



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Thomas, Sarah (2015) Allegorizing extinction: Humboldt, Darwin and the valedictory image. In: Brauer, Fae and Keshavjee, Serena (eds.) *Picturing Evolution and Extinction*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. ISBN 9781443872539.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/9975/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively

ALLEGORIZING EXTINCTION:

HUMBOLDT, DARWIN AND THE VALEDICTORY IMAGE

SARAH THOMAS

By the mid-nineteenth century a body of paintings had been produced in several continents which allegorized a phenomenon widely held to be true: that ‘savage’ peoples across the imperial world were sadly but ineluctably doomed to extinction.¹ While the causes of this apparent state of affairs were hotly debated, the presumption itself was profoundly flawed.² The paintings of indigenous peoples shown in deep shadow silhouetted against a sky at sunset, by Eugene von Guérard in Australia and Albert Bierstadt in North America, are the focus of this essay. They served as elegiac valedictions that highlighted the power of nature in determining racial destiny. Poised at the cusp between the competing world views of Humboldt and Darwin, they actively participated in the type of extinction discourse that ultimately—if often unwittingly—served to justify the unparalleled global decimation of indigenous peoples in the colonial era.³

As will be revealed, both itinerant artists were engaged in a Humboldtian project, with the empirical observation of a unified and harmonious natural world at its core. Paradoxically however, it will also become clear that the underlying message of this remarkably cogent group of paintings was profoundly Darwinian or, as we shall see, ‘Darwinistic’, portraying a vision of indigenous peoples whose apparent inability to adapt to the harsh reality of imperial occupation would ensure their demise. Thus while on the surface the paintings appear to show humanity in total harmony with nature, in fact what they presage is a much harsher world, one which Darwin famously introduced in his epochal book of 1859, titled in full *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*. While Darwin’s theory of a brutal struggle for survival may not be immediately apparent in these mournful eulogies, and indeed may not have been fully comprehended or even accepted by the artists considered here, in their equation of indigeneity with what will be argued was a prelapsarian past, the paintings served to confirm Darwin’s warning that adaptation was essential to survival, and that species which do not change will become extinct.⁴

As a young naturalist Darwin idolised Humboldt, whom, he wrote, ‘like another Sun illumines everything I behold’.⁵ Despite this reverence, Darwin’s radical vision with the struggle for survival at its core, was profoundly at odds with the harmonious and unified natural world presented by his mentor. I do not wish to argue that Darwin’s work had an immediate or even direct impact on the allegorical paintings of von Guérard and Bierstadt, for as we shall see while their familiarity with Humboldt most likely stemmed from their training at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, history does not furnish us with a similarly useful connecting thread from the Englishman, Darwin. In fact the date of von Guérard’s *Stony Rises: Lake Corangamite* (1857) (Fig. 1) two years prior to the publication of *Origin* mitigates against a neat and compelling argument for direct Darwinian influence. Nevertheless, it is well known not only that Darwin had been quietly reworking his field notes since the 1830s, but perhaps more pertinently that he drew on a myriad of existing theories about the natural world. His ideas were, in the succinct words of Ted Benton, ‘formed, constrained and enabled by the wider discourse of early-nineteenth-century natural history’.⁶

Peter Bowler, among others, has pointed out that the Darwinian revolution began well before Darwin was even born.⁷ In acknowledging this, David Bindman has noted the difficulties of pinpointing Darwinian influence with precision, and he provides a nuanced semantic distinction:

... between the ‘Darwinian’ (deriving from Darwin’s own writings), and the ‘Darwinistic’. ‘Darwinistic’ ideas may pre- or post-date *Origin*: they are ideas which were commonly attributed to Darwin, but whose connection with his opinions might

be indirect or even oppositional, given the widespread acceptance of theories of evolution before he published *Origin*.⁸

In this light I wish to propose a ‘Darwinistic’ reading of what I shall call the ‘dying light’ paintings under discussion here; that while they cannot be directly traced to the impact of Darwin’s revolutionary book, they nevertheless belie concerns which were central to mid-nineteenth century scientific discourse, and which by the end of the century would come to be closely associated with Darwin; namely, the inevitable extinction of ‘savage’ races when pitted against ‘civilised nations’.

By mid-century many people were genuinely confounded by the rate at which indigenous populations across the New World were declining, without convincing physical causes to explain it. Even the young Darwin in the mid-1830s had written in his journal that as well as the ‘several evident causes of destruction’ of the **Aboriginals**, there seemed ‘to be some more mysterious agency at work.’⁹ Many put the mystery down to the hand of God. Yet Darwin himself acknowledged that ‘Wherever the European has trod, death seems to pursue the aboriginal. We may look to the wide extent of the Americas, Polynesia, the Cape of Good Hope, and **Australia**, and we find the same result ...’¹⁰ There were numerous causes for the decline of indigenous peoples, and as Patrick **Brantlinger**, Henry **Reynolds** and numerous others have pointed out, many such causes were not at all mysterious: They were the result of violence, warfare and genocide. They were also the result of infectious diseases which, though not well understood, devastated populations. At the same time it was widely held that the state of ‘savagery’ itself was self-extinguishing.¹¹

The particular group of mid-century paintings that is the focus of this essay had a powerful message: that uncivilised races were on an inexorable collision course with ordained destiny.¹² In his study of the ‘doomed race theory’ as it pertained to the Australian Aboriginals, Russell **McGregor** has pointed out that the development of the expectation of extinction in the nineteenth century coincided with a growing acceptance that Aboriginal people were incapable of becoming civilised.¹³ While nothing, it was widely believed, could alter this path of history, artist eyewitnesses such as von Guérard and Bierstadt felt they had a moral obligation to record this primitive past before it was extinguished. In this sense their mission had much in common with the broader aims of anthropologists and ethnographers of the day, and this was particularly so in Germany at mid-century. The ethnographer Adolf **Bastian**, for example, followed in Humboldt’s footsteps by spending 25 years of his life travelling the globe on expeditions—scrupulous observation, he believed, was the key to understanding humankind, and to this end he became an avid collector of ethnographic objects.¹⁴ Such travellers—artists and ethnographers alike—were driven, at least in part, by a sense of urgency. This theme of the ‘vanishing primitive’ is pervasive, says historian James **Clifford**, the very term ‘traditional’ to describe a society in itself implying a rupture with the past:

[P]opulations are regularly violently disrupted, sometimes exterminated. Traditions are constantly being lost. But the persistent and repetitious ‘disappearance’ of social forms at the moment of their ethnographic representation demands analysis as a narrative structure.¹⁵

1859 was a seminal year which saw both the death of the renowned explorer and natural scientist Humboldt and the publication of Darwin’s *Origin*. It was also the year in which German-born American artist, Bierstadt, made his first expedition to the American West, with the intention of sketching scenes for a series of large paintings of the subject. Having only recently returned from a period of study at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, Bierstadt was anxious to witness for himself the kind of American wilderness that his great rival, Frederic **Church**, was then painting to great acclaim. After managing to secure a place on Colonel Frederick West **Lander’s** government expedition to the Rocky Mountains, over several months Bierstadt produced numerous detailed landscape and figure studies. On his return, he settled in New York City and began to paint a series of virtuosic landscapes that would soon earn his reputation as one of America’s leading landscape painters. The works included intimate scenes of Indian life such as *Indian Encampment*, *Shoshone Village* (1860) (Fig. 2) and *Toward the Setting Sun* (1862) (Fig. 3), culminating in the monumental canvas, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander’s Peak*, (1863) (Fig. 4).

While Bierstadt was encountering the American West, over ten thousand miles away in colonial Victoria and New South Wales another Düsseldorf-trained landscape painter, von Guérard, was on a distant expedition of his own. He too was making sketches which would subsequently be worked up into major oil paintings; these oscillated between commissioned views of homesteads in cultivated country, and scenes of wilderness that reveal more than a passing resemblance to the contemporaneous paintings of Bierstadt and his Hudson River School peers in North America.¹⁶ Like Bierstadt, von Guérard specialised in scenes of wild nature. If figures were there at all—whether European or indigenous—they were on the whole small and seemingly

inconsequential.¹⁷ Yet two years earlier he had produced a major work in which the human element appeared to take on a heightened significance, and which remains distinctive within his prolific *oeuvre*: *Stony Rises: Lake Corangamite*.

Here were two landscape painters trained at the Düsseldorf Art Academy working in remote regions of the New World, who in the late 1850s and early 1860s turned their attentions, if only momentarily, to creating melancholy eulogies to the indigenous people they were encountering on their travels. The similarities between such paintings as *Stony Rises* and *Towards the Setting Sun* are compelling, despite being produced in geographically and culturally disparate sites. The major allegorical device in each work is, of course, the setting sun, which provides not only a romantic golden glow across each skyline but also serves to throw both foregrounds, including their occupants, into deep shadow; as this essay will argue, the dying light signalled the demise of an entire people.

That these are paintings with allegorical weight is supported in several ways. Von Guérard's original title was not the geologically and geographically descriptive *Stony Rises, Lake Corangamite*, but rather the more poetic, *An Australian Sunset*.¹⁸ In his essay 'On Ethnographic Allegory', Clifford reminds us of what **allegory** actually is: 'A story in which people, things and happenings have another meaning, as in a fable or parable: allegories are used for teaching or explaining.'¹⁹ This latter point is crucial, for while the paintings served several purposes—not least to satisfy the demands of colonial art markets—in the end both von Guérard and Bierstadt were in the business of creating mythic pictures which engaged with some of the profound dilemmas of the imperial age. Von Guérard's painting was not conceived of as an empirical record, but as an ambitious artistic attempt to capture the spirit of an entire continent.

The 'dying light' paintings also contain other symbolic references to death and decay. In the Australian example, the skeletal form of a dead tree pierces the glowing sky to the left. It has also been suggested that the young blackwood trees may be reminiscent of Roman pines commonly associated with European cemeteries, thus signifying the proximity of death.²⁰ A prominent dead tree also appears in Bierstadt's *Towards the Setting Sun*, and the bare bones of a buffalo are seen in his much larger canvas, *Sunset Light, Wind River Range of the Rocky Mountains*. The association of the setting sun with the passing of indigenous peoples was not only being made visually at mid-century, but was also expressed in words, such as those of the American artist-explorer John Mix Stanley, who in the 1850s and 1860s toured his own travelling Indian gallery in an effort to document this perceived demise. He wrote that his ambitions had been to visit 'those regions where the nature and habits of the Indians are found in their greatest purity and originality ... a people silently retreating or melting away from before the face of civilization like exhalations from the sunlight.'²¹

Despite the fact that von Guérard and Bierstadt worked within a Humboldtian tradition which valued careful observation from nature, these paintings were not simple transcriptions of specific places and peoples. Rather, it will be observed that they were based loosely on a wide range of scenes witnessed and experiences lived. Both artists were, after all, highly attuned to market demands, and were eager to please potential patrons by presenting scenes that were both aesthetically appealing and familiar. In fact it could be argued that the paintings were simply idealised pre-contact views painted for burgeoning colonial art markets. *Stony Rises, Lake Corangamite*, after all, depicts a placid family scene in which a father returns from hunting to the delight of a young child. Certainly this would suggest self sufficiency, harmony with nature, an assured future. However, what this essay will argue is that such paintings also reflect the profound ambivalences which characterised the colonial imagination. These paintings are in many ways idealised views, but their allegorical message is one which resists this reading, and foregrounds instead widespread anxieties around race and sovereignty. In other words, they are examples of what W.J.T. Mitchell has evocatively termed the "'dreamwork" of imperialism'.²²

Bierstadt and the 'picturesque facts of Indian life'

Early in his trip to the American West, Bierstadt penned a letter to the journal *The Crayon* in which he first commended the 'beautiful' scenery with its 'silvery streams' and 'mighty perpendicular cliffs', before turning his attentions to the indigenous inhabitants. They were, he claimed, 'kindly disposed to us' although 'naturally distrustful'. He went on to write about their encroaching extinction:

The manners and customs of the Indians are still as they were hundreds of years ago, and now is the time to paint them, for they are rapidly passing away; and soon will be known only in history. I think that the artist ought to tell his portion of their history as well as the writer; a combination of both will assuredly render it more complete.²³

Thus while Bierstadt's ambition was to pursue a career as a landscape rather than a figure painter, he was nevertheless an enterprising entrepreneur, and quickly recognised that his direct encounters with the exotic 'Red Men' of the West provided opportunities he could exploit for a curious white audience. Engaging in what I will argue was a form of 'salvage ethnography', he set about making careful and detailed sketches of the native Americans from life.²⁴

Bierstadt was by no means the first North American artist to embark on such an exercise. In fact as Brantlinger has pointed out the theme of the dying Indian had pervaded American culture since the end of the American Revolution. 'For more than half a century [after it]', he explains:

Independence Day orations employed the elegiac trope of the dying Indian to celebrate the creation and progress of the new Republic. Even as the citizens of the new nation rejoiced in their new rights, freedom, and radiant future, the dying Indian became the object of national sympathy and mourning. The world of savagery—noble, perhaps, but still savage—was passing away into darkness; the world of white civilisation and progress, with its vanguard in the new United States, was emerging into the full light of day.²⁵

In literature the seemingly ineluctable demise of the American Indian had also become a well established theme in popular literature of the period, most famously in James Fenimore Cooper's romantic novel published in 1826, *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757*. Set during the Seven Years' War, decades before Bierstadt's first visit to the frontier, the book did much to promote the myth that the Mohegan people had all but vanished by the early nineteenth century.²⁶ The book soon made its way into art, such as Thomas Cole's painting, *Scene from "The Last of the Mohicans"*, *Cora Kneeling at the Feet of Tamenund* (1827).

Perhaps an even more significant precursor to Bierstadt's paintings of American Indians can be sourced in the work of two artists who had already made far more dedicated artwork in their focussed attempts at 'salvage ethnography' than their Hudson River School successors. The Canadian artist, Paul Kane, and the American, George Catlin. Kane had embarked on journeys to remote parts of the Canadian and North American West in the latter half of the 1840s, returning home to Toronto after each trip armed with hundreds of detailed sketches and notes which he later developed into oil paintings and a book, *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America*. Published in the very year that Bierstadt embarked on his own expedition to the West, the book met with both critical and popular acclaim.²⁷ In its preface the artist clearly expressed pathos over the disappearing aborigine:

All traces of his footsteps are fast being obliterated from his once favourite haunts, and those who would see the aborigines of the country in their original state, or seek to study their native manners and customs, must travel far through the pathless forest to find them.²⁸

Many reviewers confirmed what they understood as the urgency of Kane's project:

One must make haste to visit the Red Men ... Their tribes, not long since still masters of a whole world, are disappearing rapidly, driven back and destroyed by the inroads of the white race ... Their future is inevitable ... The Indians are doomed; their fate will be that of so many primitive races now gone.²⁹

Kane had in turn been deeply impressed by the work of his American contemporary, George Catlin, whose paintings of Indians he had seen in London in 1843.³⁰ He too had published a popular memoir of his adventures, *Letter and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians* (1841). Like Bierstadt, Kane and Catlin focussed on a pre-contact vision of the American West, one which appeared to ignore the reality that native Indians were being forced, often brutally, to adapt to life in a rapidly developing colonised world. Thousands were being killed, while many others were dying from European diseases. As several scholars have noted in recent years, while 'total extinction did not happen, it almost happened.'³¹

Outbreaks of violence were integral to frontier life, and indeed it was one such event that had instigated Lander's expedition to the Rocky Mountains. In 1857 a group of Mormons and American Indians had attacked and killed a group of 128 Arkansas emigrants. Subsequently known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and thought to have been fuelled by anti-Mormon sentiment, it was this conflict which led to the Overland Trail being re-routed by Lander, Chief Engineer of that division of the Trail. Lander was advised to survey an alternative route and to placate the Indians who had lost trading opportunities; Bierstadt accompanied him, keen to see the West for himself. *The New Bedford Daily Mercury* announced his departure for the Rocky Mountains, for the declared purpose of studying 'the scenery of that wild region, and the picturesque facts of Indian life.'³²

In addition to numerous sketches, Bierstadt returned from the West with numerous stereoscopes and ethnographic artefacts, and it was not long before he had begun to exploit his interest in, and first-hand experience of, Indian life. At New York's Metropolitan Fair in 1864, for example, he was asked to organise an 'Indian Department' for the amusement of visitors. He arranged for a *tableau vivant* of nineteen American Indian performers to recreate those in the foreground of his painting which was also hung at the Fair, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* (1863), in which Indians were shown carrying out essential tasks such as preparing food and hides.³³ In reporting on the enormously popular event, even providing an illustration (Fig. 5), *Harper's Weekly* stressed their dispossession:

In the Fourteenth Street Building Bierstadt's Indian Wigwam has been constantly crowded by visitors desiring to study the habits and peculiarities of the aborigines. Several entertainments have been given daily by the Indians. Our Sketch represents a *War Dance*, as given on several occasions to the intense gratification of all spectators. Historically, no feature of the Fair has greater interest than this in which the life of those who, only a little while ago, held undisputed possession of our continent, is reproduced by a handful of the once absolute tribes for the pleasure of the pale-faced race, whose ancestors pushed them into obscurity and historical oblivion.³⁴

The reporter's use of the past tense here suggests that by this time 'historical oblivion' was already considered a *fait accompli* for North America's Indians.

Von Guérard's *Stony Rises*

The same was true in the Australian colonies, where a vigorous debate as to whether or not the Aboriginals could be civilised was fought throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century. Barron Field for example, Judge of the New South Wales Supreme Court, claimed confidently in 1825 that 'the Australian will never be civilised'.³⁵ He questioned whether the 'decay or extermination of the simple race of Australia should be the gradual end of our colonization', and that if it was then perhaps, 'better that their name should pass away from the earth'.³⁶ His view was elaborated in romantic verse too:

Yet deem not his man useless,
But let him pass, —a blessing on his head!
...
May never we pretend to civilize,
And make him only captive!
Let him be free of mountain solitudes;
And let him, where and when he will, sit down
Beneath the trees, and with his faithful dog
Share his chance-gather'd meal; and, finally,
As in the eye of Nature he has lived,

So in the eye of Nature let him die!³⁷

The Polish explorer, Paul **Strezlecki**, was highly critical of the colonial missionaries who were attempting to 'civilise' Aboriginals by introducing them to what he believed was a religion completely irrelevant to their own society. Despite taking a strongly humanitarian view however, he too ultimately believed that they had: 'the sentence of extinction stamped indelibly upon their foreheads.'³⁸ Atrocities on the **Australian frontier** were becoming more widespread during the 1830s and 1840s, with punitive expeditions conducted during the 1850s; clashes between colonists and Aboriginals began soon after settlement in 1788, and continued for over 150 years.³⁹

While frontier violence is not overtly apparent in the *oeuvre* of von Guérard, it nevertheless provides a vital historical context within which to consider *Stony Rises: Lake Corangamite*. Austrian-born von Guérard had been lured from Düsseldorf by the Victorian gold-rush, as well as the prospect of discovering exciting new scenes to paint. His art training at the Academy had fostered a keen interest in geology, and he was particularly fascinated by the lie of the land around the Stony Rises in Victoria's Western District, through which he travelled in March and April 1857.⁴⁰ He produced several pencil sketches of the subject, none of which appear to relate directly to the finished oil. Indeed while the sketch shown in Fig.6) is loosely reminiscent of the scene in the finished painting, scholars have pointed out that not only are there no monoliths of this magnitude in the region, but neither are there any sketches which relate directly to the painting.⁴¹ This is highly unusual in the context of von Guérard's *oeuvre*: Here was a painter whose Humboldtian training emphasised the fundamental significance of empirical observation; even his grandest of studio oil paintings are known for their overall fidelity to actual places. What scholars have also pointed out is that the country around the Stony Rises is considered to have been of particularly sacred significance to the region's first inhabitants, the Gulidjan people, and that in the 1840s, it had been the site of considerable bloody conflict between them and the European occupiers.⁴² By the time von Guérard was passing through only sixteen Gulidjan were said to be still alive, none of whom lived in the bush, but rather worked on local sheep and cattle stations.⁴³ Indeed by the time the artist was traversing this part of the country, frontier violence in the area was a thing of the past.

While von Guérard was primarily a painter of landscapes, in his early years in Australia he had tested the still young colonial art market in Melbourne by producing a group of genre paintings of Aboriginals, including *Aborigines Met on the Road to the Diggings* (1854) (Fig. 7).⁴⁴ Highly unusual within the artist's *oeuvre*, this narrative painting shows two gold-diggers bartering for a possum-skin cloak, one on his knees. While the abolition of slavery across the British empire had formally ceased in 1838, many contemporary viewers would surely still have recognised the bold inversion here of the popular and enduring abolitionist motif of a chained supplicant slave.⁴⁵ Painted three years before *Stony Rises*, this work shows none of the foreboding symbolism of the later example; rather, the light and airy scene presents an optimistic vision of cultural exchange and harmony. Here an Aboriginal family is portrayed as healthy, fertile, industrious and friendly: A robust and harmonious future for all seems assured

Despite this, we know from one of von Guérard's diary entries the same year that this painting was executed, that he was not only aware of Aboriginal decline, but that he was under no illusions about its cause. On 16 March 1854 he wrote:

This morning I saw a miserable group of eight Aborigines, clad in the most ludicrous odds-and-ends of European wearing apparel, and nearly all in a drunken condition. It is sad to see how the poor creatures are demoralised by the white man's influence.⁴⁶

Von Guérard's words reveal his sympathy for the Aboriginals' plight, a factor which adds poignancy to his elegiac painting three years later. Not only presaging the extinction of a people, the allegorical *Stony Rises* may be also deciphered as an expression of personal sympathy and cultural loss.

Humboldt's **Reisekünstler**

While Bierstadt missed von Guérard by only one year on his arrival in Düsseldorf in 1853, both artists were trained at the city's internationally renowned art academy during a period when German interest in the New World was flourishing. Such excitement was generated largely by the publication of the first two volumes of Humboldt's great book, *Cosmos*, in which the author had singled out a privileged role for landscape painters, which was to record nature in all its glorious detail 'on the spot'. In his view, the painter needed to observe with the detached eye of a scientist. 'Why may we not be justified in hoping', he asked,

that landscape painting may hereafter bloom with new and yet unknown beauty, when highly-gifted artists shall oftener pass the narrow bounds of the Mediterranean, and shall seize ... the living image of the manifold beauty and grandeur of nature in the humid mountain valleys of the tropical world? ... It is only by coloured sketches taken on the spot, that the artist, inspired by the contemplation of these distant scenes, can hope to reproduce their character in paintings executed after his return.⁴⁷

Humboldt's exaltations thus encouraged the rise of a new type of landscape painter: the *Reisekünstler* or travelling artist, whom he urged to travel beyond Europe to all corners of the globe.⁴⁸ Frederic Church, Bierstadt's great rival, was Humboldt's most ardent American disciple, and his decision to travel to South America in search of tropical scenery was a direct answer to the great scientist's clarion call to landscape painters.

As Mary Louise Pratt has pointed out, Humboldt 'reinvented' South America as nature personified.⁴⁹ Yet for him nature was not simply the raw data that could be recognised, collected and classified as Linnaeus had envisaged half a century earlier. Rather, Humboldt's conception of nature was of dramatic and abundant spectacle that had the power to overwhelm human rationality. It was a deeply romantic vision, one which embraced Edmund Burke's conception of Sublime nature as both Godly and awe-inspiring. Long after the publication of Burke's famous aesthetic treatise a century earlier, the Sublime had continued to permeate European landscape painting and its New World manifestations.⁵⁰ Artists such as Cole, Church, Bierstadt and others in North America, Ferdinand Bellermann, Eduard Hildebrandt and Johann Mauritz Rugendas in South and Central America, and Nicholas Chevalier and von Guérard in Australia and New Zealand, were all in search of Sublime landscape subjects as they travelled. Such artists tended to paint nature as a powerful and imposing force, one that was ultimately indifferent to the specks of humanity which were so often shown to inhabit it.

There are many paintings by Bierstadt and von Guérard that fit comfortably into this trope. As an example, the latter's well-known *North-east View from the Northern Top of Mt Kosciusko* (1863) (Fig. 8) shows two scientists, Georg von Neumayer and his assistant Edward Brinkmann taking barometric readings in the Australian Alps, dwarfed by the majestic and ancient rock formations extending below them.⁵¹ Bierstadt's allegorical *Sunset Light, Wind River Range of the Rocky Mountains* (1861) is another example of this type of Sublime vision, with its sombre Indian figures overshadowed by a dazzling celestial Rocky Mountains backdrop. Yet despite both works subscribing broadly to the tenets of Sublime landscape painting, there is a significant distinction between the manner in which the German scientists and native American subjects are portrayed. The scientific gentlemen, poised with their measuring instruments in hand, are depicted reacting to the scene before them not only by recording information, but also by gazing in wonder at the great and Godly spectacle laid out before them. The indigenous Americans on the other hand almost disappear into the foreground shadows: They are undifferentiated from nature, unable to react to the landscape around them because they are an integral part of it.

Yet it is a group of rather gentler and less virtuosic paintings that is my focus here, specifically allegories of indigenous extinction that subscribe more closely to the aesthetic category of the Picturesque than that of the Sublime. Melancholic visions such as von Guérard's *Stony Rises* and Bierstadt's *Indian Encampment, Shoshone Village* tend not to emphasise nature's wildness and its capacity to inspire awe. These brooding and highly romanticised scenes of indigenous peoples facing the dying light of their existence do not, on the face of it at least, portray the Darwinian sense of struggle.⁵² They appear to present the contrary: self-sufficiency and harmony with nature. As in *Sunset Light*, the native Americans are again an implicit part of nature, indistinguishable from it: Here there is only nature, a world in which plants and animals of all kinds appear to live together in total unity. Nevertheless the symbolic aspects of these particular works are far more pronounced, and it is their allegorical significance—what they imply rather than what they show—that serves to undercut their Humboldtian sense of unity and harmony. As will be observed shortly, it is these paintings' foreboding message of inexorable decline that alludes to a new Darwinian reality in which 'extinction and natural selection ... go hand in hand.'⁵³

Understandably, art historians have focused their attention on Humboldt's impact on nineteenth-century landscape paintings: As we have seen for the most part human figures, if they are there at all, are humbled specks which serve, as they had for centuries, to provide a sense of scale and individual focus for the eye. Yet rather than accept this Eurocentric art-historical commonplace, which tells us much about the endurance of a Claudian artistic tradition and nothing about the role of art within the broader rubric of imperialism, it is important to note the virtual absence of indigenous peoples in these paintings and what that in itself might reveal. Clearly such a line of enquiry would yield fascinating insights and merits further consideration, although it extends far beyond the focussed remit of this essay.⁵⁴

Given the scholarly attention long devoted to Humboldt's understanding of the physical world, it is perhaps not surprising that it is only recently that his impact on the course of racial science and American abolitionism in the early nineteenth century has been seriously considered.⁵⁵ Yet according to Laura Dassow Walls, he was 'the only major scientist during the nineteenth century to argue consistently, for six decades, that 'race' was not a biological category. As he declared in *Cosmos*:

While we maintain the unity of the human species, we at the same time repel the depressing assumption of superior and inferior races of men. There are nations more susceptible of cultivation, more highly civilized, more ennobled by mental cultivation than others, but none in themselves nobler than others. All are in like degree designed to freedom.⁵⁶

Both von Guérard and Bierstadt were profoundly aware of their privileged role as artist-observers working 'on the spot' in remote regions. As we have seen they responded to market demands for paintings of white settlers' properties and cultivated land, particularly in the case of von Guérard, and in both cases for landscapes of untamed wilderness. But their face-to-face encounters at mid-century with indigenous peoples who were visibly suffering the dire effects of contact prompted them to produce these mournful laments for a mythical past. Such redemption could most readily be expressed in allegory, which in Clifford's words, 'violated the canons both of empirical science and of artistic spontaneity'.⁵⁷ It is the allegorical aspect of these mid-century 'dying light' paintings which undercuts their adherence to an exuberant and totalising Humboldtian world view, nudging them closer towards a Darwinian paradigm characterised by winners and losers.

It is important to note that in the mid-nineteenth century many paintings of indigenous peoples were not generally perceived as referring to a world before European settlement; rather the clock was pushed much further back to an ancient era before The Fall. Clifford has pointed out that this was a common device prior to the rise of secular anthropology, and that biblical or classical allusions are plentiful in early New World imagery.⁵⁸ Contemporary critics in Australia certainly understood this, seeing not only the landscape as primeval, but also its original occupants. This is illustrated by the way in which leading Melbourne critic James Smith described another of von Guérard's paintings: 'The lords of creation are represented by a couple of Aborigines ... whose appearance, while it gives life to the scene, is not out of harmony with the primeval appearances of nature with which they are surrounded.'⁵⁹ This distinction between pre-contact and prelapsarian periods may seem immaterial—surely the point is the subjects' apparent timelessness, their lack of engagement with European settlers, and their message that indigenous peoples were in harmony with nature, if not inseparable from it. Yet as Russell McGregor has noted, the mid-century practice of pushing back the temporal limits for the existence of the earth and its people not only made a chronology based on the bible increasingly untenable, but so too did it legitimise the emergent 'science' of anthropology.⁶⁰

A Darwinian Shadow

Darwin had been pondering the problem of racial origins since the 1830s, when they were a prominent concern for ethnologists.⁶¹ Yet it would not be until 1871 with the publication of his second major book, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, that he dared to address the explosive issue of human evolution. Some forty years after his return from the New World on H.M.S *Beagle*, Darwin was at pains to try to understand the declining numbers of indigenous peoples across the colonised world. 'When civilised nations come into contact with barbarians', he wrote:

the struggle is short, except where a deadly climate gives its aid to the native race. Of the causes which lead to the victory of civilised nations, some are plain and simple, others complex and obscure. We can see that the cultivation of the land will be fatal in many ways to savages, for they cannot, or will not, change their habits. New diseases and vices have in some cases proved highly destructive; and it appears that a new disease often causes much death, until those who are most susceptible to its destructive influence are gradually weeded out; and so it may be with the evil effects from spirituous liquors ...⁶²

While Darwin thus recognised that native peoples seemed to be disappearing rapidly once in contact with 'civilised nations', he warned against ascribing a single cause to this dire state of affairs.⁶³ He went on to give several examples of decimated populations (including those of Tasmania and other Australian colonies), and cited a range of independent speculations as to why numbers continued to shrink at such alarming rates.⁶⁴

Stony Rises and *Indian Encampment*, with their dark message of irreversible decline, seem in many ways to presage Darwin's subsequent thesis in *Descent*.

Some thirty years after Bierstadt first visited the American West and produced his allegorical paintings of the region's original inhabitants, he painted a final major work, *The Last of the Buffalo* (c1888). This painting returned to an earlier theme of impending extinction but it was stated this time, not merely implied. Here however it was not the American Indian who was seen to be doomed to extinction, but rather the buffalo, which since the 1870s had suffered a rapid decline in numbers as a result of excessive hunting—buffalo robes and tongues (considered a delicacy) were highly valued by the colonial market. By the time Bierstadt produced his canvas, the plight of these animals had become the subject of an ardent conservation campaign.⁶⁵ Concern for dwindling animal populations was becoming increasingly prominent during this period of intense colonisation.⁶⁶ Yet ironically (although not surprisingly), it was not the white man who was seen to be the culprit here, but rather the indigenous Indians whom Bierstadt portrayed as the aggressive perpetrators of a heinous crime. As Nancy K. Anderson has already noted, the painting was in fact a 'masterfully conceived fiction that addressed contemporary issues'.⁶⁷ While Plains Indians did indeed hunt the buffalo for their own purposes (it was their primary source of food), in fact the widespread slaughter (by colonists) was vigorously encouraged by army officers whose role was to subdue hostile Indians, and who discovered that the most effective means of achieving this was to starve them by eliminating the buffalo. By the time Bierstadt painted his canvas, not only were the animals almost extinct, but most of the Indians who had not already been slaughtered themselves had been sent to reservations. Bierstadt shows the Indians using lances, bows and arrows rather than the colonist's rifle, yet his title refers unambiguously to contemporary and highly divisive issues.⁶⁸

It is instructive to compare *The Last of the Buffalo*, painted long after the publication of Darwin's *Descent*, with George Stubbs' *Horse Attacked by a Lion* from a century earlier. With its dramatic reference to species' innate drive for self-preservation, Stubbs' vision was profoundly Burkean, reflecting a philosophy which, as Barbara Larson has pointed out, would influence Darwin's theory of species transformation a century later.⁶⁹ Yet in Bierstadt's post-Darwinian vision, 'man' has entered the ring and is battling for his own heroic supremacy—yet not with his colonial oppressors, but rather with the very animals which, ultimately, had kept him alive for centuries. Furthermore, the American Indian has stepped out from nature's shadows and inhabits not a mythical ancient past, but a modern world in which nature is no longer in harmony. Rather than engaging in the kind of redemptive exercise of 'salvage ethnography', Bierstadt recasts his Indian subject in the role of ferocious warrior: No longer was he to be pitied, he was now a figure to be deeply feared.

Perpetuating Imperialism's Fantasy

The mid-century allegorical paintings which have been the primary subject of this essay demonstrate a profound engagement with history in a period which was undergoing rapid paradigmatic change. Steeped in Humboldtian science, they also expressed some of the revolutionary ideas and anxieties which were central to intellectual discourse in the mid-nineteenth century. Presaging a dark and mutable Darwinian world in which the struggle for survival is key, these paintings were intimately bound to the twin ideologies of imperialism and racism. While they did not attribute agency in this seemingly fatal state of affairs—there was no attempt to explain the mysterious demise—their melancholic ambience expressed mourning for such inexorable loss. In this way they offered solace, sending a message that resistance to this sad yet seemingly inevitable state of affairs was fruitless. In thus yielding to the inevitable, the paintings' consoling message ultimately, if indirectly, contributed to the perpetuation of colonial atrocities around the globe. They exemplify Brantlinger's conception of 'proleptic elegy'. He writes: 'the mourning and moralizing doomsday loses his or her sense of personal inadequacy in the grand apocalypse of nations, empires or races. Nothing can be one's personal fault if everything is falling to pieces.'⁷⁰ Components of imperialism's 'dreamwork', they subscribed to Mitchell's vision of 'utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence...'⁷¹

Benton, Ted. 'Science, ideology and culture: Malthus and *The Origin of Species*', in David Amigoni and Jeff Wallace (eds), *Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species : New Interdisciplinary Essays*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995

Bindman, David. 'Mankind after Darwin and Nineteenth-century Art' in Diana Donald and Jane Munro, *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 143-44.

- Bowler, Peter J. *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *Dark Vanishings : Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. London, 1757.
- Byrne, Lisa, Harriet Edquist, and Laurene Vaughan. *Designing Place : An Archaeology of the Western District*. Melbourne, Melbourne Books, 2010.
- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 1986.
- Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2nd ed, Penguin, 2004.
- . *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, London: John Murray, 1860.
- . *Journal of Researches into the Geology ...* London, 1839.
- . *Beagle Diary*, ed. R. D. Keynes, Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Donald, Diana and Jane Munro, *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009.
- Field, Barron, *Geographical Memoirs on New South Wales. By Various Hands ...* London: J. Murray, 1825.
- Francis, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian: the Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, Vancouver: Arsenal Pump, 1992.
- Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1859
- Hendricks, Gordon. *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West*. New York: Harrison House, 1988.
- Humboldt, Alexander von. *Cosmos: Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe*. Translated by Edward Sabine. 7th ed. Vol. 1. London: Longman, Brown, Green & Murray, 1849.
- . *Cosmos: Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe*. Translated by Edward Sabine. 7th ed. Vol. 2. London: Longman, Brown, Green & Murray, 1849.
- Kelly, Franklin. *Frederic Edwin Church*. Washington: National Gallery of Art; London : Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.
- Larson, Barbara. 'Darwin, Burke, and the Biological Sublime' in Larson (ed), *Darwin and Theories of Aesthetics and Cultural History*, Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012
- Lubbers, Klaus. *Born for the Shade: Stereotypes of the Native American Indian in United States Literature, 1776-1894*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994.
- McGregor, Russell. *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997
- Mitchell, W. J. T. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Moore, James and Adrian Desmond, 'Introduction' to Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2nd ed, Penguin, 2004, pp. xi-xvi.
- Oberg, Michael Leroy, *Uncas, First of the Mohegans*, Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2003.
- Oldfield, John. *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery*, London: Frank Cass, 1998
- Parry, Ellwood. *The Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art: 1590-1900*. New York: George Braziller, 1974.
- H. Glen, Penny, 'Traditions in the German Language' in Henrika Kuklick, *A New History of Anthropology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, pp. 79-95.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Pullin, Ruth. *Eugene von Guérard. Nature Revealed*. Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2011.
- Reynolds, Henry, *The other side of the frontier: Aboriginal resistance to the European invasion of Australia*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006.
- Russell, Lynette. *Colonial Frontiers : Indigenous-European Encounters in Settler Societies*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001.
- Sachs, Aaron. *The Humboldt Current: A European Explorer and His American Disciples*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Andrew Sayers and Elizabeth Johns, *New Worlds from Old: Nineteenth century Australian and American landscapes*, Canberra and Hartford, Conn: National Gallery of Australia and Wadsworth Athenaeum, 1998.
- Stocking, George, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York :Free Press, 1987.
- Thomas, Daniel (ed). *Creating Australia: 200 Years of Art, 1788-1988*. Sydney: International Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1988.
- von Guérard, Eugene , and Marjorie Tipping. *An Artist on the Goldfields: The Diary of Eugene von Guérard* Melbourne: Currey O'Neil, 1982.
- Walls, Laura Dassow. *The Passage to Cosmos : Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press ; Bristol : University Presses Marketing [distributor], 2009.

Wilton, Andrew, and T. J. Barringer. *American Sublime : Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880*. London: Tate, 2002.

¹ Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997).

² Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings : Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930* (Ithaca, NY ; London: Cornell University Press, 2003). I would like to thank Dr Ruth Pullin, Dr Philip Jones and Professor Michael Rosenthal for reading and commenting upon early versions of this essay. Dr Pullin was the co-curator of the major exhibition *Eugene von Guérard: Nature Revealed*, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2011.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, (London: John Murray, 1860), pp. 109-110.

⁵ Charles Darwin, *Beagle Diary*, ed. R. D. Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 42.

⁶ Benton, 'Science, Ideology and Culture: p. 90

⁷ Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003), p.1. Bowler examines the pre-Darwinian history of evolution, including the work of Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus. See also the introduction by James Moore and Adrian Desmond to Darwin's *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2nd ed, (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. xi-xvi; and Benton, 'Science, ideology and culture, p. 90.

⁸ David Bindman, 'Mankind after Darwin and Nineteenth-century Art' in Diana Donald and Jane Munro, *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 143-44. Bindman cites the work of George Stocking, in particular his *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987), p. 148.

⁹ Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the Geology ...* (London, 1839), p. 520, cited in McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, p. 520.

¹¹ Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, p. 2.

¹² McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*.

¹³ McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 13.

¹⁴ H. Glen Penny, 'Traditions in the German Language' in Henrika Kuklick, *A New History of Anthropology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 85. Bastian's massive collection of ethnographic artefacts subsequently entered the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, today one of the largest museums of its type in the world, which he established in 1873.

¹⁵ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, p. 219.

¹⁶ A groundbreaking exhibition mounted in 1998 explored some of the remarkable similarities between American and Australian landscape painting of the nineteenth century. Andrew Sayers and Elizabeth Johns, *New Worlds from Old: Nineteenth century Australian and American landscapes* (Canberra and Hartford, Conn: National Gallery of Australia and Wadsworth Atheneum, 1998).

¹⁷ There are exceptions to this in von Guérard's oeuvre, largely a group of works painted in 1854 in which the human figure dominates. For further information see Ruth Pullin, *Eugene von Guérard: Nature Revealed* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2011), p. 112.

¹⁸ Ron Radford has suggested that the title change may well have been in order to attract a wealthy local buyer for the painting. See his 'Eden before the White Serpent' in Daniel Thomas (ed.), *Creating Australia: 200 Years of Art, 1788-1988* (Sydney: International Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1988), p. 80.

¹⁹ Definition from *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 2nd ed. Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, p. 205.

²⁰ Radford, 'Eden', p. 80. Scholars have pointed also to the creeping intrusion of the European blackberry bush in the lower left corner of the painting as yet another ominous symbol. One should be wary here though, as Philip Jones has noted, as it would not be until the twentieth century that the foreboding symbolism of this pestilential plant was widely appreciated, and it would be a further decade until the rise of the Acclimatisation movement (email to the author, 13 February 2013).

²¹ John M. Stanley, 'Petition', 1852, cited by Brian W. Dippie, *Catlin and his Contemporaries: The Politics of Patronage*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), pp. 282-83.

²² W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 10.

²³ *The Crayon*, September 1859, p. 287. Cited in Gordon Hendricks, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* (New York: Harrison House, 1988), p. 73.

²⁴ James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', ch. 11, James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986), pp. 205-28.

²⁵ Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, p. 46. See also Klaus Lubbers, *Born for the Shade: Stereotypes of the Native American Indian in United States Literature, 1776-1894* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994).

²⁶ Fenimore Cooper confused two distinct groups of people, the Mohegans and the Mahicans. For more on the history of the Mohegan people see Michael Leroy Oberg, *Uncas, First of the Mohegans* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: the Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pump, 1992), p. 22.

²⁸ Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1859), p. vii.

²⁹ Francis, *Imaginary Indian*, p. 23. Francis cites J. Russell Harper, *Paul Kane's Frontier. Including Wanderings of an artist among the Indians of North America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971). By the late nineteenth century,

developments such as the arrival of the rail road did much to encourage immigration and tourism to the 'West' on a grand scale; yet the opening up of the region had started much earlier in the century, inspired in part by the work of artists such as Kane and Catlin.

³⁰ Francis, *Imaginary Indian*, p. 17

³¹ Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, p. 46. The author cites recent books to substantiate this claim: David Stannard's *American Holocaust* and Ward Churchill's *A Little Matter of Genocide*.

³² January 17 1859, cited in Hendricks, *Albert Bierstadt*, p. 63.

³³ Ellwood Parry, *The Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art: 1590-1900* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), p. 116.

³⁴ *Harper's Weekly*, VIII, no. 382, April 23, 1864, p. 260. Cited in Parry, *Image of the Indian*, p. 116.

³⁵ Barron Field, 'On the Aborigines of New Holland and Van Diemen's Land', in Barron Field (ed.), *Geographical Memoirs on New South Wales* (London, 1825), p.196. Cited by McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 8.

³⁶ Barron Field, *Geographical Memoirs on New South Wales. By Various Hands ...* (London: J. Murray, 1825), p. 228. Cited by Michael Rosenthal, 'Soldier, settler, artist: the Australian watercolours of Edward Close', unpublished essay, 2012.

³⁷ Field, 'On the Aborigines', pp. 228-29. Cited by McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 13.

³⁸ Paul Strzelecki, 'Physical description of New South Wales', p. 348. Cited by McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 17.

³⁹ Henry Reynolds, *The other side of the frontier: Aboriginal resistance to the European invasion of Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006), p. 10. The extent of the conflict between European settlers and indigenous Australians has been hotly contested for over a decade, although most scholars of note now accept Reynolds' estimate in the book cited here of a minimum of 20,000 Aboriginal frontier deaths.

⁴⁰ Tracey Lock-Weir, 'Stony Rises: Lake Corangamite' in Ruth Pullin, *Eugene von Guérard: Nature Revealed* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2011), p. 118.

⁴¹ Ruth Pullin, 'Eugene von Guérard: A Journey Through Victoria's Western Plains' in Lisa Byrne, Harriet Edquist, and Laurene Vaughan, *Designing Place: An Archaeology of the Western District* (Melbourne, Melbourne Books, 2010).

⁴² Harriet Edquist, 'Stony Rises: the Formation of Cultural Landscape', in Byrne et al, *Designing Place*, pp. 62-77. See also Tracey Lock-Weir's entry on *Stony Rises, Lake Corangamite* in Ruth Pullin, *Eugene von Guérard. Nature Revealed*, pp. 118-19.

⁴³ Thomas, *Creating Australia*, pp.80-81

⁴⁴ Candice Bruce, 'Aborigines met on the road to the diggings', in Pullin, *Eugene von Guérard*, p. 112.

⁴⁵ *Am I not a man and a brother?*, c. 1787, was famously reproduced as a ceramic seal by Josiah Wedgwood for the Society of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and reiterated in innumerable printed forms thereafter. There is a considerable body of literature surrounding the motif and its history, including John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 155-84.

⁴⁶ Eugene von Guérard, diary entry, March 16 1854, Marjorie Tipping (ed.), *An Artist on the Goldfields: The Diary of Eugene von Guérard* (Melbourne: Currey O'Neil, 1982).

⁴⁷ Alexander von Humboldt, *Cosmos: Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe*, trans. Edward Sabine, 7th ed., vol. 2 (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Murray, 1849), pp. 84-85.

⁴⁸ Pullin, *Nature Revealed*, p. 20. On this subject see also Sigrid Achenbach, *Kunst um Humboldt: Reisestudien aus Mittel- und Südamerika von Rugendas, Bellermann und Hildebrandt in Berlin* Kupferstichkabinett (Berlin: SMB Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin), 2009.

⁴⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 120.

⁵⁰ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: 1757)..

⁵¹ There is a substantial literature regarding this painting. For the most recent work see Tim Bonyhady, 'The Tipping Point' in Pullin, *Nature Revealed*, pp. 36-41.

⁵² Von Guérard's painting appears to contradict the Malthusian view which saw population growth as being directly dependent upon the means of subsistence. Here the Aborigines appear to have an abundance of food. For further on the relationship between Darwin and Malthus see Ted Benton, 'Science, ideology and culture: Malthus and *The Origin of Species*', in David Amigoni and Jeff Wallace (eds), *Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species : New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 68-94.

⁵³ Darwin, *Origin*, 1869, p. 155.

⁵⁴ Indeed scholars, particularly in Australia and more recently in North America, have been working in this field. See for example Tim Barringer and Andrew Wilton, *American Sublime Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880*. In the Australian context the uninhabited 'natural' landscapes on the one hand reflect the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century Aborigines in many parts of the south-east of the country were rapidly dwindling in numbers, the result of both widespread disease and vicious imperial conflict. But these apparently uninhabited landscapes also served to deny the widespread indigenous levels of resistance that historians since Henry Reynolds have long brought to our attention. Such paintings of uninhabited wilderness served to confirm one of colonial Australia's founding myths, that of *terra nullius* (literally, 'land belonging to no-one').

⁵⁵ Laura Dassow Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009), ch. 4.

⁵⁶ Citation, cited by Walls, *Passage to Cosmos*, pp. 175-76.

⁵⁷ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, p. 207.

⁵⁸ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, p. 209. In Australian colonial art biblical and classical allusions are more rare.

⁵⁹ Cited by Rob Macneil, 'Time After Time: Temporal Frontiers and Boundaries in Colonial Images of the Australian Landscape', in Lynette Russell, *Colonial Frontiers : Indigenous-European Encounters in Settler Societies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 47-67.

⁶⁰ McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 22.

⁶¹ Moore and Desmond, 'Introduction', p. xxiv. Darwin wondered why different groups of people were so physically different from one another even when their physical environments appeared to be so similar. He began to think that their differences could not just be put down to natural selection, but that another factor, sexual selection, was involved.

⁶² Darwin, *Descent*, p. 212.

⁶³ Darwin, *Descent*, 'On the Extinction of the Races of Man', pp. 211-222.

⁶⁴ Darwin, *Descent*, pp. 213-14.

⁶⁵ Nancy K. Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt Art and Enterprise* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990), pp. 100-105.

⁶⁶ This was notably the case during the 'Scramble for Africa', which intensified later in the century. Fae Brauer has explored this field and identifies a shift in the representation of indigenous peoples from hunters to the hunted, taking as her example Emmanuel Frémiet's sculptures of gorilla subjects, and examining them against the rise of Neo-Lamarckian evolutionary theory. See her 'Wild Beasts and Tame Primates: "Le doanier" Rousseau's Dream of Darwin's Evolution', in *The Arts of Evolution: Charles Darwin and Visual Cultures*, eds. Fae Brauer and Barbara Larson (Dartmore: The University Press of New England, 2009), esp. pp. 206-08.

⁶⁷ Anderson in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt*, p. 101. This source also informs the following two sentences.

⁶⁸ The argument has often been made in the vast literature devoted to Bierstadt, and *The Last of the Buffalo* in particular. See for example the words of the late Robert Hughes: 'The blame for the ecocide is put on the Indians themselves. The picture is a lie ...', Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (London: The Harvill Press, 1997), p. 201.

⁶⁹ Barbara Larson, 'Darwin, Burke, and the Biological Sublime' in Larson (ed), *Darwin and Theories of Aesthetics and Cultural History* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012).

⁷⁰ Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, p. 190.

⁷¹ Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, p. 10.