' child, would have condemned her to the status of 'fallen woman' in the eyes of polite society in Victorian England, the artist chose to emigrate to Australia together with her sister Martha, and also with Edward Le Freimann, the father of the child she was expecting, in 1892.

7 The choice of Australia was not that surprising, given the fact that since its inception as a penal colony in 1788 the colonial periphery was conceived of as a "receptacle for the unwanted," with emigration envisioned as an "option really only for the ineffectual, the inoffensive lower orders, and those […] who cannot ideologically be accommodated at the centre" (Cheadle 102). This is famously the case in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), where the reformed prostitute Martha and the equally fallen Little Emily are shipped off to Australia together with the financially distressed Micawber family. Fiction in this case followed reality as Dickens himself had been involved in the Urania Cottage project, established in 1847 and funded by Angela Burdett-Coutts, that was to provide shelter, "together with education and training, for prostitute, criminal, and otherwise socially outcast and impoverished women who agreed to begin a new life overseas" (Bowen 7-8). Meanwhile, the Australian colonies had been advertising for able-bodied men to immigrate, following the Australian gold rushes of the early 1850s, and the end of convict transportation in 1868. Emigration to Australia soon became a topic favoured by Victorian painters, including Abraham Solomon's *Second Class – The Parting* (1854), depicting a young boy about to emigrate to Australia (as suggested by the posters visible in the background, advertising destinations in Australia, such as Sydney and Port Phillip); it is part of a whole group of paintings featuring people travelling on trains, as in Augustus Leopold Egg's *Travelling Companions* (1862), a painting featuring two identically-clad sisters travelling in a railway carriage, presumably in the south of France (Wood 62-63). In Birmingham, the newly

[3] The almost identical words are used both by Joan Kerr, who writes that Louisa "strained her heart" during an excursion to the Welsh mountains and "was never again perfectly healthy" ("Louisa M. Haynes" 370) and by John Clark, who refers to Haynes family members suffering from "ill health" to which a vegetarian diet and emigration to South Australia's "warmth and clean air" was to provide a remedy (74), which points to the fact that neither did any further research on the matter; they merely paraphrased Franklin's brief remarks and obviously failed to realise the meaning hidden behind the euphemistic phrases he employs.

founded Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG), officially opened in 1885, exhibited several large-scale paintings depicting passengers in trains and on board ships destined to Australia, including "the most famous of all Victorian paintings on the theme of emigration" (Wood 110), Ford Madox Brown's *The Last of England* (1855), exhibited and acquired by BMAG in 1891, shortly before Louisa Haynes embarked for South Australia.

8 The choice of destination thus seems plausible, even if the rupture that migration to Australia entailed may seem extreme. In order to fathom the social constraints even Victorian painters faced, Nigel Daly's *The Lost Pre-Raphaelite* provides an interesting case in point. Daly demonstrates to which manipulative extremes two well-connected English families were driven in order to conceal the relationship and subsequent birth of the 'illegitimate' child of Robert Bateman, another 'forgotten' Pre-Raphaelite painter, and the aristocratic Caroline Howard. Had the affair become publicly known, the scandal would have had destructive results for even distant members of the families involved. Daly also touches on the fate of Simeon Solomon, the gifted painter and poet who disappeared into obscurity due to what the Victorian establishment regarded as transgressive behaviour: Solomon was arrested for an act of "gross indecency" with another man in 1873 and subsequently refused

> to conform to the hypocritical moral conventions of Victorian society. As a result he descended, literally, into the gutter. Shoeless, ragged and an alcoholic, he became an inmate of St Giles's Workhouse in Seven Dials, London, where he died in 1905. (96)

In spite of the popularity of the Pre-Raphaelites, and prevailing notions concerning artists' Bohemian lifestyle, critics have shown how carefully these artists sought to conform to social standards at least outwardly, in order to avoid public scandal, which would have led to ostracism and put an end to their careers, artistic or otherwise, as in the case of Solomon. Had Louisa Haynes given birth to her child in Birmingham, she, as well as the surviving members of her family, would have become social outcasts. The 'stain' of illegitimacy, fictionalized in Victorian novels and melodramas and its symbolic punishment obsessively captured in contemporary paintings of sickly, dying or drowned 'fallen' women, would have brought financial disaster to her and to her sisters. Who would have sent their daughters to board at Emily's school or learn how to play the piano in Martha's lodgings? Who would have employed Louisa as a teacher, let alone exhibited or bought any of her paintings?

III. An Alternative Version of Australian Impressionism

9 To the artist, Australia did not only have the clear advantage of being the land of opportunity; it also provided the opportunity of new beginnings and new identities. She boarded ship as Louisa Haynes, together with the father of her unborn child who then went by

the name of Edward Le Freimann, and with her equally unmarried sister, Martha Haynes, who may have functioned as a chaperon. On arrival in Adelaide she became Louisa Le Freimann, and thus fashioned herself as a married woman, the wife of Mr. Le Freimann with whom she took up residence in Flinders Street, Adelaide. It is here that the couple's son Idris Louis was born, and died, in 1893; it is also here that their daughter Gladys Irene was born in 1895, one of several daughters Le Freimann had with his various partners or self-styled 'wives.' He soon moved out, probably to live temporarily with his other common-law wife Emily and their daughter Gertrude Iris (who shared the initials of her name with her younger half-sister), and continued to pursue his fraudulent 'medical' career. From then on Louisa had to fend for herself and for her young child, struggling not only to make ends meet but also continuing to work as an artist. In spite of her strong non-conformist convictions, she would uphold her assumed identity for society's sake, and thus for sheer economic necessity, as a sense of propriety would guarantee her own and her daughter's survival, for the rest of her long life.

10. In stark contrast to the fate she would have faced in Birmingham, Louisa Haynes Le Freimann's career prospered in Australia. She became a member of the South Australian Society of Arts, more or less upon arrival in Adelaide, where she was duly "added to the committee" in 1893 ("South Australian Society of Arts"); she was also elected as a member of the South Australian Photographic Society in 1894 ("The Photographic Society"). After a professional controversy at the South Australian Society of Arts in 1895, she joined the more rebellious Adelaide Easel Club, where she was elected as member of the committee in 1896 ("The Adelaide Easel Club"). It is here that she exhibited for the first and only time her controversial *Bush Picnic* painting, at the annual exhibition of the Adelaide Easel Club in 1896, mentioned by an anonymous art critic as "A Picnic Party. L. H. Le Friemann [sic]. A strange mixture of colours ("The Easel Club's Exhibition").

Ill. 2: Louisa Haynes Le Freimann, *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide* (1896)

11 Kerr reads the painting against details from the artist's life, such as her vegetarian lifestyle, common-law marriage to an already married self-proclaimed 'naturopath,' her interest in Eastern spiritual belief systems, the concepts of karma and rebirth, and her subsequent involvement with the Theosophical Society. Kerr writes:

> Few such unorthodoxies are evident in this rather bland painting. The tent is the most exotic element, making the occasion seem more like an Indian than an Australian scene. Since both Louisa and the Le Freimann family emigrated to South Australia direct from Birmingham, it evidently had something to do with Le Freimann's health notions, too […]. Hence this modest little oil painting of an apparently typical picnic conceals a surprisingly unorthodox artist and a most unusual happy family group. (Kerr, "*Bush Picnic Scene*" 67)

Whereas Kerr contrasts the "modest" painting's "bland" and 'un-Australian' appearance with juicy details from the artist's lifestyle that she perceives as being 'concealed' beneath what appears (to her) at surface level as a conventional scene,[4] *Bush Picnic Scene* to me is very much an Australian painting in that it speaks of the hybrid nature and global reach of the late colonial era. By grouping together an extended English family (in a most unorthodox sense)

[4] In a similar way, John Clark, who included the painting in his *Picturing Australia* and whose description of the painting is clearly based on Joan Kerr's assessment of the artist and her painting (which in turn is entirely based on Franklin's one-page sketch of his aunt), writes: "This ordinary sylvan scene was painted by an anything-but-ordinary English artist, Louisa Haynes (1863-1956), an agnostic turned theosophist and, most memorably, a member of a longstanding ménage à trois" (74).

under the shade of an Asian-style tent in the Australian bush, identified only by the painting's title as being somewhere 'near Adelaide,' the artist has not only linked a remote spot in the Australian bush to a wider colonial context, she has also linked her personal story to the global framework of Empire and migration, and the emerging national narrative of Australia.

12. Through its depiction of the Australian landscape (indicated mainly via the bright red earth), through its Impressionistic style and relatively small scale, reminiscent of the dimensions of a cigar box lid (9 inches by 5 inches), a format famously employed by Australian painters of the Heidelberg School, the painting can further be linked to Australian Impressionism, considered to be the first genuinely Australian school of painting. The Impressionist movement in Australia has also long been associated with a particularly physical approach to landscape painting. The artists, among them Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton and Charles Conder, mainly worked out in the open and established artists' camps in Heidelberg near Melbourne and at Sirius Cove in Sydney. In their paintings, commonly regarded as "the most iconic and the most popular works in Australian culture" ("Australian Impressionism"), the Australian bush is a male domain. Tom Roberts' *Shearing the Rams* (1890) and *Bailing Up* (1895), Walter Withers' *The Fossickers* (1893), Frederick McCubbin's *Down on His Luck* (1889) and *On the Wallaby Track* (1896) are cases in point. As McLean writes, "these painters forged a pre-Federation sense of national identity" and "seemed to create, for the first time, national, rather than colonial, pictures" (57).

13 *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide*, by contrast, seems colonial, rather than national, in that it depicts a party of English teetotalers grouped around an Indian tent, with the only male in the picture wearing another colonial accessory originally associated with India, namely the pith helmet. The tent was not limited to the Indian context, though; bathing tents were a familiar site on beaches in British seaside resorts, as well as on late nineteenth-century Australian beaches, but clearly somewhat out of place in the Australian bush, rendering the scene slightly humorous. This notion of displacement is not shared by the group of women who have arranged themselves comfortably around their picnic and in the shade of their tent. The scenery is pastoral in the traditional sense of the word, and thus contradicts the iconic scenes of Australia's "pastoral industry, seen as the embodiment of the Australian character" (Radford and Hylton 177) as idealised in Australian Impressionist art.

14 Impressionism saw a development from the small scale of its early days to increasingly large canvases. As McLean writes: "Roberts and Streeton monumentalised the space, as if the viewer's eye was able to command it all, rather than be lost in its expanse"

(57). In their paintings the ubiquitous gum trees have become the new icons of Australia's wilderness, celebrated famously in Hans Heysen's *Mystic Morn* (1904). Strikingly, these new 'national' landscapes are devoid of Indigenous Australians, a development that is similar to that in American landscape painting, where Native Americans were increasingly pictured in the margins, or at a distance, as a romanticized part of nature, and generally vanishing, suggesting that "the life cycle of the native population has been completed" (Lubbers, *Born for the Shade* 170). In Australia, as McLean suggests, gum trees are

> symbols of the new nation that bear the imprint of a repressed aboriginality. Another example is the 'bushie' on the wallaby track, an exemplary substitute figure of the Aborigine in the mould of the American frontier ethic, advanced by Frederick Jackson Turner, in which the white frontiersman takes on the qualities of the Indian. A good example of this is McCubbin's *The Pioneer* (1904). (59)

These rugged individuals and the muscular image of masculinity they represent are thus modelled on the visual vocabulary of the frontier idolized in American landscape painting of the nineteenth century. Tom Roberts' iconic *Break Away!* (1891) is a case in point. According to a contemporary review, it depicts a critical moment, when the mounted stockman is "vainly trying to stop a rushing mob of thirsty sheep who sight water" (qtd. in Radford and Hylton 177). Through this "expression of extreme physical energy" Roberts, according to Radford and Hylton, sought to reflect "the heroic quality of characteristically Australian bush life" (178). The painting is also suggestive of a larger symbolism. The rapid movement of the sheep and the extreme poise of the stockman leaning into the saddle, his right arm stretched out as far as possible, waving at the sheep and simultaneously gesturing beyond the fenced-in land, suggests that this sentimentally Australian painting is not only akin to the American frontier ethic, it also displays another key feature of American landscape painting in that it indicates a spatial as well as a temporal axis (as analysed by Lubbers in "Modelle Nationaler Identität") of expansion into the dry, dusty, red expanse of the unexplored, and 'uncultivated' Australian continent.

15 Such notions of the 'frontier,' of ruthless expansion into and exploitation of the Australian continent and its native peoples, are clearly absent in Haynes Le Freimann's painting that is, moreover, devoid of gum-trees. Here, the women are placed centre stage; they are neither weak (as the exhausted young mother in McCubbin's *On the Wallaby Track*) nor lost (as in McCubbin's *Lost* of 1886) nor overdressed ghost-like apparitions (as in Arthur Streeton's *Near Heidelberg* of 1890). The quiet, self-absorbed group of women and girls arranged informally in a circle is suggestive of a self-contained, utopian community of women. Like a miniature version of the all-female society envisioned two decades later in

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), they seem suspended in time and space on their slightly elevated sandy sunlit spot – one woman seeking the comfort and shade of the tent where she is resting with her baby (i.e. the artist and her one-year-old daughter Gladys), the other (i.e. Le Freimann's wife Emily) in conversation with a dark-haired woman in a red dress reclining comfortably with her back to the viewer (presumably the artist's sister Martha), while a girl (Emily's daughter Gertrude, then aged twelve), who is seated next to the artist and her baby, is glancing protectively at her baby half-sister. The women thus form a rather unusual family-group, in that they are all related, in one way or the other: either by birth or through their relationship with the only male in the picture. Another curious detail is worth noting concerning the woman in the red dress. The artist's sister Martha Haynes died of a stroke in Adelaide in June 1896. Therefore, the fact that the woman is the only one facing away from the viewer could indicate that she was, in fact, no longer alive when the picture was painted – a reading that could be supported by the woman's black belt (or black crepe) that stands in stark contrast to the bright colour of her dress. The group thus not only links Le Freimann's two partners and their daughters; it links the living and the dead, in an equally peaceful, sisterly way, suggestive of the artist's spiritual conviction.

16 The women are separated from the only man through several rocks, and the brook flowing in the foreground separates them further from the viewer, emphasizing the insular quality of the resting place of the little picnic group. Considering the non-conformist nature of the family group indicated by John Clark, who chose the caption "Ménage à trois" for his brief description of the painting, the leisurely all-female group may also be linked to harem scenes, popular with nineteenth-century French Orientalist painters. This reading could be supported by the presence of the two women's partner, Edward Le Freimann, who is gazing intently in their direction, mimicking the voyeuristic male gaze associated with the Orientalist genre, and possibly gesturing to the 'scandalous' nature of the family group. However, all of the women are appropriately dressed in accordance with Victorian English women's Orientalist discourse on female propriety (as analysed by Reina Lewis in *Gendering Orientalism*), a perspective famously introduced by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the eighteenth century. This tentative reading could additionally be supported by the presence of the Oriental tent which was, after all, widely used in Britain and overseas as a changing cabin serving to protect women from prying gazes at the seaside. Moreover, the voyeuristic male gaze is effectively hindered through the double barrier of the rocks and smoke from the campfire that has been lit somewhat redundantly. This group of vegetarians does not require a

barbeque of grilled meat; in reversal of traditional roles, the only man is probably pictured putting the kettle on in order to prepare tea.

17 On close inspection and through consideration of the personal, social and national contexts in which it was produced, the painting is thus anything but "bland," "modest" or "ordinary." At surface level it portrays a quietly feminine version of Impressionism, and yet it is highly subversive and strongly at odds with the ruthless expansionism and frontier rhetoric portrayed by the school of male Australian Impressionists. Rather than expressing a desire "to be absorbed into the land and locality" (McLean 57) the picnic painting literally provides a 'green' vision of peaceful co-existence with nature that critiques the destruction of nature, as depicted in Arthur Streeton's *The Selector's Hut* (1890), an "iconic image of the 'pioneering spirit' that underpinned Australian nationalist attitudes of the late nineteenth century" (Radford 69). Moreover, the unorthodox family group offers a radically different perspective on possibilities of tolerant co-existence in a nurturing and literally matriarchal, rather than patriarchal, society. On yet another level, the scene alludes to the artists' camps favoured by Australian Impressionist painters which were largely closed to women artists. In this sense, Louisa Haynes Le Freimann's *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide* may be regarded as a comment on the frolicking and male bonding that was associated with artists' camps consisting of improvised huts outside Melbourne and on Sydney's beaches. Ironically, these camps have been equally critiqued as being 'un-Australian,' probably because they, too, stood at odds with the Victorian code of conduct. As McLean observes:

> While the Impressionist nude is *plein-air* and seems a natural part of the life and ethic of the bohemian camps around Sydney and Melbourne at the time, it has often been pointed out that there is nothing particularly Australian about these artists' camps. Smith, for example, saw them as part of an international 'neo-pagan interest in nudity, sex and sun-cults.' (McLean 59)

IV. Conclusion

18 This paper has concerned itself with reconstructing some details pertaining to the life and work of Anglo-Australian painter Louisa Haynes Le Freimann. The difficulty of assembling details from the artist's life is strongly connected to the social restrictions women had to face in both Victorian England and in turn-of-the-century Australia. Had the fact become publicly known that she had two children out of wedlock with a presumably married man, the artist would have been regarded as a 'fallen woman;' her and her family's reputation would have been ruined and her career would never have happened. Therefore, the artist actively went to great pains to avoid such a fate, including emigration to South Australia and the life-long pretence of being a married woman. *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide* (1896),

one of the pictures that she painted at the end of her short but highly productive Adelaide period, resonates strongly with her personal history. Its rediscovery, one century after it was first exhibited, is due to Joan Kerr's *Heritage* project of 1995. Both Joan Kerr, who regarded the picture as part of the suppressed heritage of Australian women artists, and John Clark, who chose it for *Picturing Australia*, suggesting that it represents a particular, if curious, moment in Australia's national narrative, failed to understand the complexities resonating in Louisa Haynes Le Freimann's *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide*, but they nevertheless acknowledged its significance in a larger national context. Both Kerr and Clark had only a one-page memoir to rely upon; written by the artist's nephew in the 1970s it still echoes the 'cover up' in the extended Haynes family to secure a general sense of propriety.

19 In spite of the paucity of public material (itself partly incorrect) available on the artist's life, an investigation of various archival documents has brought to light additional layers of meaning inscribed in her enigmatic *Bush Picnic Scene near Adelaide* (1896) that clearly challenges the discourse on the emerging Australian nation in the pre-Federation years. As I have shown, the painting can be linked, through style, scale and genre, to Australian Impressionism. And yet it consciously contradicts the masculinist as well as nationalistic vision of that school of painting in various ways. It idealizes quiet tranquility instead of aggressive expansionism, sisterhood and an alternative way of life instead of repressive gender roles and male bonding. It also suggests peaceful co-existence with nature indicated by the vegetarian life-style to which this nonconformist group subscribed. All these layers are to be found in a small painting created three years after the artist's arrival in the 'Land of Opportunity' from Birmingham, one of Britain's busiest cities, in both economic and cultural terms. It is through the exploration of the painting that the artist's hidden history unfolds. The painting also indicates that in spite of the social restrictions women faced during the artist's lifetime, Australia did promise a range of possibilities that England probably would not have provided.

20 One important feature was the chance for the artist to reinvent herself, first in Adelaide, then in Sydney, where she went in 1897, and would spend the rest of her life – not in a permanent ménage-à-trois, as John Clark implies, but living with her daughter, son-in-law, and her two grandchildren, until they moved out and had families of their own. The story of her Sydney years is strongly connected with her commitment to the Theosophical Society, which she joined within days of her arrival in the city. Significantly, the members' book of Blavatsky Lodge in Sydney records that two people joined on the same day: Louisa Le Freimann and Edward Le Freimann. Once more, the artist made the effort to present herself as

a married woman. Even though Le Freimann seems to have left for good soon after, this seems to have been one last act of solidarity with the woman who risked so much when she came to Australia with him.

21 Although Louisa Haynes Le Freimann was part of the Theosophical Society (TS) for decades, her work has not yet been appreciated in that context. Jenny McFarlane, the author of an in-depth study of women artists in the Theosophical Society, the first and only one so far, lists Louisa Haynes among a number of TS artists who "appear to have no connection, innovative or otherwise, between their work and their real commitment to the Society" (161, note 7). The fact that the picnic painting is expressive of exactly the features that McFarlane identifies as being representative of the alternative Modernism created by TS women artists such as Jane Price, Florence Fuller and Ethel Carrick, namely "essentially feminist, spiritual and cross-cultural" (160) clearly contradicts this assessment. The painting even links the visible and the invisible world, expressive of the artist's spiritual vision. This is yet another level of the 'hidden history' of Louisa Haynes Le Freimann that is still to be discovered, which provides an important alternative version, and vision, of Australia.

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