ELIZABETH GERTSAKIS

OUTRAGE, OBSCENITY AND MADNESS (SEX, VILE GOSSIP, ART AND ILLUSTRATION)

MELBOURNE'S PICTORIAL WEEKLY BUDGET, THE CITIZEN, BANNER OF TRUTH AND POLICE NEWS 1875-2015.

Outrage, Obscenity and Madness
(SEX, VILE GOSSIP, ART AND ILLUSTRATION)

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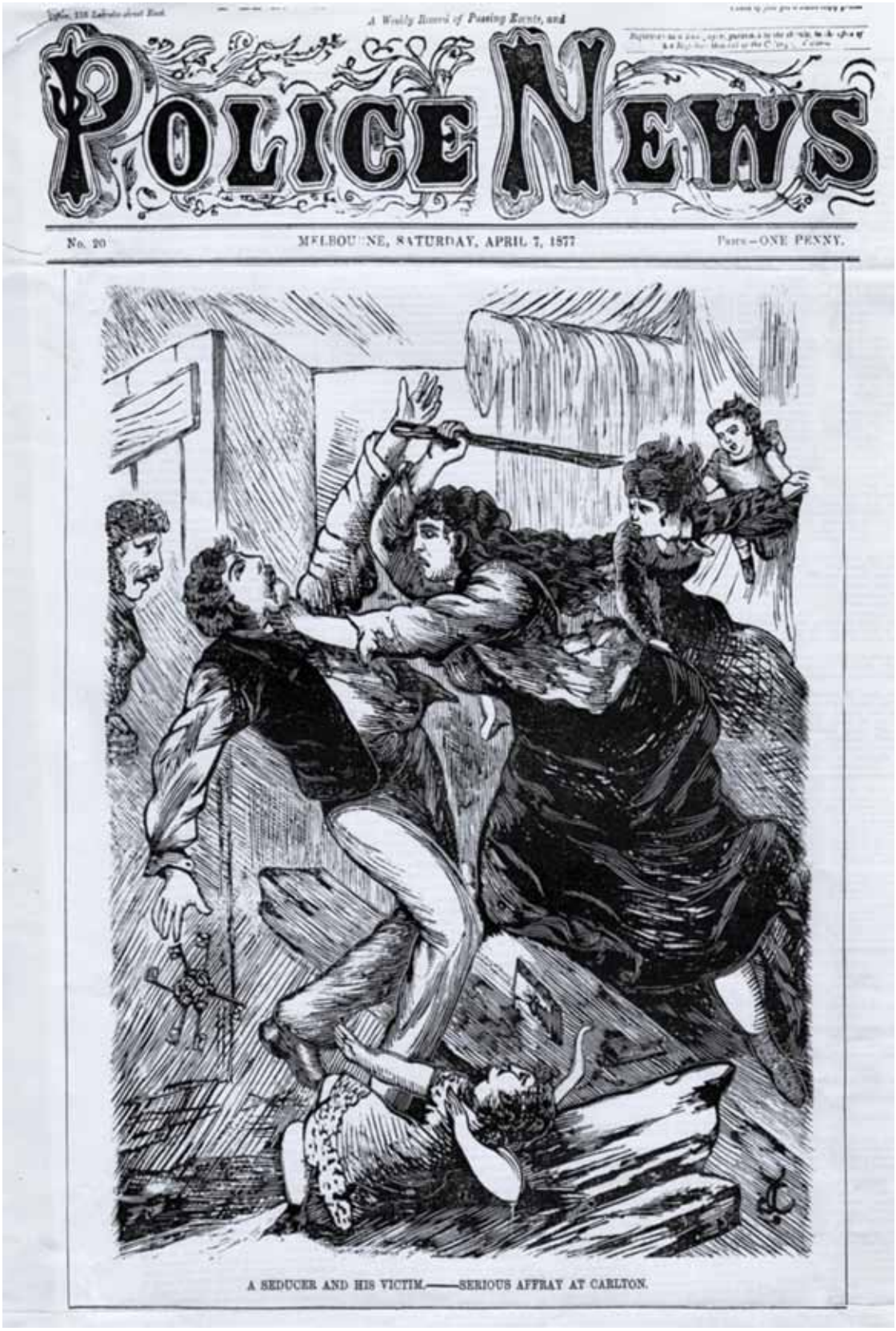
Elizabeth Gertsakis was born in Greece and immigrated to Australia with her parents last century. She is an artist, curator and cultural historian. She has lectured in art history in Australian universities, independently curated exhibitions for major state and regional museums related to Australian art and culture and was senior curator of the National Philatelic Design Collection, Post Master Gallery, Australia Post from 1995-2010. She is currently doing doctoral studies at the University of Melbourne on the subject of photography and identity related to the Balkan Wars 1903-13 of northern Greece.



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Elizabeth Gertsakis, April 2015

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INTRODUCTION

In 2005 I was browsing through the State Library of Victoria's *Picture Collection* catalogue, looking closely at institutional collections as part of my curatorial work and my practice as an artist. During the 1990s and the 2000s I prepared exhibitions for public institutions as well as regularly showing work at Sutton Gallery (Fitzroy).

On one occasion online, I saw a series of unfamiliar prints that initially looked like woodcuts. Though they were awkward, rough and childlike, there was something compelling, tragic and surreal about them. Online they were shown as single images without the context of the newspaper page they had first appeared in: no banner, no columns, just these cropped digital data slices of violent events and woeful outcomes. They came from a single-sheet, folded letterpress newspaper published and edited in Melbourne (1875–77) by a Richard Egan Lee (b. 1808 Wiltshire, d. 1879 Melbourne).

The broadsheet had five different banner titles over a period in which Egan Lee was taken to court for selling material considered obscene and offensive, both in content and illustration. Egan Lee would, on each occasion and with great difficulty, pay his costs and fines, close down the existing banner, rename it and publish again. He continued to protest, determined to keep exposing humbug, fraud, hypocrisy and the human catastrophes that he believed were based on poverty as well as stupidity and corruption. His paper was based on the cautionary 'moral' as well as on exposé as a reforming zeal.

Prior to knowing anything about Richard Egan Lee and his first titles – *Lee's Pictorial Weekly Budget, Police News and Tales, Trials, Sports and Events* (1875) – the images I saw were unfamiliar to me from any art historical book or body of research discussing newspaper printing in Australian art, or in histories of engraving of colonial illustration.

These crude images seemed to look back to much simpler images from the period of English printed almanacs, calendars, chapbooks and execution broadsides, yet these illustrations were dated to the later nineteenth-century colonial Australia. They were crude and unskilled yet still appeared on a weekly basis in a paper selling for one penny and presenting in a dramatic and emotional manner a gamut of terrible and assorted events of the day. I didn't really know how they belonged to a particular English history of illustration.

Instead, based on the harshness of the depictions and emotionality, I felt they retrospectively evoked the deliberately jagged, confronting world of

expressionist woodcut prints of the early twentieth century, in particular the German expressionist group Die Brücke[i]. I wondered momentarily whether these colonial images could have been made by some errant antipodean artists that neither I nor anyone else knew anything of. I was to eventually find out that this was indeed the case.

L: *A barbarous murder in New Zealand,* Police News, *13 January 1877*

R: Neben der Heerstrasse, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, German, 1880–1938*

L: *'Mrs. Mitchell from Donnelly's Creek with two children, holding a knife to her throat'*

R: *'Girl buttoning her shoe', woodcut on paper, 1912, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, German, 1880–1938, Syracuse University Art Collection*

Looking at them, I was moved by their ludicrous pathos and the way they held my attention. In one sense I responded as one does to photographs of anonymous or deceased people. The elements of the image were discernible at once and yet, visually, it was not possible to shift the gaze from repeatedly following the surface lines and graphic inflections that made up the tragic and often puzzling image in order to extract more information. It was both fascination and curiosity. I responded by wanting to think and write in a descriptive language, probably best described as a poetic narrative response to what I was seeing.

Subsequently I applied for, and was awarded, a three-month State Library of Victoria Creative Fellowship based on a proposal to follow what I called the

source of the *graphthos* (pseudo Gk) in these illustrations, which I felt combined pathos within the delineation itself. I wanted to learn the history and context of these prints created in Melbourne, but I also wanted to pursue why something so indifferent to visual disjunction, composite in process and seen according to the norm as fundamentally bad in appearance could still have such a dramatic and authentic capacity for expression. Was it just the description of the terrible events that the illustration was based on, or was it the power of a curiously grotesque image, before reading the caption, that compounded the overall response?

The papers of the day, such as the *Argus* and the *Age,* critically condemned Egan Lee's broadsheet, in historical perpetuity, as 'trash' for the corruptible poor, and thus morally unworthy of attention. This set about a conflict with my understanding of image-making some 140 years later in the changing lineage of pictorial and social aesthetics.

From the Victorian sectionings of class, morality and 'high' art through to twentieth-century avant-garde revolutions – and to the present digital encompassing of all visuality as electronic data – something still needed to be loosened and released from the grip of hierarchical judgement in the making and transmission of excluded yet communicating images. These images needed to be brought in to the wider arcanum of Australian art history and Australian art, as they presented confounding problems that contemporary visual practice could indeed accept but also find fascinating.

The result of the first period of Fellowship research at the State Library of Victoria (2005–06) was an education in Australian colonial, British and American popular illustrated print media and social context that took me further back into early woodcut printing and popular broadsheets for the working classes. From an artist's perspective I wanted to work directly with the images from Egan Lee's *Police News* and represent them to a new and contemporary audience with the poetry intended as a direct textual and literary parallel. The poetry is, like the images, droll, black and farcical whilst it also senses and comments on the appalling pathos of each separate incident, illustrated in a form so naïve that the tragedy is doubly exaggerated.

The visual outcome of this process was seven coloured prints, which were exhibited at the State Library of Victoria (2007) and at Cross Arts Projects (2007) in Sydney. Though the research did uncover new and previously unpublished facts about Richard Egan Lee, and about the printing process and ad hoc nature of the contributing illustrators, my feeling was that it was still the tip of the iceberg in consideration and artistic exploration of this ephemeral material. Beginning in 2007, I decided to make large digital pigment paintings based on my previous set of seven prints, and again in 2013, with the support of an artists project grant from Creative Victoria, was able to add to the work to produce a total of 18 digital paintings.

The exhibition of these works at William Mora Galleries is my response to the original broadsheet, not only as a visual source for a new work but to allow the anonymous mix of illustrators that came from the general public of the day to briefly have their moment again, no matter how ephemeral or inconsequential.

There are many connections between the overwhelming spectacle of anxious electronic 24-hour news images and the social and commercial anxiety of Richard Egan Lee's *Banner of Truth*. The newspaper had invited the random public to submit drawings. I found that these drawings provided their view on the state of the world, and the power of the way they drew and copied images, even badly, was a will to engage in representation.

The riddle of these 'bad' images in the newspaper is ultimately the strange formal result of the editor's chronic financial impecunity (not being in a position to employ a professional engraver or another method to produce sufficient images for a weekly newspaper) and the combining of amateur or copied drawings with the final editing that Egan Lee's 'finisher' brought to the them. The submissions were required to come in as simple pencil sketches, and, then – in preparation for a new method of cheaper printing, which was Egan Lee's version of zincography – they were outlined, added to and filled in. The final formal 'compository' effect created anarchic illustrations of an anarchic world – an unrestricted, unedited and unauthored melee of parts of received and borrowed images. This transgression within the terms of reference for standards and appearances of illustration in newspapers and journals of the time was nonetheless sufficiently popular with colonial readers for Richard Egan Lee's *Police News* to begin to outsell the *Age,* in particular.

A new censorship law for images

If the latter sales were the part that teetered between financial hope and subsequent devastation for Egan Lee and his paper, it also led to political consequences and tighter legal adjustments to existing censorship laws affecting publishers and creators of images. A new censorship law was passed through the colonial parliament of Victoria amending the South Australian act that had incorporated the English *Vagrancy Act* into its 1869–70 *Police Act*. However, the Victorian acts were more powerful than the older English ones, and were modelled on Lord Campbell's Act, the Obscene Publications Act 1857, which gave magistrates power not only over distributors but also over printers and publishers. On Friday, 17 December 1875, Egan Lee was charged in the Old Court House, Melbourne, with publishing an obscene article and obscene pictures illustrating the article in his *Police Budget* of 23 October. He was subsequently found not guilty of publishing an obscene libel in 1875 by a jury. The Victorian Government decided that juries, who continued to dismiss legal action against publishers like Egan Lee, could not be trusted to defend decency and that their powers should be transferred to sole magistrates. Aspects of these censorship laws continue into the present, and we have seen both in Victoria and other states recent closures of exhibitions and removals of work, as well as police proceedings against artists who have, in particular, made images of children (Bill Henson and more recently, Paul Yore) which have then been connected to 'paedophilia' as visual commentary and have been read and seen as 'being one and the same'.

Ceross Mitchell, the Senior Detective, fictional character from story 'An unveiled mystery', 3 February 1877[ii]

Egan Lee's wild, anarchic editorial mix of radical and reactionary reformism, empathy with the working class, nonconformity, satirical potpourri, sexual and marital denouements and exposures of hypocrisy of the Melbourne 'snobocracy'

"SACKING" A WIFE AT CAPE SCHANCK.

THE EDITOR REPLIES TO THE DEPUTATION OF HEADS, FROM ALL DENOMINATIONS

Richard Egan Lee, the Editor, replies to the Deputation of Heads from all denominations, 1877

was as inconsistent and contradictory as you might find in a nineteenth-century colonial settlement or in a large capitalist city today. Egan Lee damned the fraudsters-become-politicians and corrupt premiers, thieving speculators and establishment newspapers, but he also added to his list of regular targets pimps, brothel keepers, freemasons, teetotallers, abortionists and others, none of which made him many personal friends in either high or low places. He instead put his faith in the concrete abstraction called his readership who wanted news and entertainment.

In a very short period of time, Egan Lee was easily targeted in return, and brought down by intense market competition as well as social and political indignation made into law. The new law damned him and his views and illustrations as obscene and offensive to public taste and morality.

Perhaps from this point it is possible to look at why and what he allowed himself to do and see how it fits with twenty-first-century aesthetic and social perception of what the images in digital media today do, and how they tell us a story. Is it still possible to consider the actual 'illustration' offensive, indecent and immoral, or is the graphthos being confused and judged as morally responsible for the actual criminality, the offence and the event?

WHO WAS RICHARD EGAN LEE?

The historian Michael Cannon in his foreword to Richard Egan Lee's *Police News* (1977) provides the first documented account of what we know about him and where Lee's fiery brand of radical political dissidence came from. He relates the circumstances around the publication of the *Police News* or *Police Budget* that led to Lee's several court appearances, the opinions of the *Argus* and *Age* newspapers and their direct role in the changing of Victoria's censorship laws which finally closed Egan Lee down as a publisher just two years before his death. The research I was able to do in 2006 brought to light new dramatic aspects regarding his life in England before migrating to the colonies, his lifelong inability to remain solvent as a publisher and journalist, and the perpetual running from creditors as well as the law.

Richard Egan Lee was born in Wiltshire, England in 1808, and he died in 1879 after contracting typhoid during an epidemic in Melbourne at the age of 71. It seems he was married twice and had two or three separate sets of children. Cannon describes him as a radical writer and agitator in London in the 1830s during a time of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation.

Egan Lee was born in the decade that William Cobbett published his *Political Register,* which advocated radical, social and parliamentary reform. Egan Lee's editorials in the Melbourne *Police News* of the late 1870s unflinchingly echoed Cobbett, who recognised that popular unrest was caused more by unemployment and hunger than by subversion.

In England Egan Lee wrote a pamphlet titled *A Whisper to the Whigs* in which he warned Sir Robert Peel's government that imposition of a military dictatorship in Ireland had destroyed the normal 'social contract' between the people and the monarch and would ultimately result in the establishment of an Irish republic. He wrote: 'Justice had been betrayed in the interest of private profit … Bloated pluralists and over-gorged impropriators joined with a phalanx of greedy absentee land-stealers, in calling for more powers to coerce their refractory serfs into submission.'

Lee brought these social and economic issues and political beliefs to the colonies in 1853. Thomas A Darragh, author of Printer and Newspaper Registration in Victoria, 1838–1924, brought to my attention that Egan Lee came to the colonies at the age of 45 with an already established reputation; having made the choice of becoming a political writer and activist made him as vulnerable as any poor or working-class man to the reality of being unable to make a sufficient living to keep his wife and family.

It seems he was sufficiently educated and with a capacity to comment on the political culture of the times but faced the chronic problem of finding an audience large, literate and visionary enough to buy printed material that would be interested in political and social reform.

Egan Lee found himself in both the right and wrong place to be in mid-nineteenth-century colonial Australia. The struggle to make money out of popular journalism also brought him another reverse distinction, the notoriety of being the only person to have been successfully taken to court and sued by Charles Dickens.

Soon after Dickens' publication of A Christmas Carol in December 1843, within two weeks the magazine Peter Parley's Illuminated Library[iii] brought out a 'condensed' and 're-originated' edition entitled A Christmas Ghost Story, selling at a penny a piece. Two days later, on 8 January 1844, Charles Dickens filed for a court injunction to halt publication; the injunction was granted. Dickens then set out to sue *Parley's* owners, Richard Egan Lee and Henry Hewitt. Hewitt was also Egan Lee's father-in-law. It was a disappointing victory for Dickens: Hewitt and Egan Lee declared bankruptcy, leaving Dickens to pay his court costs of £700, against a profit of only £230 on the sale of 6000 copies by the end of 1843. At this point in Dickens' life, owning copyright was as desperate an issue for his survival as a writer, as the legal absence of it was for Egan Lee.

The episode over copyright and the widespread practice of 'pirating' is a crucial one here, given that thirty-five years later in the production of Egan Lee's *Police News* it was still the basis for a final attempt at having financial success as a publisher and social commentator. Egan Lee's paper sadly became a parody of his very earliest experiences in popular journalism.

Lee was already an older man at the age of forty-five when he started a quarterly publication with the architect William Coote FRS in Van Diemen's Land, titled *The Tasmanian Athenaeum* (1853–54), *Journal of Science, Literature and Art*.[iv] Working backwards from the style and content of Egan Lee's *Police News* of the 1870s, it was a great contrast to see and read this publication. In style, it was a classical and conservative review publication of books and articles in theme and tone aimed at the highest levels of educated Tasmanian readership. It covered a wide range of contemporary publications, including the classics and sciences with the overall desire to appeal to Royal Society academic interests. It only produced six issues over two years, and once more the problem was no sales, much debt and no way of paying. The epithet on the title page of each issue truthfully expressed the situation as 'We cultivate literature on a little oat meal'.

Egan Lee must have felt strangely out of water arriving at a penal colony in the middle of its life as a place of harsh imprisonment and hard labour, with the distinction of being the second-biggest prison in the British Empire for juveniles.

Two important factors come to mind at the time of Egan Lee's arrival. The island still had twenty-four years remaining as headquarters of a prison which involved containing, processing and punishing convicts (young and old) before its cessation as a jail in 1877. The second one was that Van Diemen's Land didn't change its name to Tasmania until 1856.

Combining these factors, the early influence of Cobbett and the passionate identification with the Irish and the working poor, Egan Lee's style of political protest and vision belonged to the world of the transitioning late eighteenth century rather than to a landscape that was a prison in entirety. He was still to discover the extent of the colonial mishmash of what was fast becoming, with the discovery of gold on the Australian mainland, uninhibited and rampant 'free for all' entrepreneurialism. The bucolic versus bestial schizophrenia of penal 'Van Diemen's Land become Tasmania' may have very momentarily felt like some kind of Burke-ian older social order, but one flagrantly organised as statehood fully realised as terror, that in one form or another would never permit an alternative social order that even imagined equality.

Nothing, however, was more familiar to Egan Lee and his partner William Coote than the reality of creditors. On 16 November 1854 Coote was declared bankrupt and imprisoned for twelve months. Coote's subsequent life compared to Egan Lee's was one of great achievement in surveying and engineering work in Victoria, and in Queensland where he finally settled. It is notable that Coote's passion for writing, publishing and activist struggle for reform in the new colonies never faded. This characteristic of Coote matched him to Egan Lee who, however, escaped Tasmania and debtors prison and found himself on the Victorian diggings in the Ovens Valley. His writing at this time focused on the question of 'unlocking the land' from squatters, and in 1859, as a contributing writer to the Melbourne *Age,* published a five-column analysis on land reform accurately forecasting the direction taken by free selection laws in the 1860s. There is also a record of him as a writer for Alfred Massina's *Australian Journal* in 1870 and of being friendly with and sharing an office with Marcus Clarke.

One other event in Richard Egan Lee's life in the preceding years has not been previously published but would have added greatly to his sense of injustice. In 1866 he was tried and convicted for theft, and imprisoned for a year in Melbourne. He had been working as a compositor for Charles Buck Demaine, printer, at 27 Market Street, Melbourne. Demaine testified that Egan Lee had been in his employ from December 1864 to April 1865, a period of less than six months and that he had stolen '3 blocks, 3 coats of arms, 500 pieces of type and one coat of arms circle'. Egan Lee maintained that the blocks belonged to himself and another man in partnership in London. The court records at the Public Records Office of Victoria indicate that Richard Egan Lee was convicted and imprisoned on 19 April 1866. He was also photographed prior to being imprisoned; unfortunately, these early photographic records of prisoners were amongst those irreparably damaged by floods in the basement of the State Library of Victoria, where they had once been stored.

Very little is actually known about Egan Lee's private life concerning the number of times he had been married and his respective children from possibly three women. From the existing accounts we know that Richard Egan Lee married his first wife, Ann, the daughter of Henry Hewitt (his partner in the unfortunate *Dickens v Hewitt & Egan Lee* copyright trial) and that Ann and Richard Egan Lee had two sons, Thomas and Abel. They settled and lived in the Collingwood and Fitzroy areas. There is also evidence that Ann died at the age of fifty in 1868.

At some point early in the 1870s Egan Lee legally married again, now in his mid-to-late sixties and an older father to three young children. A woman by the name of Elena Agnes Lee, described as a 'married woman', is signed as the owner of the often retitled *Citizen Press* (new name for the *Police News*) at the same address as Richard Egan Lee in July 1877 and 'carrying on the business of a printer'. We can speculate she was his second wife or his daughter-in-law, as his adult son Thomas, from his first wife Ann, was also working as a journalist during this period and writing for *Police News.*

Other family members also nominally registered their names as owner and printer of the newspaper under a different banner name to help Egan Lee avoid further censorship issues and fines after the slander and obscenity court cases of 1876 and 1877. One was a Thomas Hewitt, possibly the brother of Ann Egan Lee nee Hewitt (decd) or a relative from her parents' side of the Hewitt family. Henry Hewitt and his wife had also emigrated to Australia, following their daughter and Egan Lee. In 1866 when Richard Egan Lee was convicted of theft and sentenced to twelve months' jail, a person named Robert Egan Lee stood as second surety in 1869 for two new illustrated monthly journals by publishers William Clarson, Massina and Co.: *Humbug* edited by Marcus Clarke, and *Once a Month* edited by Peter Mercer.[v]

The jail episode did not deter Egan Lee's determinations as both an editor and writer. In 1871–72 he is recorded as operating the *Hill End and Tambaroora Times* and still agitating for reforms, fighting for better mining laws and control of bogus flotations by Sydney company promoters. He was subsequently threatened with physical violence and libel suits.

Trouble was still a continuing reality for Egan Lee. He is also mentioned for his drinking and combative pugnaciousness but he was far from oblivious to the satirical, absurd and comical view of reality. If nothing else the short few years of the Melbourne *Police News* suggest a deep enjoyment of the anarchic and comic ludicrous: mad laughter in the face of a society that was become increasingly serious about its own authority and self-importance.

Egan Lee's drinking and the threat of penuriousness were prevalent in the colonial journalistic community in abundance, which in itself was no indication of his unsuitability, moral or ethical, to produce a successful broadsheet.

N. THE MODEL HUSBAND.

Marcus Clarke, after a life committed to writing for journals such as *Colonial Monthly, Melbourne Punch* and as editor of the short-lived satirical *Humbug*, struggled to make things pay. Despite his success with the publication of *The term of his natural life* (1871), he was still forced to resign his position as sub-librarian of the State Library of Victoria for reasons of insolvency. Even though Egan Lee probably saw his ideal self as a social agitator, he started up a publication titled *Colonial Comicalities*, but this seems to have been so ephemeral that there is no record of it. Egan Lee again returned to writing and subediting for the Melbourne *Age* and *Australian Journal* and once more turned his attention to current issues.

His article 'Our criminal classes' in the *Australian Journal* showed great sympathy with petty offenders sentenced to heavy jail sentences. He claimed that police prosecution of helpless unemployed men and women resulted in 'the manufacture of criminals', and pleaded for the establishment of prison farms to keep first-time offenders separate from hardened lags.

The penal system had been something he was directly exposed to, not only in Tasmania but more pointedly in his own experience of jail in 1866, though there is no record of whether Egan Lee served the whole twelve months or the possibility that someone was able to pay a substantial fine to release him from the sentence.

His belief that poverty was the biggest contributor to crime and to criminalising may also be reflected in the notorious lack of social security within the city. Police statistics cast a picture of an insufficiently policed Melbourne society in which the poor were struggling to stay on the right side of the law. In 1860 for a population of just over half a million people there were 1432 police; in 1882 there were more than 860,000 but police numbers had actually decreased to 1115. By 1892, when the population had reached over a million, the figures were almost as bad as they were thirty years earlier, at 1528 police.

A character like Egan Lee was not necessarily an outcast journalist just because of a supposed inclination to disrespect artistry in preference for vulgar sensationalism in the Police News. Journalists like Marcus Clarke and *The Vagabond* paper did not write about the respectable working class who settled down to employment either. Clarke describes Melbourne as a place of 'low life':

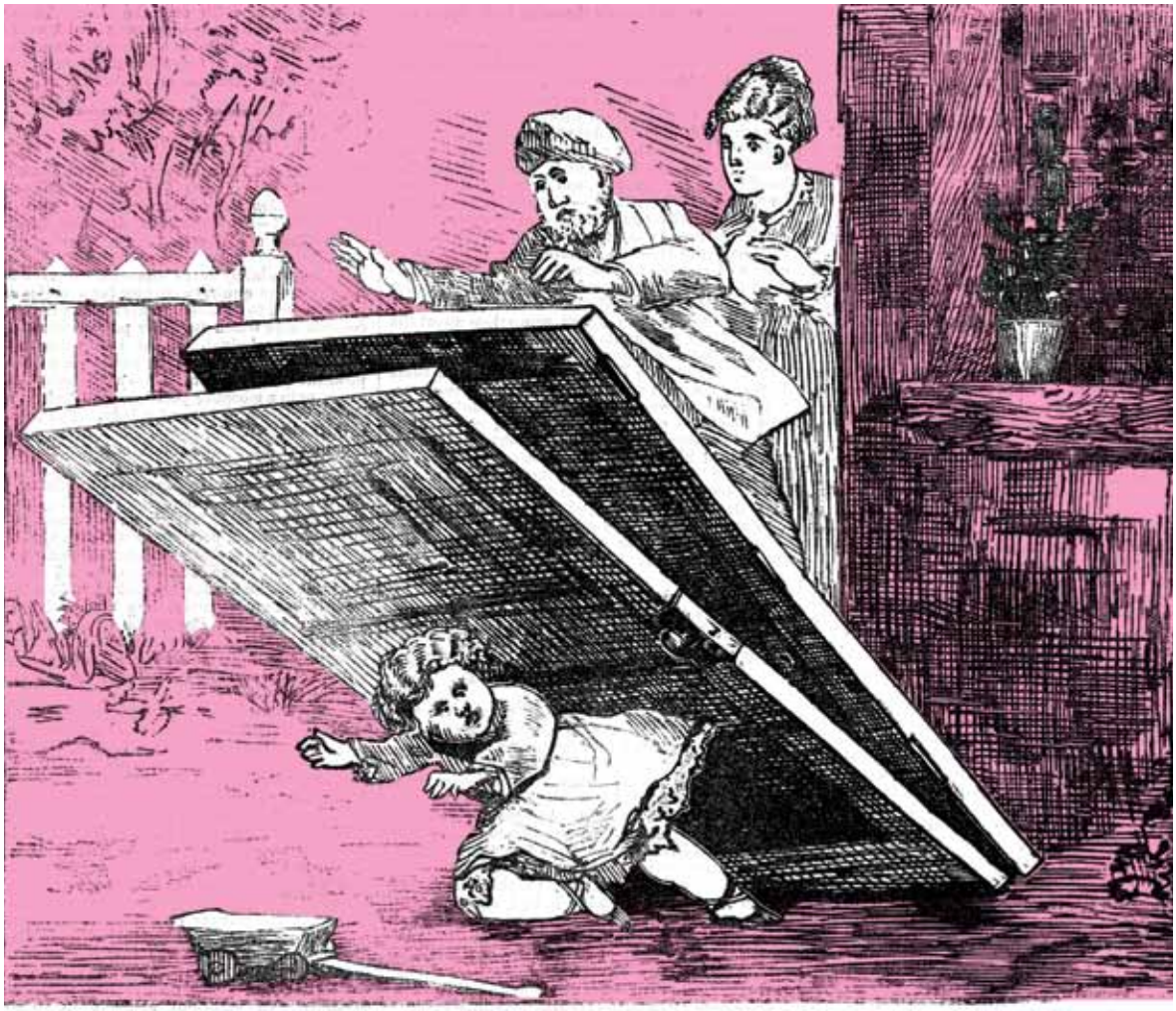
> It was a place of polyglot population of deserting sailors, ex-convicts, vagabonds and gentlemen down on their luck. We got the flotsam and jetsam of the world as well as the most energetic. He focused on the Dickensian underclass of oddballs who frequented bars, Chinese gambling dens and pawn shops. Fringe dwellers that lived in desperate lodgings and doss-houses in lower bohemia or slept under bridges.[vi]

Clarke likened them to '… men in the wilderness stripped of all refinement and scrounging like animals to survive'. Egan Lee (though generationally older) and Marcus Clarke were closer to the Mayhew tradition of crusading journalism, which forces comfortable opinion to face the destitution that was the other side of their prosperity.

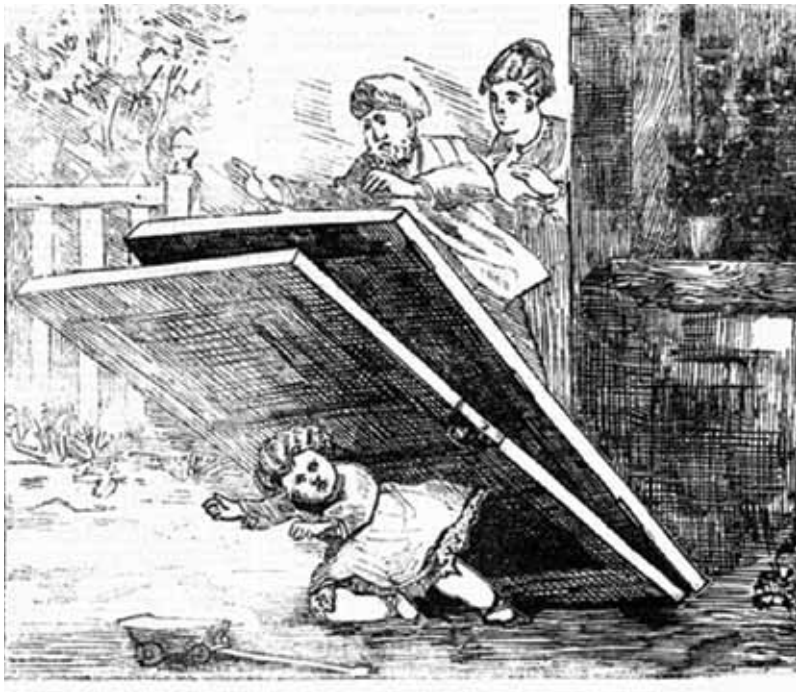
By the mid-1870s a combination of ill health, senior years, the lack of financial 'sufficiency' as well as harassment from other newspapers, offended individuals and the new censorship law brought Egan Lee to his knees as a newspaper owner and hopeful entrepreneur appealing to the already hungry and vociferous consumers of the popular market.

PART ONE

PAINTINGS AND POEMS
2007



FATAL ACCIDENT TO A CHILD, DURING THE LATE GALES.



FATAL ACCIDENT TO A CHILD, DURING THE LATE GALES.

FATAL ACCIDENT TO A CHILD, DURING THE LATE GALES.

The yard is fenced, safe harbour for tiny Anabella

pulling on her toy cart.

Close by she can hear mama's voice.

Papa has just removed the doors

of solid eucalypt, two inches thick, heavy, cut and dressed

but leaning awkwardly against the house.

Outside, an inconspicuous but obtruding shelf holds

two pots of proud geraniums, bright red blooms in shadow.

She could smell them, the doors, fresh, sharp like a mint.

She pulled the cart and stopped, crouched down

on fat pink legs to collect stones.

Sitting low, looked up, felt the wind and saw the rigging

of her mother's wash line blowing horizontal, pretty sails.

She saw the grey wooden post holding up the line,

swing angrily, back and forth, draught music to a pendulum.

The cat spat past and hid under the overturned barrow.

Anabella squatted to see him but the dust filled and

scratched her eyes, the cat hunkered down.

Anabella rubbed her face with tiny fists.

The tumult came, the course loose ground picked up and blew,

spinning a tornado amongst the vegetables and leaning brooms;

the apple blossom snowed down too early, upstairs the lace curtains blew out to catch the petals in cotton webs.

The saddler remembered the precarious doors,

mama remembered Anabella.

They rushed, but not faster than the wind and arrived

to see big wooden cards falling, flat.

Doors fluttering and Anabella, gone, taken by the wind.

LA POUPÉE EST LE COUP

Doll's house tableau,

Run, doll, run.

Finely modelled plaster of Paris and porcelain,

a padded miniature of femininity

waspish waist and tiny feet,

sweet Victorian eyes and lips,

only, now, just moderately disfigured -

lifts her arms on impact.

He readies himself, legs apart, takes aim, and shoots.

A puff of smoke, white cloud in the grain,

a white space for unspoken words,

just tips her

slippery, gently forward but she trips the light so poorly.

He, maddened in the forest or by the dark lake

with trees, compositional, and a distance that runs the horizon only cross-ways
and, so, lost perspective.

Heaving with a newly coy mortality,

held up by demure and tidy skirts.

She skates between trees,

caught

by the tin toy malefactor,

cut against the grain.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE SNAKE SEASON.——THE FIRST VICTIMS, AT COLAC AND WHITTLESEA.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE SNAKE SEASON.——THE FIRST VICTIMS, AT COLAC AND WHITTLESEA.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE SNAKE SEASON

A pretty Teutonic tole work,
appliqué and decoupage,
engraving's wooden horticulture
of nature in broderie anglaise.
Grasses, weeds, lichen, moss
Molly runs about, gives the dog a toss.
Beyond the trees shoot wild narcissi,
soldier plants ring orange bells
for blooming purple Liriope
Spring's eternal,
if not hope.
Brown Boomer curves between the tussock
sharp as Cupid's Dart
and rising from it like a springboard
bites into the farmer's dove.
She squeals, she calls
to no avail
death's snake has moved beyond the pail
to drink
and brings to this embroidered engraved sampler
a life,
unstitched.

AWFULLY SUDDEN DEATH IN A RAILWAY TRAIN.

AWFULLY SUDDEN DEATH IN A RAILWAY TRAIN.

DEATH OF AN EPILEPTIC ON A TRAIN

The light falls bleak on the sleeping man

quiet on the floor between the wooden seats.

He lays humbly, child-like, forehead on forearm, gently cushioned against the rattle.

His legs may be a little too disordered for day time travel yet they are judiciously bent for this is a moving carriage with benches, wooden pews for kneeling in a hard, dissenting chapel.

The watching figure is neither signalman nor constable.

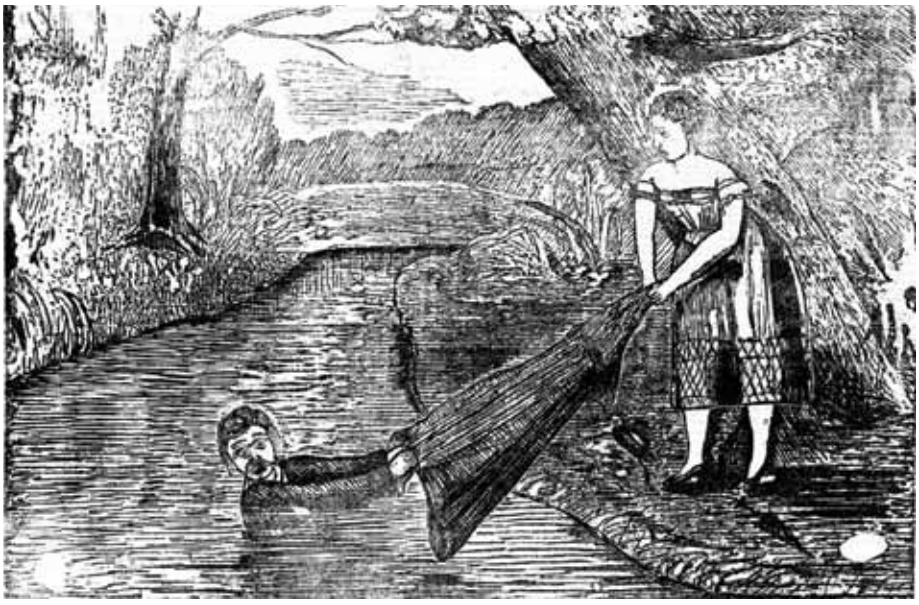
Has he not just received confession through the window
and now sees before him remorse asleep, forgiveness alone.

The light dims, the lines cross and darken.

Speaking in tongues could not stop the evangelical shadow swallowing him up, together with his babbling tongue.

Worse than contrition is to have invasion of such a tender privacy.

Pull down the shades on this carriage and let me ride, a layman,
to the speed and silence of all stations not crossed. Let me shunt from track's end to its beginning and back again, undisturbed, let me sleep, passing ever only through dark tunnels.



BETROTHED SAVES FIANCÉE

Slapstick in a book of Flemish Hours.

A terse but practical maiden, well fed,

pulls up herr-ing in a fashionable fishing net.

The snows melt beside the Yarra's dykes and run down to the sea where red cheeked girls run to meet the shiny scales of plenty.

Milken plaits wound tightly, arms, white and strong, pussy willows sprout green tips, poplars burst into greens and fragrant yellows bending in sweet and promising breezes.

The moustached youth leaps into the fishing frenzy,

fully dressed,

herding pisceans toward a vinegary pickle.

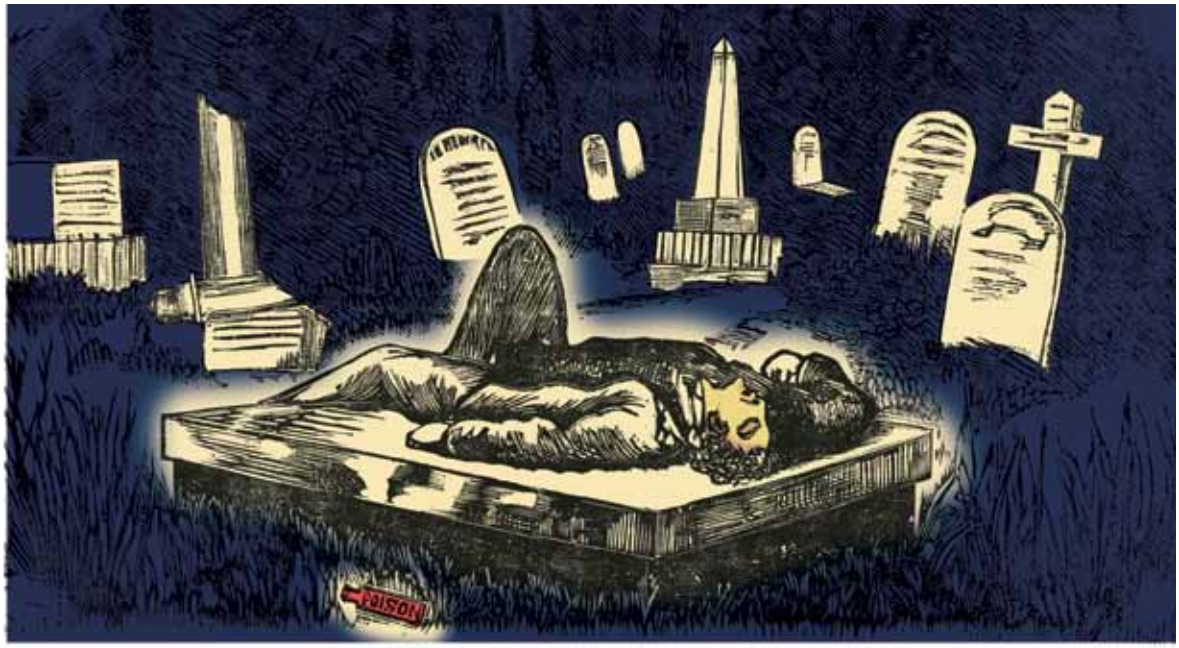
In the unseen late summer, left of picture, the peasants cut golden wheat tips with glittering scythes, and on the right, just out of frame, girls hold up their aprons on ladders to fill with small red apples, woody, oaken and sweet.

But this is no mediaeval calendar illustration, no almanack of bright coloured gothic faith, instead, a teasing picture of heroism's entertaining humiliation.

Girl defrocks, crowd gathers, she throws her poplin overdress into the river to save her fiancée, gallantly, he looks away but grasps tentatively and tenderly for her mercy.

Ignoring her modesty, she offers the truest plighting of troth that a maid could give. The chemise is rather pretty, and the cross stitched bloomers a revelation, a gauzy film barely conceals bosoms tightly bound by corsetry.

A local penny tale, a fishy story turned into a chuckling paper frontispiece



MELANCHOLY SUICIDE IN GEELONG CEMETERY.—VERDICT OF A "CHRISTIAN" JURY.

MELANCHOLY SUICIDE IN GEELONG CEMETERY.—VERDICT OF A "CHRISTIAN" JURY.

MELANCHOLY SUICIDE IN GEELONG CEMETERY

A bier at last
but not for the road.
His pictorial choice was good
a central space midst antique marbles,
obelisks, broken columns, planted
crooked teeth, angular to uneven ground
a la mode anglais, elegiac as if near moors
or under ancient oaks in family arms.
His chosen poison,
POISON, there, a bottle to the left. Clear writ
in revelation in this theatrical desolation;
a spectacular triumph
of anger and resignation.
The grass grows long around his bed
Who was that sought him thus dead?
Christian judgement
and he to remedy, immolated prematurely
on whose conscience does he sleep
unfortunately only
a burden to the one beneath.

SAVED BY DEATH.—A CONVICT ESCAPES IN A COFFIN.

The English papers recently gave an account, with an illustration, of a convict at Portland who removed a dead body from a coffin, and put to sea in it: he made good his escape, and reached an American ship, which picked him up and conveyed him to New York.

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SAVED BY DEATH – A CONVICT ESCAPES IN A COFFIN.

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat went to sea
in a beautiful pea-green red boat.

Bosch's Fools went sailing too, three in a tea cup float.

On the lake at Galilee Christ went on a walking spree

Ron Barassi did that too, on the Yarra

a miracle, and profundity.

The rumour is just a fact that Marcus Clarke did writ His Natural Life in the office company of this editor, Egan Lee.

When fiction brings to truth its tools

why not a convict let it be his model for sailing free

in a salted coffin,

authored and pictured too by all

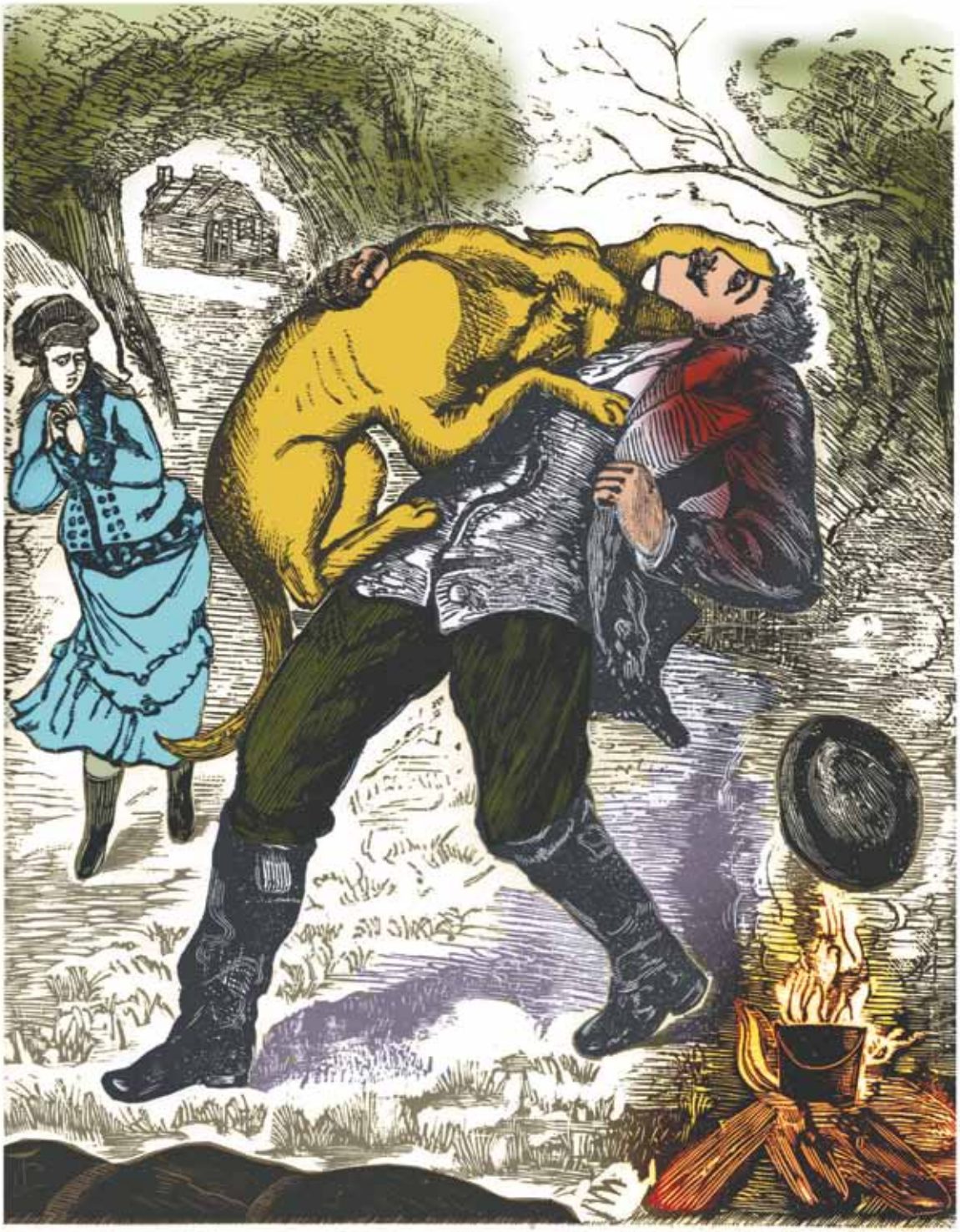
of those who knew the Tasmanian tale;

and so gave it to one

who might live to regale, a journey beyond the engraver's waving underworld of lines.

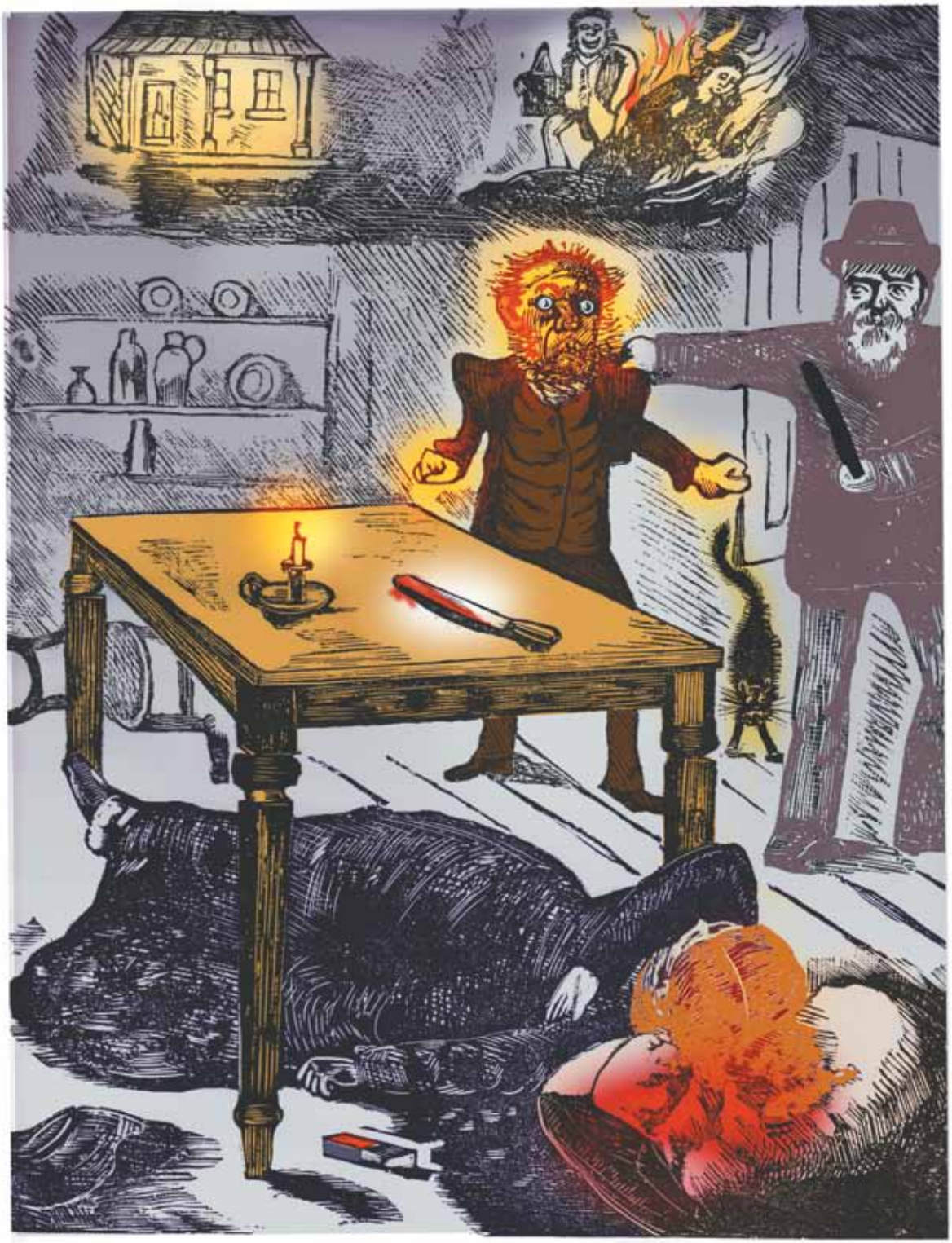
PART TWO

PAINTINGS
20012-13

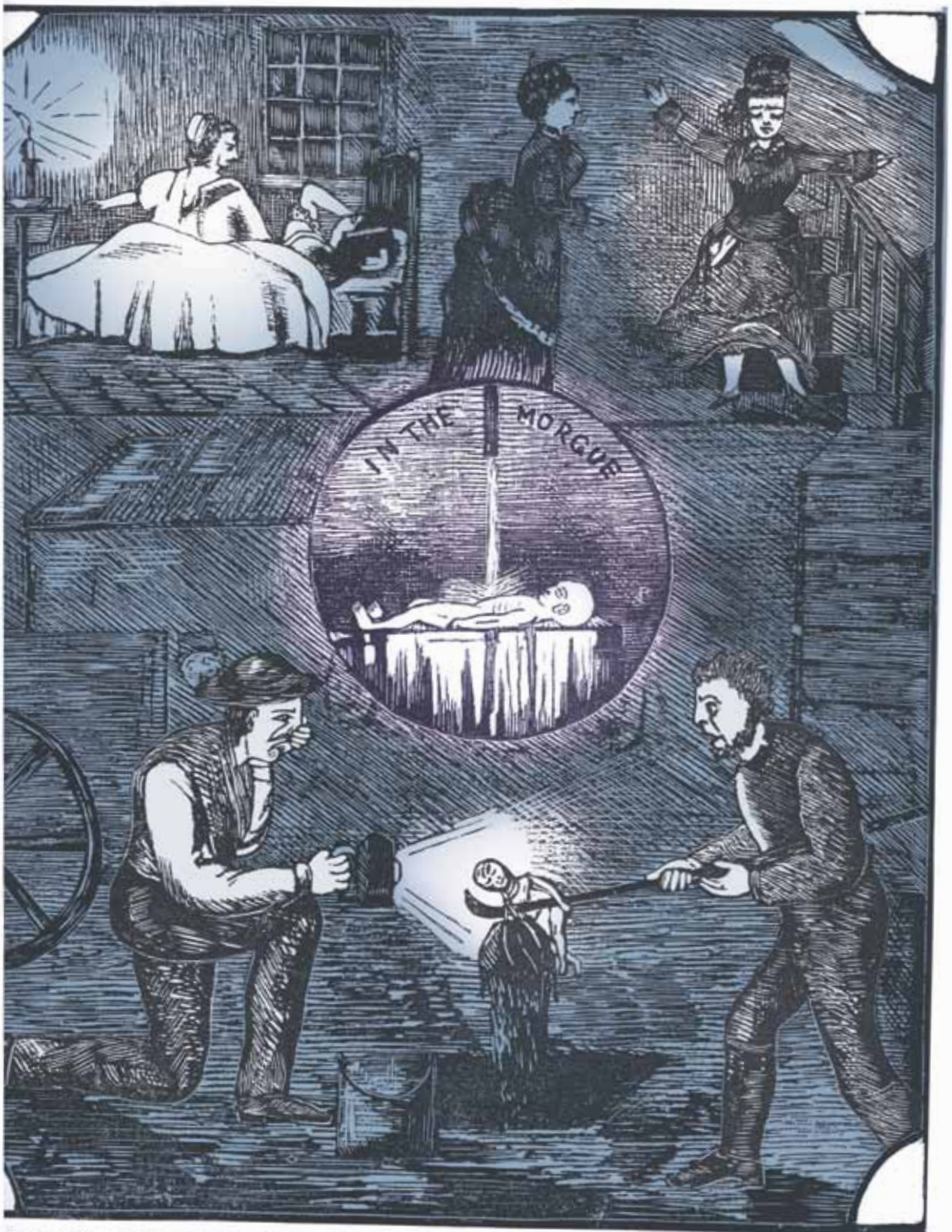


A FARMER'S DAUGHTER SAVED FROM OUTRAGE, BY A BRAVE DOG.

A SEDUCER AND HIS VICTIM.——SERIOUS AFFRAY AT CARLTON.

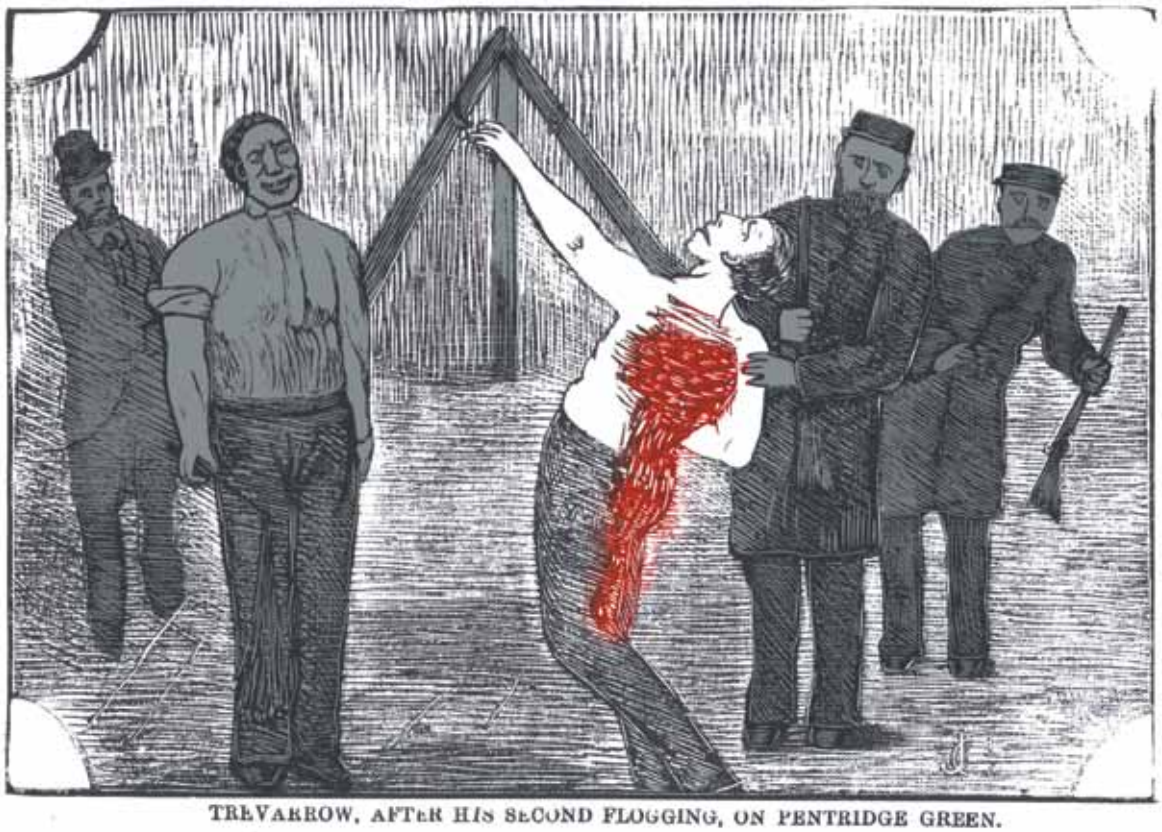


DIABOLICAL MATRICIDE AT MAIDSTONE, NEAR FOOTSCRAY.



CHILD MURDER BY WHOLESALE.—REVOLTING DISCOVERIES.


DARING OUTRAGE ON A LADY.



TREVARROW, AFTER HIS SECOND FLOGGING, ON PENTRIDGE GREEN.

VILLAINOUS OUTRAGE ON A LADY—ATTEMPTED ABDUCTION.

Cover of Ipswich Temperance Tracts, *no. 222, no date*

'Fearful quarrels and brutal violence are the natural consequences of the frequent use of the bottle', George Cruikshank, 1847

STRUGGLES OVER CHEAP LITERACY:

A LONG AND POPULAR VISUAL TRADITION

(Religious Tracts, *The Newgate Calendar*, Dying Speeches, Execution Broadsides and Penny Dreadfuls)

Tracts were a form developed for dissemination of religious and political views as early as the thirteenth century. By the nineteenth century they developed into relatively sophisticated publications that included images, and were published in series, with identified authors. Cover images were often sensational, to attract attention from potential readers.[vii]

The religious view was that simply reading a Christian text was to meet the Grace of God, whether the text was understood or not. To 'read the line' of an image was, similarly, to identify with the calamity that had befallen the victim. Peter Sinnema[viii] writing about the English Illustrated London News described the function of the illustrations as having an 'interpellatory power': that is, interpellation can be considered as a type of 'recruitment' as it invites a person (in this case, the reader) into a religious or moral subject.

Illustrations could be as simple and unsophisticated as the cover drawing of The Drunkard's Bible or as theatrically powerful as George Cruickshank's emotionally urgent illustration, 'The Bottle', of a drunken husband violently beating his wife, and in so doing, destroying his hearth and home. These precise moments of capturing a violent event have been described as the importing of uncanny Gothic visual elements into a contemporary setting for the psychological creation of a 'primal-scene'.[ix] If the religious tracts were pursuing redemptive, moral, Christian primal-scenes using illustration as cautionary narrative, at what point does the reforming visual idea cross over into ghoulish entertainment that popular demand relishes, not for sober reflection, but for primal voyeuristic atavism?

Charles Dickens was a literary figure who understood the popular desire for fictional storytelling to have 'all the elements' – feelings of true human passion including horror and madness. He writes:

> As a school boy I would buy the TERRIFIC REGISTER making myself unspeakably miserable and frightening my very wits out of my head, for the small change of a penny weekly, which considering that there was an [x]illustration in every number in which there was always a pool of blood and at least one body, was cheap.

Some of the early success stories for such fiction were John and James Catnach's *Seven Dials*; they produced chapbooks from 1813 full of electrifying ballads and humorous woodcut illustrated pictures; these broadsheets supplied the place not yet filled by popular newspapers. One single broadside, the *Murder of Maria Martens in the Red Barn,* sold a million copies.[xi] Richard Altick writes: 'No newsworthy event – no gory murder, no well attended execution, no contested election, no marriage or death in the Royal Family went uncommunicated by one or more of Catnach's Seven Bands of Seven Dials – a stable of seedy authors who earned a shilling for gin, by composing to order.'[xii] Edward Lloyd, an Englishman, went on to publish the American Police Gazette in the 1840s but had started with the Penny Sunday Times depicting murders, child kidnapping, armed robberies and violent occurrences.

L: *The Ratcatcher's Daughter', Seven Dials*

The Newgate Calendar, subtitled *The Malefactor's Bloody Register,* the Bible and Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* were the most likely top three works of 'improving literature' to be found in the average home in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Newgate Calendar was originally a monthly bulletin of executions, produced by the Keeper of Newgate Prison in London; its title was pirated by other publishers, who put out biographical chapbooks about notorious criminals. Collected editions of these stories began to appear in the mid-eighteenth century, and in 1774 a five-volume bound edition became the standard version. Many of its accounts are highly dramatised and often drawn uncritically from other sources, often referring to contemporary events and social issues.

It is to this tradition of earlier chapbooks, broadsides and penny dreadful illustration and presentation that Robert Egan Lee's Police News belongs, rather than to the more sophisticated caricature and political satire illustrations of magazines like the English or colonial Punch or Humbug edited by Marcus Clarke and Henry Kendall and illustrated by Samuel Calvert and TS Cousins.

L: *Image of child murderer Thomas Hunter (executed August 1700) from* The Newgate Calendar

R: *18th-century illustration of William York, age 10, murdering Susan Matthew, age 5, on 13 May 1748, from T*he Newgate Calendar

All these earlier broadsheets editorialised strongly against their subjects, Catholicism, the Indian Protectorate and Commonwealth, any political enemies of Britain (such as the French), drunkenness, prostitution ('women of abandoned character'), gambling, 'dissipation' and other 'vices' in general while eulogising Protestantism, the Church of England, the English monarchy and legal system, the Common Law and Bloody Code, with some rare exceptions. One edition contained an introduction suggesting that swindling be made (another) capital offence.'[xiii]

The very weakness and immorality of men was a double blessing to early Victorian popular journalism, for not only was the supply of this material inexhaustible, so too was the common man's appetite for it.[xiv] What was emerging was a struggle for control of the media, 'waged between church and state on side, radical reformers on the other, while a third factor, commercial enterprise, was quietly making the biggest inroad of all.'[xv]

Illustrated religious tracts initially swamped the writings distributed by the radical reformers. The evangelical Hanna More's *Cheap repository tracts* (1795–98) swamped Thomas Paine's political and philosophical *The rights of man* (1791–92). She sold two million in two years. The tracts were a major feature of the cheap religious publishing fields, which were particularly directed against radicalism.

They made it plain they were out to substitute 'good reading' matter for bad and conducted an endless war against 'dangerous' publications. These divisions, which announced themselves in the first mass circulation of reading material, were still profoundly engaged and had become entrenched throughout the nineteenth century and in the colonies over more than 150 years later.

The religious tract (for temperance, faith, and the salvation of domestic economy) conducted an endless war against 'dangerous' publications that the ordinary reader not only considered harmless but, more importantly, enjoyed.

Richard Egan Lee's early journalistic influences had come through William Cobbett's writings, which dwelt on a hatred of parliamentary corruption. Cobbett's style made politics personal and vital and set the tone for political journalism, taking the debate of political issues into the marketplace, tavern and sitting room.

The common reader often accepted narrative tracts and read them if nothing better was to be had, mostly the affordable penny went for old-fashioned chapbooks and, later, instalments of sensational tales. The *Tract* stories were lively but they were fundamentally a cover for moral instruction; the reader resented high-handed attempts to interfere with freedom of choice, especially when the new religious product seemed in many ways less exciting than the old.

Louis Altick argues that the condescension was deeper than religious content or related to mere questions of the use of language, but that it was inseparable from an embodiment of a social message. Hannah More's messages were fundamental; the first related to class: 'Beautiful is the order of society when each, according to his place, pays willing honour to his superiors'.[xvi]

The other tract prohibition connected to the fear and danger seen in radical reformism was the equal fear and condemnation of the imagination. Any expression of interest or belief in the political rights of common people was seen to be as threatening as the prolific and anarchic products of the creative mind. The *Six Acts of 1819* were brought in by an anxious England in response to manifestations of discontent and distress in the form of riots and disaffection described as the 'Condition of England Question'[xvii].

Following a series of disturbances between 1811 and 1816, the government passed the so-called 'Gag Acts'. This legislation did little to end the discontent, which continued during the next two years. The government then used the unrest as the reason, or excuse, for passing the *Six Acts.*

The *Newspaper Stamp Duties Act* greatly increased the taxes on printed matter, including newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets. Publishers and printers had to provide securities for their 'good behaviour'. Any publication appearing at least once a month, and costing less than 6d. was subject to a tax of 4d. The Act restricted the freedom of the legitimate press. Radical publications simply went 'underground'.[xviii]

This 'gagging' process using a mixture of traditional Christianity proselytised through the influence of cheap tracts – focusing on temperance and the eradication of 'social evils' – continued to be, in microcosm, the battleground

over media control in the colonies, including Australia, well into the twentieth century.

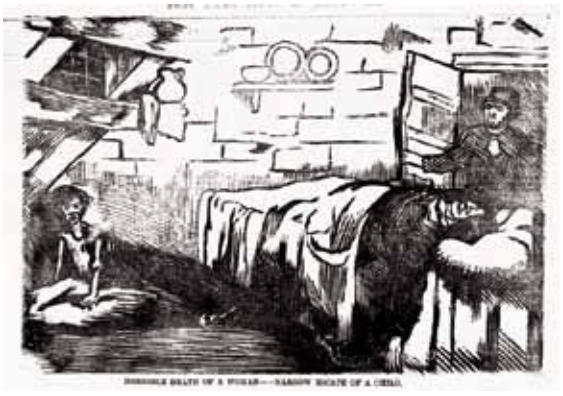
In the current digital age, even though the Internet presents virtual unrestricted access to global millions, nations still attempt, successfully or otherwise, to impose legislation for prohibition, on both moral censorship as well as commercial copyright grounds. The question of using prohibition as a form of 'national security' goes back to state control as in the 1819 acts. (The current law passed for retention of hypostasised metadata is as much a threat as it is a promise of protection.)

'The knife again – murderous attack on the police', 1877

During Richard Egan's Lee's short 'local' broadsheet experiment of the 1870s there was already a well-established cultural and historical taxonomy to draw on social and class division using the Christian as well as the commercial legal path for momentarily gagging competition. But it was also used for publicly excluding those who had the temerity in Egan Lee's naiveté of creating an unexpected and antipathetic appearance of images that was creative through accident, misfortune, means and chance miscellany.

This persistent *antipathy of the misfit sign* is perhaps the actual bedrock of *modernity* that a culture of ideas and invention can try to ignore but cannot stifle. Yet this critical kind of creativity in form and function, which is seen as 'offensiveness', would never be countenanced by the controlling civil society, who would judge it as coming from the representational nadir of humanity, defined as venial and abject.

If to see is to know, the classical notion of the meaning of art, to reveal, could not translate improvised and ad hoc illustrative logic into any form of acceptable illusory recognition. The audience for sensational reading and looking were more than heartily capable of recognising the difference between an illusion of life and an interpretable illustration of it.



L: *'Serious accident, near Deniliquin', 1877*

R: *'Horrible death of a woman, narrow escape of a child', 1877*

The etymological roots of the two words make the distinction very clear. The Late Latin illusion-, illusio, from Latin, action of mocking, from *illudere* to mock at; and illustration-, illustare, 'A spiritual illumination', an enlightening, distinguishing and clear in mind.

The consumers who spent a penny and enjoyed it without qualm, even along the increasing edges of middle-class colonial society, were not concerned about the social status or moral value of its purpose. In Victorian society, visual horror was recognised as a reality by the common reader, the point of sensation recorded, amplified and shared. As Altick says, it 'stripped the veils from Victorian respectability and prudery, exposing bigamists and adulterous vampires and murderesses'.[xix]

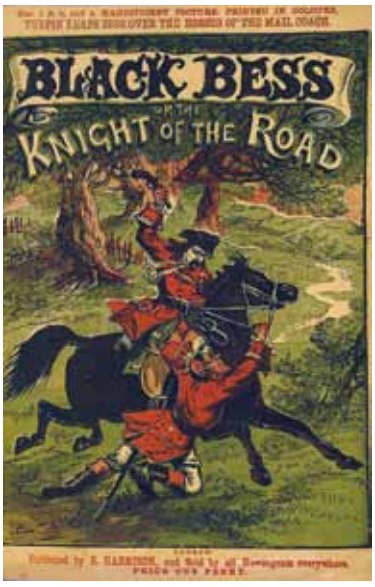
The mechanism of 'gutter' imagery was a double-edged sword for a type of morality that came from the bottom up rather than from the top down. The expose of the gutter press and the radical scandaliser and libeller reminded one of the chaos of people's lives in preference to submitting to the judgement of exclusion from chaos itself.

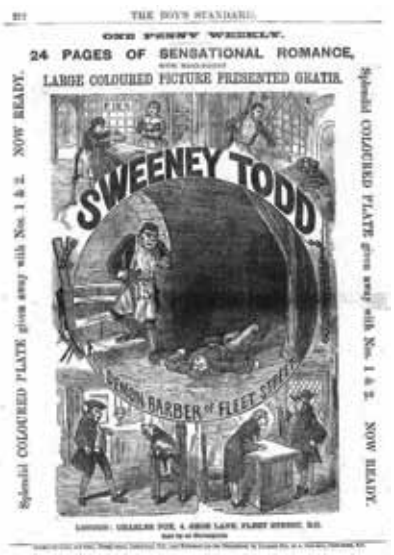
The penny dreadful

The term referred to a story published in weekly parts, each costing one (old) penny. The subject matter of these stories was sensational, focusing on the exploits of detectives, criminals, or supernatural entities.

While the term was originally used in reference to a type of literature circulating in mid-Victorian Britain, it encompassed a variety of publications that featured cheap sensational fiction, such as story papers and booklet 'libraries'. The penny dreadfuls were printed on cheap pulp paper and were aimed at young working-class males.

Egan Lee and Henry Hewitt's *Peter Parley's Illuminated Library* of the 1840s easily fell into this category. The stories themselves were reprints, or sometimes rewrites, of





Gothic thrillers such as *The Monk* or *The Castle of Otranto,* as well as new stories about famous criminals. Some of the most famous of these penny part-stories were *The String of Pearls: A Romance (introducing Sweeney Todd), The Mysteries of London* (inspired by the French serial *The Mysteries of Paris*), and *Varney the Vampire.* Highwaymen were popular heroes; *Black Bess or the Knight of the Road,* outlining the largely imaginary exploits of real-life English highwayman Dick Turpin, continued for 254 episodes. Other serials were thinly disguised plagiarisms of popular contemporary literature. The publisher Edward Lloyd, for instance, published a number of penny serials derived from the works of Dickens entitled Oliver Twist, Nickolas Nickleby, and Martin Guzzlewit.

Working-class boys who could not afford a penny a week often formed clubs that would share the cost, passing the flimsy booklets from reader to reader. Other enterprising youngsters would collect a number of consecutive parts, then rent the volume out to friends. In reality, the serial novels were overdramatic and sensational, but generally harmless. If anything, the penny dreadfuls, although obviously not the most inspiring of literary selections, resulted in increasingly literate youth in the Industrial period.[xx]

'The Idle 'Prentice Executed at Tyburn', engraving 1822, William Hogarth (1697–1764), Harvard Law School

The singular artist at this time in the British tradition who recognised the trope of the cautionary moral tale and demanded its place within 'high art' as mockery, storytelling and reflection was the engraver and painter William Hogarth (1697–1764). His *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) and the morality series *A Rake's Progress* (1734) used art to make social and political statements, often targeting the urbanisation of London and the prevalent crime.

Works created in this atmosphere include Industry and Idleness (1747), Gin Lane (1751) and The Four Stages of Cruelty (1751), which respectively addressed embracing the Protestant work ethic, alcoholism and cruelty to animals. An engraving from Industry and Idleness, 'Execution at Tyburn'

(detail) 'The Idle 'Prentice Executed at Tyburn'

depicts mass regular gatherings to see executions in London. It had the same draw as a sporting event at the Melbourne Cricket Ground would have today, with food, entertainment, people hanging from every surrounding building and structure, and there would often be expected interaction between the crowd and the condemned prisoner or prisoners with insults being exchanged, confessions, declarations and last-minute reprieves. In this print the old woman holding the baby and looking straight ahead is selling broadsheets that were a program for the execution. These printed, single-sheet 'last dying speeches' described in detail the results of sentences handed down at London's central criminal court, the Old Bailey.

Sites like Tyburn, the Tower of London, Tower Hill, Smithfield, Charing Cross and Westminster had entirely different meanings for its populace than they do today, recognised primarily then for the gruesome punishments that took place there. Londoners knew the gallows sites as well as they knew London's most famous landmarks like St Paul's Cathedral and London Bridge. They could recite infamous (or famous) persons executed at their 'favourite' site just as we would name the players in our favourite football team. Tyburn, a legendary place of execution for six centuries, even became an early tourist attraction for people from out of town.[xxi]

Vendors set up their carts and booths hours before execution time, doing a roaring trade selling food, drink, souvenirs, even pornographic material, to a frenzied crowd. Minstrels and jugglers entertained the crowd. With the advent of cheap printing in the 16th and 17th centuries, touts created lurid broadsheets detailing the supposed history and scandalous crimes of the victim, the precursors to modern-day tabloids. These broadsheets sold like hotcakes to an excited audience.[xxii]

These public executions were not silent and sombre events; they were rough, noisy, boisterous and often irreverent spectacles, so much so that at times they took on a surreal air. Public gatherings for these events became the largest social events for several centuries in medieval England, bordering on the anarchic at times, depending on who was being marched onto the scaffold. Executions were indeed part of the popular culture of the time from which came a fair amount of gallows humour – the locals referred to the events as a 'hanging fair', 'stretching', or 'collar day'.

Life was indeed cheap in Georgian England, as the broadsides attest. Egan Lee had no doubt seen his share of executions, public punishments and humiliations in England as well as Van Diemen's Land and was still see experiencing his own everyday attempt to escape the law.

POLICE NEWS
ENGLAND, AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA

In 1875 Richard Egan Lee decided to do something he knew would be very familiar to consumers of popular newspapers: something that was published very cheaply, sold cheaply and that had both specific publishing precedence and a long history of folk familiarity.

He would have known of the English Illustrated Police News (1842), being a journalist and not departing England for the colonies till 1853. He would also have been well aware that The Illustrated London News 1842 was the first to make a policy of subordinating text to pictures. It didn't take long to become apparent that newspapers with illustrations could achieve very high sales. In the colonies during this period, literary Australia was an ideal place for someone like Egan Lee in principle, to consider how one might very well survive as it was largely a journalistic Australia[xxiii] – 'This is essentially the land of the newspaper' referred to the fact that wealth and literacy resulted in a per capita purchase of newspapers far in excess of that in Britain.

The English Illustrated Police News was first published in 1864, ten years earlier than Egan Lee's version, and ceased publication in 1938, proving long-term popularity and financial success.

In Australia the impact of the 1855 abolition of newspaper stamp duty, together with cheaper postal rates, helped accelerate a wider distribution of mail-order catalogues and subscriptions. The situation improved even more in 1861 when paper duty was also abolished. It had become very obvious that in the nineteenth century 'pictures sold more goods' and during the 1870s–'80s, pictorial advertising and its associated ephemera hit its highest peak.

There was no reason why Egan Lee in his senior years could not have one last lunge at success, knowing full well that he had a family of five to still feed, clothe and shelter.

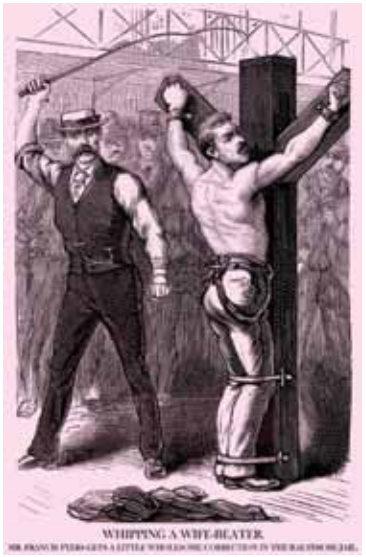
Although at first glance the English *Illustrated Police News* looked vaguely like Egan Lee's *Police News* first published in 1875, with similarly garish subjects, they were much more detailed and skilled in illustration and, though equally varied in treatment, made attempts to create fully representational, more complete scenes. Egan Lee copied the English format: the front pages were similar in that they used split frames to show different events in different-sized frames.

In their structure, conventions and narrative, these engraving of news events were equivalent to performances framed as if in a proscenium – news images could be mistaken or read for the depictions of theatre or even opera productions. Joshua Brown describes how viewing these pictorial windows of events, readers registered a sequence constituting an event, as well as that event's defining, or, decisive moment; framed within one image, time extended and cause and effect became apparent.[xxiv]

In America, English-born Frank Leslie's Illustrated *Newspaper* (1855; called *Leslie's Weekly*, *The Boy's and Girl's Weekly* and *The Budget of Fun*) included news as well as fiction; it survived until 1922.

The *National Police Gazette,* commonly referred to as simply the *Police Gazette,* was an American magazine founded in 1845 by two journalists, Enoch E Camp, also an attorney, and George Wilkes, a transcontinental railroad builder. In 1866, Wilkes and Camp sold the Gazette to George W Matsell. The editor and proprietor from 1877 until his death in 1922 was Richard Kyle Fox, an immigrant from Ireland.

Unlike the British illustrated press, which avoided the more unpleasant aspects of urban life, American pictorial papers offered a steady supply of pictures



showing the dangerous city. Frank Leslie's paper regularly depicted accidents, fires, hazards, crime and especially poverty. His publication insisted that its display of 'terrible pictures' was intended to incite positive action and to press its reader to demand change.[xxv]

Ostensibly devoted to matters of interest to the police, it was a tabloid-like publication, with lurid coverage of murders, Wild West outlaws and sport. It is well known for its engravings and photographs of scantily clad strippers, burlesque dancers and prostitutes, often skirting on the edge of what is legally considered obscenity. Its greater physical realism and detail attracted a market already familiar and possibly seduced by photographic naturalism.

Lee's *Pictorial Weekly Budget, Police News, Tales, Trials, Sports and Events*

In the *Police News*, Egan Lee's correspondence and letters column called 'The Lion's Mouth' always carried the Latin epithet 'For the cause that needs assistance, 'Gainst the wrong that needs resistance'.

This conveyed his frustrated and deeply felt effort to expose the corruptions and institutions of Melbourne. He described his broadsheet as 'the advocate of the working classes' and although his column consistently took up social questions, the illustrations were more to do with the calamities of everyday disaster than many depictions of issues to be addressed. This may have been essentially connected to the type of individual who chose to spend time in 'making up a sketch' to send to the *Police News*. Perhaps it was the younger and the older people who had time or those who followed daily disasters and accidents with regular fascination who made the contributions.

The decades of the colonial 1860s and '70s were inevitably going to produce a local version of publishing that was planning for mass distribution with material that had already been well tried, but it now had bigger, hungrier urban markets to exploit.[xxvi]

Yet the rapid growth of new economies all seemed to have a dark side. This period in Victoria was an unsettled one and as Garden writes, it was 'not a proud one'. The battles for selection, protection campaigns, bitter political fighting, and constitutional crises had created a community that suffered from too much social division, corruption and greed.[xxvii]

These were decades of economic growth assisted by capital investment from Britain which stimulated the pastoral industry, residential construction and public sector. Though the Victorian economy levelled off in the mid-1870s it then slumped in 1878–79. Egan Lee died in 1878, having accurately foreseen the economic factors and related political crises.

Thousands of diggers returned to major towns for work and found only depressing wages. Investment and speculation in mining companies and shares became a huge business. Quickly won wealth and a gambling attitude saw the floating of and speculation in mining companies and, perhaps like today's residential property market in our inner capital cities, became a national pastime. This, as with the economic global crisis of recent years, was based on false prospectives, and in particular, on non-existent mines and directorates stacked with public figures to give an aura of respectability. The relationship between capitalism and labour was becoming impersonal and a proletariat was beginning to emerge in Melbourne with a working-class consciousness.[xxviii]

Gardener asks an important question about the times that Egan Lee was living and working in. How were the colony's resources to be shared? Victorian society was divided on the issue, and the key to the victory of controlling who would win was political power.

During the 1870s the conservative squatter and new urban mercantile group combined to resist change. A third group made up of urban working class, artisans and small commercial businesses including small farming communities wanted more egalitarian policies and advocated reforms.

Despite the visible appearance of Melbourne as an elegant, growing Victorian city, it had a seamy side. There was still no proper system of sanitation: refuse from kitchens, baths, laundries, factories, stables and public toilets ran into the open streets. Melbourne had poverty, slums, crime and an underworld.[xxix]

But it wasn't just visible disparity between the rich and the poor that defined the differences within the society; it was the use of Christian morality and propriety that tied respectability to the middle class and to community as part of a judgemental order that polarised those on the wrong side of affluent aspiration.

This was at a more sophisticated urban level than the struggle between the Christian Tractists and the political radicals seeking reform and human rights in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century of Hannah More and Thomas Paine.

Although public morality in Victoria was not high, the community had an aura of public propriety on social issues; for example, keeping the Sabbath and the burgeoning temperance movement. As well as being a colony of churches, with fifty per cent church attendance, there was a powerful puritanism made up of Anglican Protestants (Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Congregationalists and Baptists) added to by Church of England's drive for propriety. Both priests and secularists established societies for the promotion of morality to improve the moral tone of the community and religious issues became major questions of the day, widely discussed in newspapers, periodicals and public meetings. Egan Lee was a harsh critic of church corruption and transgression[xxx], sufficient for representatives of the various denominations to come after him. The only illustrated portrait that exists of Egan Lee in *Police News* is the one of him confronting 'the Heads of the Denominations' who he has had transformed into a crowd of deformed semi-demonic beasts.

It was never just *Police News*' 'sensationalism' that was the issue. What was flouted to be immoral rubbish that brought about a disordered imagination leading to crime was also a very common widespread use of the sensational narrative 'newspaper' novel that developed into the crime fiction we read today, as well as the bloody forensic murder TV serials and films we have adopted as the new 'primal scene'. Altick points out that by as early as 1860 '… newspapers had taken over the proprietorship of English murder'.

But the question of 'sensationalism' was a poor critical excuse that was used to undermine Egan Lee's constant criticism of a corrupt Victorian 'legislature' and support for the workingman and those from the working class who wanted to stand for seats in parliament. If Egan Lee had a readership as significant as is suggested then perhaps it wasn't just the 'obscene' pictures that were a problem.

In his editorial of February 12, 1876 he writes:

> … momentous issues that at the time we write are being hotly fought out, by an injured and betrayed, on the one hand, and the most venal, corrupt majority within the walls of Parliament that ever disgraced any age or nation. The country thoroughly understands that it has been betrayed by those whom it had entrusted.

> … We honour the men who, like Peter Lalor, call things by their right names and the people will endorse his manly denunciation of the gross corruption that has obtained the venal majority which support the no less venal Ministry of the Iron Hand. A general election, just now, would purge our colonial Parliament of men who have notoriously sold their constituents for the regulation price, some two thousand or so out of the fund raised by the land-sharks and profit-mongers, especially to buy the votes of these despicable traitors.

In this same editorial he also emphasises the important work done toward the Eight Hours' Struggle. Egan Lee's editorial breadth mostly focused on the calamities and disasters of people's everyday lives expressed in both universal and local context, and although his political opinions were, conversely, very specific in terms of politicians and related business corruption, the two make an interesting balance. He is clear about the overall aim of his paper. His intention is to consider the 'emotional' nature of life and yet he also idealises a 'manly' future time that would be mature in social ethics and understanding.

Twenty months after the commencement of Lee's *Pictorial Weekly Budget* he closes down the title and starts under a new banner, *The Citizen and Penny Police News* (21 April 1877). Despite the legal charges of libel and accusations of obscenity, he proceeds to qualify his editorial position in the restart.

> [My] past sentiments and principles would be reprinted without alteration of a single letter; for I can solemnly assert that there is not One line which, dying, I would wish to blot. It may be permitted us to remark, at this the beginning of a NEW VOLUME, that whilst we will at all times fearlessly expose those social frauds and shame which are the curse of a community, we shall never lend our columns to wanton attacks upon unoffending parties. The pen of the censor and the satirist is a wholesome reformer, and an admirable corrector of chronic vice.[xxxi] It is only social shoddy and snobbery, the libertine, the seducer, the prude, and the hypocrite that need fear from us a lampoon or a lash. Whilst giving, from time to time, all permissible details of those sensational or emotional events of the day, which a TRUE newspaper must publish, sheer profanity and obscenity we hold in utter aversion. With the experience of fifty years as a journalist – our advent on the press dates from November, 1822 – with children and grandchildren here in Victoria, we are fully alive to the responsibility of our position.

Defamation, indecency and obscenity – Egan Lee goes to court

The *Argus* described one of *Police News*'s articles as being of 'a most filthy and disgusting nature … to the disgrace of the city. This sale of this garbage was immense'. Egan Lee was consequently prosecuted in 1875 for obscenity and found not guilty by a jury. What amounted to a single sheet of four pages of letterpress that was badly printed, with some issues selling up to 17,000 copies

– a colossal amount in a small city, well in excess of the daily newspapers – may have been closer to the point about why he was found to be so offensive and irritating to the more respectable presses.

In 1876 he was again taken to court for defamatory libel. The *Police News* had published that a Mrs Emily Chapman, 'Hotel Keeper, Freemasons Hotel', was obtaining income from 'Ten Pound Ladies'. Mrs Chapman insisted that she was being blackmailed by Egan Lee who had told her if she didn't want the information printed she had to pay as it 'cost me eight pounds cutting the block and two pounds for printing'. Mrs Chapman claimed that 'my livings has been completely ruined since. And I never kept a house of assignation'. (See illustration.) Lee subsequently published an entry in the *Police News* titled 'An Unasked Apology To Mrs. Chapman'.[xxxii]

In October 1876 the *Age* launched a full-scale attack on Egan Lee for having produced and illustrated an issue which gave details of frightful abortion

Mr. S.—"Now, Mrs. Chapman, on your oath, did I not give you and your two maids £10 apiece to sleep with me?'—The landlady did not answer the question. She fainted.

'Now, Mrs. Chapman, on your oath, did I not give you and your two maids ten [pounds] to sleep with me?', 1877

practices that were current In Melbourne. Police News had also committed the sin of using a then forbidden word, 'abortion', and accusing married women of resorting to the practice as well as illustrating the recovery of foetuses by police. The *Age* wrote:

> … of the filthiness and immoral tendencies of the literary garbage which Mr Lee served up to his reader there could be no doubt in the mind of any decent person. At the present moment there is not a print in the whole literature of smut to equal the *Budget* for foul and unblushing

> scurrility and lewdness – the nuisance has reached a point at which it would be criminal to remain silent any longer. In the interest of the public morals, therefore we have no scruple whatever in directing the attention of the police and the Attorney general to the last number of the publication, and calling upon them to stay the plague. Lee is not a bit less an enemy to the health of society than the wretch who exposes for sale food unfit for human consumption.

Who were Egan Lee's artists and how was the *Police News* printed?

From the earliest days of the publication Egan Lee was inviting illustrations from contributors:

> We shall be happy to receive the occasional sketches you prose. Any event suitable for illustration is at all times a welcome subject. Photographs or drawing that may be needed to guide the worker in zinc, will be promptly paid for.

Eight months later he writes again:

> As to the rude illustrations, it may be useful to say a word or two. They are NOT woodcuts or engravings of any kind, neither are they pretended to be works of art, but simply approximate sketches of the doings of the day, produced by a process which, with means at my command, will continually improve.

Egan Lee makes clear his printing process, as well as placing advertisement to sell Lee's printing blocks, rubber stamps and rollers:

> **Lee's Process of Zincotype**
>
> R. Egan Lee begs to draw attention to his process for the production of Surface Printing Blocks by Zincotype, which for commercial purposes especially, will to a very great the more tedious and expensive process of engraving on wood, a saving of more than fifty percent being in all cases effected. All the illustrations in this journal have been engraved by this method; every one of them being drawn by Amateurs; some of them their first production, so as to put the process to the severest possible test. The result, despite carping critics, is so far perfectly satisfactory for the establishment of this New Colonial Industry. By Zincotype, artists or amateurs have merely to draw on the prepared plate, with chemical ink, and metal blocks can be produced capable of printing any number of impressions at a typographical press. These blocks can again be multiplied by Electrotype or Stereotyped to any extent. The cost of blocks produced by 'Lee's Process' varies according to the fines of the work required, in all cases effecting an immense saving in comparison with wood engraving. By means of Photography in connection with this process, fac-similes of any existing engraving or an enlarged or reduced copy can be produced. Bookbinding Blocks can be reproduced by Zincotype much cheaper than any other means.

One of his columns, 'A Week's Budget of Disasters', relates the details of each week's disastrous events, in sympathetic terms, but he was always placing the importance of the 'illustration' forward as a key aspect of the information and of the market difference in his emphasis. At the end of the column he writes, 'All that we feel in the matter, beyond the sorrow as citizens, is that we have no omnipresent artist who could sketch the whole dose of disasters in one fell swoop'.

In another issue when reporting the 'The late horrible death of Miss Collier, and miraculous escape of her sister' he describes how one of the party 'whose courtesy we are indebted for the sketch, from which our artist has been enabled to give an illustration of the catastrophe, which appears in our front page'.

Who was 'J.C.'?

From 1876 onward many, but not all, of the illustrated prints of the broadsheet are signed in the self-conscious initials of J.C. Initially, I considered they were intended to be part of the public contributor's drawing, but quickly noted the discrepancy in the style of the illustrations even though the same initials were being added. Whether the depiction was extremely crude or more sophisticated, the initial was still applied.

Some initial investigation at the State Library catalogue of lists of ship arrivals of the period with a search under 'engraver' came up with the name of a Johann Cederberg who came to colony of Victoria with his wife Eva on the *Gauntlet*. The records are complicated, however, because it appears there are two Johann and Eva Cederbergs who are recorded as having different ages, yet in both cases Johann Cederberg is recorded as being an engraver. Perhaps the age of both of them is simply an estimation made by the record writer, as they are roughly the same differences between Johann and Eva.

The point of the search was originally to find the only artist who was proud enough to want to leave his own mark on so many of the illustrations, yet knew that as he was the technician of the task of finishing, the compositor of an array of constant variations of appearances, his full name could not be given as 'the artist'. Nonetheless, as the 'finisher' and platemaker I think he realised that it was his final reinscriptions and reiterations that would be all that was left behind. If Johann Cederberg's origins were originally Swedish or northern European, he may have wanted to play with a monogram after a master engraver: the initials of Albrecht Durer. Neither the humour nor the irony is lost on us.




Views on women

Egan Lee's obsession with crime and calamity during the 1870s in colonial Victoria was not a misplaced paranoia; it was the concern of a major cross-section of the community. His wish for changing such a society was accurately focused on the importance of education, both for boys and girls. Murder, rape of women and child abuse was the basis for many of the illustrations in the *Police News*, and his calls for attending to and changing the causes was as strident as it is becoming in our own period with increasing statistics of violence toward women and children. He writes very well in the language of his own age and experience:

> Hence we write, print, and publish not alone for the sons, but for the daughters of Australia. In a climate where puberty is early attained, the precocity of both sexes demands wise guidance. But wisdom consists, NOT in absurd and futile efforts to keep boys and girls in ignorance, like the silly ostrich, that, hiding its head in a sand hill, blinds itself to danger. The days of 'parsley beds and gooseberry bushes; are long passed away; and there is no happier, holier sight on earth than a family where mystery is banished and confidence abounds; where the boys are treated by the father as younger brothers, and the girls by their mother as fond and devoted sisters; where Ignorance is not deemed the best safeguard of Innocence, and where the mask of Prudery is not held to be the symbol of Purity. Despising the mystery that leads only to morbid curiosity, whence the victim awakens only to ruin and shame, we have but one aim in life, and that is to establish in the land of our adoption – before we 'go hence and be no more seen' – a cheap POPULAR for the MASSES; not, as some would have it, an insipid chronicle of crime, commonplace, and cant.[xxxiii]

Egan Lee emergences as a great advocate for changing the conditions of women's lives, producing editorials and columns on their powerless position in regard to violent abuse from husbands and sons, and in regard to the sexual exploitation of young girls. He applauds the visit of an American women's rights lecturer, arguing that she has come to encourage women to claim their rights:

L: *Three ruffians cowed by one woman, 1876*

R: *Breach of promise – a deceiver has caught a tartar, 1876*

THREE RUFFIANS COWED BY ONE WOMAN.

BREACH OF PROMISE.—A DECEIVER HAS CAUGHT A TARTAR.


LEE'S PICTORIAL WEEKLY BUDGET.

POLICE NEWS

TALES, TRIALS, SPORTS AND EVENTS.

No 60. MELBOURNE, JULY 22, 1876. ONE PENNY.


THE BANNER OF TRUTH.

POLICE NEWS

No 12. MELBOURNE, FEBRUARY 10, 1877. ONE PENNY.

AN ARAB MAIDEN'S VENGEANCE.


A BRAVE GIRL, SECURING A VILLAIN.

Above L: *'Ten monsters (disguised as men) criminally assault one poor woman at Hotham', 1876*

R: *'An Arab maiden's revenge', 1877*

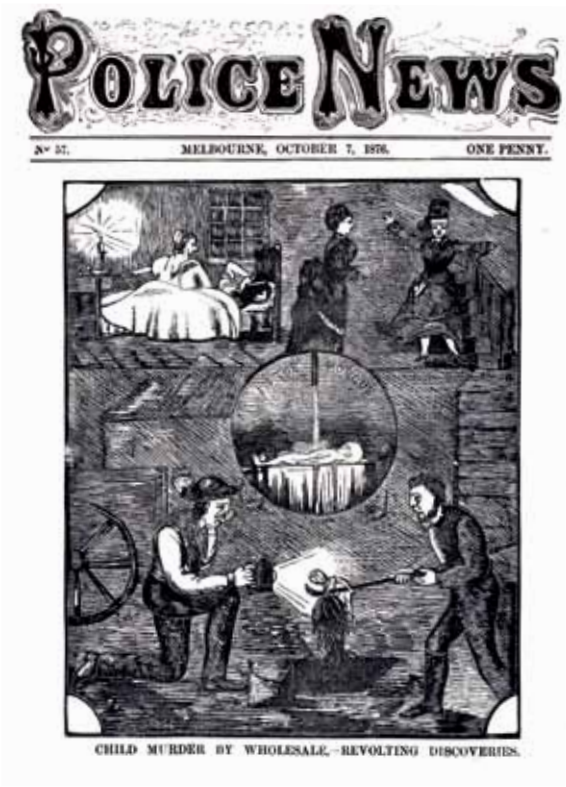
> A right that we trust will never be disputed by the masculine portion of humanity. It is the right of a woman, to ask from her stronger brethren and for herself and children. Now Victorians, rally round, and assist this talented lady, who is both benevolent and accomplished; although her lectures did not happen to suit Victorian tastes.

I find his enlightened sense of women as individuals entitled to equal rights to be significantly matched by his focus on the newspaper as an expression of emotion operating as a major societal force.

Below L: *'A brave girl, securing a villain', 1876*

R: *'Plucky Carlton girls arresting a thief', 1877*

In 1847 in the U.S. National Police Gazette, the front-cover illustration was of:



R: *Ann Lohman, known as Madame Restell, notorious abortionist to NYC high society, March 13, 1847*

In this context the subject of abortion is also one he does not shy away from, either in commentary or visual representation, placing the subject as the full cover on the issue of that week (7 October 1876). The subject had been given a frontis page status twenty years before in Frank Leslie's American *National Police Gazette* but was treated in an almost symbolist style combining competent representational drawing with bizarre and surreal elements to make a portrait of Madame Restell, described as a notorious abortionist to high society, a kind of satanic figure in whose hands she gives the birth to death as a kind of fiendish midwife. It is actually a much more frightening image than the crude narrative composition that looks like an annunciation of death instead of birth.

Editorials in his own defence

Not only was Egan Lee required to defend himself in his paper on a constant basis, he also found himself needing to defend what he considered to be crucially missing in the coverage of major community problems.

In reply to the lack of serious investigation of treatment of women inmates in the Kew Asylum and of prisoners in the 'Swanston-street lock-up' he writes:

> Such atrocities (at) the Kew Asylum and the Swanston-street lock-up could not be passed over silently in England, where the press is conducted by independent men, and not, as on the daily press of Melbourne with scarcely an exception, by time-serving, crawling lackeys. Were there but ONE honest, outspoken, and fearless daily paper in the Victorian metropolis – one unbought by Government advertisements on the one hand, and unbribed by the squatters on the other – the productive classes of the community might sometimes see a stand made against the wanton outrages perpetrated by those who 'Dressed in a little brief authority, Play such fantastic tricks before high Heaven As make the angels weep.' We are not without hope that the day is not distant when men of spirit and independent mind – men unfettered by class or party – will be found at the head of a FREE daily press journal, directing and guiding the public mind intelligently and independently.

In his editorial of 26 May 1877, he reminds those in 'high positions of trust and honour' and the 'wealthy orders of this colony' that it has been his doctrine 'from the first number of the *Police News*' to save the community from moral and social ruin, employing:

> '… satire and invective, sarcasm and exposure, fluttering the ranks of the snobocracy, and our trump is all the more gratifying, from the fact that not another paper in Victoria had the pluck to advocate the case we espoused. The game of diverting public attention from the real evil, by false issues, is played out. Costly prosecutions and lightning legislation – as needless as futile – to crush a man who dares to proclaim, the hypocrisy, cant, and veneer that pervade the nonproducing classis of this colony, cannot be repeated.

Egan Lee concluded that the Police News had evoked more envy, hatred, malice and all charitableness towards its conductor than any journal issued since the days of William Cobbett.

The ludicrous

At the point when Egan Lee recognises he is void of the capacity and energy to resist the critical attacks on himself, his living and his broadsheet he decides to write about the ludicrous.

> The sense of the ludicrous, and the effect which it has in ensuing laughter, are familiar to everyone. But what constitutes the ludicrous? We laugh at the weakness, the mistakes, the annoyances and eccentricities of others, and sometimes at their misfortunes; but in the latter case it is something in the misfortune, contrasted with their previous condition, and not at the actual misfortune that we laugh, for this borders on tragedy, and calls up other emotions. The feeling of the ludicrous is excited by incongruity, in which there is an absence of the element of danger. Laughter is the result of the emotions caused by the perception of the

> ludicrous but tends to exhaust it. The sense of the ludicrous is largely a natural gift, which seems to be depressed by intellectual culture, and to flourish most in free communities where ordinary life is varied and unconfined, and a high average of comfort prevails.[xxxiv]

The vertical horse caught in a tree fork, the galloping horse-rider terrified of a giant bat, the boy in city clothes formally hanging between tree limbs and found just in time, a culprit tied to a tree limb and the beautiful lady acrobat depicted falling to her fatal injury express the ludicrous as symbols of epic black humour, different to when we laugh at lampoons or caricatures. I think these images accurately capture the universal place of mortal incongruity that Egan Lee writes of. Oddity and incongruous peculiarity is part and parcel of the unexpectedness of an image that is between danger and death. In this sense it is also the space in which illustration holds itself back from what we more closely can recognise as the state of madness drawn as intent.

Madness as intent

There is a point between accident and stupidity, which may happen without any will, or at least bad or misguided will in the case of the ludicrous. Conversely, the capacity of a human being to make a choice that is an act of judgement and intent, to pass into madness as death, or as living death, is no longer a place of single absurdity that the prior illustrations depicted, but instead, the locus of the social and of relationship to others.

FRIGHTFUL MURDER AND SUICIDE AT GEELONG.

HORRORS OF THE KEW ASYLUM

SUICIDE FROM RELIGOUS MANIA.

The *Police News* is made up of images of the ludicrous and the mad, murder and suicide dominate whilst accident falls into the ludicrous, and cruelty into madness. Yet all of these depictions tell us of fear through sensation, and the capacity of the imagination to feel it and represent it effectively. No matter how crude, it is enough to convey not just the horror of finality, but of the ways it is specific to a distinct and unique moment in the illustrated history of visuality.

I find these illustrations coming from the simplest sources both utterly sad and distressing in the sense of helplessness they convey. Although the actions are diachronic, across time, to own realities in the twenty-first century I can see the reality of the moment that Egan Lee wanted to reflect to the present and future. They are not images of 'marvellous Melbourne' or bohemia or the struggles for a nationalist Australian art through landscape – they are the plain and sorry truth of community and its social relations.

THE LOW AND THE HIGH AND THE CONTEMPORARY

A FARMER'S DAUGHTER SAVED FROM OUTRAGE, BY A BRAVE DOG.

L: *'A farmer's daughter saved from outrage, by a brave dog'*

R: *'Milo of Croton, attempting to test his strength, is caught and devoured by a lion', Charles Meynier, 1795*[xxxv]

When I first sighted the Police News frontispiece illustration of 'A farmer's daughter saved from outrage, by a brave dog', its combination of pictorial and compositional elements reminded me immediately of seventeenth-century baroque engravings, the late-eighteenth-century painting of the sublime and the terrified white horse of George Stubbs' A Lion attacking a horse (1770), as well as nineteenth-century Romantic paintings by Delacroix of men being attacked by lions.

The intense focus on the heroic or horrific protagonist as the central dominating figure, his inevitable demise, the tortured movement of a muscular body about to collapse and the suggestion of extreme distance using deep perspective were a satisfying measure of the ubiquitous transmission of

already existing high art/fine art imagery in the available distributions of mass production of books for reading, but also books for copying in the nineteenth century.

It is possible to see a random distribution of various kinds (components) of copied images across the full range of Police News issues, of processing and interweaving of copied elements of sources, combined to create hybrid new images. Apart from an obvious example of 'high art' where a classical work such as the Rape of the Sabine Women is used, the illustrations are a veritable 'spot the source 'of sketches from contributing amateurs, copying and combining to create their finished image in a way that the editor can't predict or have any invested sense of hierarchy over the result.

Whilst the unknown contributors of sketches to *Police News* do their drawn copies, unseen, as a private form of expression, the satirist and caricaturist does the precise same thing when using sources, but as a form of public parody.

However, the *Police News* 'Attempted Abduction' as an autonomous creation is less confined than either the Pietro da Cortona as a ' signed work of art' or the Gilbert A'Beckett as a work of self-conscious public satire. Melbourne's *Punch Magazine* similarly used the lampoon as did *Touchstone,* a Saturday paper. There you could find an art historical setting for the parody of contemporary political events, e.g. repeated use of classical themes from Shakespeare and the use of artistic images of famous sculptures such at the Hellenistic Laocoon and his sons by illustrators such TS Collins. It is not insignificant that Richard Egan Lee's son Robert also wrote for *Humbug* and *Touchstone* in a milieu of shared magazine iconography. The reading of the *Police News* broadsheet 'Attempted abduction' image is not to do with 'recognition' of high art lampooned, but with a rough-and-ready amateur drawing that points to a real meaning concerning a local anxiety rather than an artistic or political one.

**note on the specific technical appearance of this print in Endnote* [xxxvi]

VILLAINOUS OUTRAGE ON A LADY—ATTEMPTED ABDUCTION.

The Rape of the Sabine Women, *Pietro da Cortona (b. 1596, Cortona, d. 1669, Roma), Permission of Capitoline Museums, Rome, Italy*

1627–29 Oil on canvas, 280.5 x 426 cm, reproduced with permission, Pinacoteca Capitolina, Rome

'Romans walking off with the Sabine Women', illustration by John Leech from The Comic History of Rome *by Gilbert Abbott A Beckett (Bradbury, Evans & Co, London, 1850)*

CONCLUSION

A key passage from Peter Sinnema's Dynamics of the Pictured Page (1998) was inspiration to look closely at the relationship of image to the broader narrative context of a published text, which as it happens is also the arch preoccupation of the art historian. Egan Lee's *Police News* suffered from a cultural aporia of its formalist function in the context of communication for more than 150 years[xxxvii]. The 'absences of any well-developed corpus of work studying the generic issues specific to [the] periodical – the complex mediations of editorial policy, engraving technique, readership definitions, sales figures, distributions patterns and finance'.[xxxviii]

There were historical and archival occlusion and invisibility until recent times; the rejected and ostracised images and the editorials of their author could not take a place within contemporary dialogues, which they nonetheless shared in universal ways.

Finally there was Egan Lee's impoverishment as a printer and publisher leading him to using a method for gathering images from the *unknown* public to provide the illustrations for the events of the week – the process being a technical and visual collaboration between the amateur sketches and the 'cut, paste and finish' technique of the zincotype compositor. The unknown 'composites' from the public, be they bad drawing as much as bad art, were mirrors of both the received and widely available circulation of images already in existence, and the final product was that of the unknown compositor/s who sometimes didn't and sometimes did sign his/their initials – 'J.C.'.

The whole process fits the contemporary imprint of the digital electronic technologies we have been using for at least forty years of increasingly sophisticated 'cut and paste' – Photoshop and InDesign. This has, for want of a better word, given a completely democratic and arguably egalitarian opportunity to the unskilled amateur artist as well as the highly skilled professional digital artist.

Finally, the proposed scientific reason and objectivity of modernity did nothing to remove cheap art and literature; if anything, mass global distribution created it as the biggest part of the basis for education and learning about visuality, culture and the world. Yet, as James Louis comments:

We are left with a paradox. The spread of literary and cheap literature was widely associated with demystification of the universe, and the substitution of a world of reason and objectivity. Yet both developments could assume dimensions as magical as the old beliefs they displaced.[xxxix]

The 'magic' that I saw initially in the harshness of the original broadsheet images, which made me think of German expressionist prints, could just as easily have conjured up the prints of Salvatore Rosa (1615–73) or Francisco Goya (1746–1828). The constant element in these references is that graphic illustration has a powerful and spontaneous capacity to show at any time that the 'sleep of reason' and the lack of it will always continue to produce monsters. Richard Egan Lee could never understand, and rightly, why he or his popular newspaper was the one that was seen as the monstrous.

JULIETTE PEERS

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THE EYE IS FREE TO ROAM AND SPECULATE; THE ***POLICE NEWS*** OF ELIZABETH GERTSAKIS.

All that is real and can be sensed is in constant contact with magic and mystery. (Sergei de Diaghilev, qtd. Scheijen, p. 5)

Tell me the truth about love. (WH Auden)[1]

Not a print in the whole literature of smut to equal the [Police News]. (David Syme, qtd Cannon 1977, n.p.)

Class, crassness and vulgarity have played a part in the travails of the *Police News* Zincotypes[2] and the substantial cultural and curatorial amnesia that has shrouded them; considering too what Audrey Schmidt (2013) named as the long history of 'absurd, sensationalised censorship in Australia' of visual culture. Elizabeth Gertsakis's lively, poetic and passionate reframing of these works is enacted with full cognisance of notions of the canonical, taste and precedent which still have traction in the expanded field of the visual cultural industry in Australia.

Trash, tragic low camp, the tabloid and the abject are not present-day inventions of art practice or the reflection of an era when media-studies academics can debate via online postings a 'considered tolerance' for Benny Hill and his position in a 'lineage of knowing, ironic comedy that does not currently acknowledge him' (Hartley 2005, McCarthy 2005). Advocates of the rambunctious and disorderly in visual culture may be found amongst radical thinkers of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

Two acclaimed essays particularly provide an imprimatur and a pedigree for Gertsakis's repositioning of popular ephemeral and outrageously uninhibited media into a high cultural permanency. Robert Louis Stevenson's essay from the Magazine of Art 1884 celebrating the cut-out cardboard sheets of characters, props and sets for the toy theatres of his childhood is widely known. The anarchic delirium offered by the expressionist and absurd characterisation and mise en scène, both textual and visual, of the cut-outs catalysed liberated creative thought as a rebuke to mimeses and the dreary replication of the standard and expected.

> Every sheet we fingered was another lightning glance into obscure, delicious story; it was like wallowing in the raw stuff of storybooks. I know nothing to compare with it save now and then in dreams, when I am privileged to read in certain unwrit stories of adventure, from which I awake to find the world all vanity. (Stevenson 1887)

The melodramatic extravagant gestures, the trope-ic, repetitive nature of the pictorial elements and the weirdly incongruous juxtapositions and inconsistencies of set and design – all offered a vivid challenge to the ordered and controlled.

> Stevenson understood nostalgia not as a retreat from the difficulties of modern life, but as a form of subversion, believing that it challenged the conformity of late Victorian culture with its evocation of danger and crime through plays about highwaymen and smugglers. (Powers 2004, p. 17)

In 1941 George Orwell likewise acknowledged that the crass and the trivial also enacted its own mesmerising aesthetic to equal any acclaimed and legitimised artwork:

> Who does not know the 'comics' of the cheap stationers' windows, the penny or twopenny coloured post cards with their endless succession of fat women in tight bathing-dresses and their crude drawing and unbearable colours, beach chiefly hedge-sparrow's-egg tint and Post Office red?

Orwell provides an uncannily accurate precedent for defining the visual style of the *Police News* zincotypes – 'the grotesque, staring, blatant quality of the drawings ' – as well as justifying such disposable artwork against the folkloric underbelly of European culture.

> Your first impression is of overpowering vulgarity. This is quite apart from the ever-present obscenity, and apart also from the hideousness of the colours. They have an utter low-ness of mental atmosphere which comes out not only in the nature of the jokes but, even more, in the grotesque, staring, blatant quality of the drawings. The designs, like those of a child, are full of heavy lines and empty spaces, and all the figures in them, every gesture and attitude, are deliberately ugly, the faces grinning and vacuous, the women monstrously parodied, with bottoms like Hottentots … what you are really looking at is something as traditional as Greek tragedy, a sort of sub-world of smacked bottoms and scrawny mothers-in-law which is a part of Western European consciousness. (Orwell 1941)

The 'modern' in cultural practice and in social history is often defined against 'the Victorian'. '[A]ntiquated stereotypes' (Teukolsky 2009, p. 4) are still routinely attached to nineteenth-century culture.

There is an accepted genealogy of the avant-garde centred around German enlightenment thought, French art, North American collecting and curating (Solkin 1995, p. 1, Teukolsky 2009, pp. 4-5, Yeazel 2010, p. 621).

'The Victorian has a contemporary cultural afterlife signifying antiquity, repression and a strict adherence to norms' (Teukolsky 2009, p. 6). A key platform of the truism is that British culture and particularly British visual culture could never be 'modern' (Solkin 1995, p. 1).

This taint of the a priori conservatism and irrelevance of Anglophone visual culture held true for what Sir Charles Dilke called 'Greater Britain': the

imperial diaspora to which settler Australia belonged. One could read much of the oeuvre of art historian Bernard Smith as dancing upon the particular tightrope of the necessity for radicalism, driven both by his Marxism and his generational position as coming to intellectual maturity in the 1930s with its Bloomsbury-inspired disdain for the 'Victorian' in high culture[3], and the nationalist loyalty to visible – and legible – signs of Australia, particularly that of the Australian workingman, which perforce meant dealing with carefully chosen aspects of the Victorian.

Smith's choices and taste – as did those of a number of key white, male, eminent and left-leaning academics – established a narrative of Australia in public myth and construct that has remained preeminent, ratified by the intellectual validation of the Whitlam and Keating regimes.[4] Smith's particular and necessary acrobatics were shared by many of his generation of academics: in order to laud the much desired [white] Australian 'working man's paradise' – the fabled era of Roberts, Lawson, Eureka and the 'Bushman' – as rightfully modern and avant-garde, one had to engage substantially with the abhorred nineteenth century.

Only New South Wales and Tasmania could boast any large oeuvre of material or visual heritage prior to the 1830s, the decade that heralded in the abhorred and adjured 'Victorian'. Thus Australian academics and curators had to engage with the Victorian, but disavowed this necessity by insisting upon the nationalist credentials of the material they were discussing – it was *Australian* and beyond any monarchical and reign-driven marking of time and cultural change. To facilitate this contradiction a very specific series of choices was made and an 'art history' was fabricated that spoke of only a narrow tranche of imagery and artists. Much nineteenth-century Australian visual culture found no validation in either the institutions or the market for reselling historic art.

The *Police News* zincotypes ironise other postwar Australian intellectual dreams. Michael Cannon's introduction to the facsimile edition of *Police News* in the 1970s mourns the meagre documentation of the 'realities of 'low life' in nineteenth century Australia' (Cannon 1977, n.p.). However, what we see in *Police News* is not the desired earnest, directed and cogent world of manly struggle and purpose, heroic workers, agents and free thinkers drawn from originals Roberts, McCubbin, Lawson and secondary sources Russell Ward and Manning Clarke, but a carnivalesque world of misrule and meaninglessness. Here is no workers' paradise, but a random dystopia that devours a spectrum of Melburnians, including the middle classes as much as the working class. Think of the respectable schoolmaster caught climbing the walls of a nearby girls' boarding school to spy on the pupils' bedrooms and the strange accidents that do not heed wealth or class and strike the innocent and guilty alike.

Richard Egan Lee's *Police News* does not simply throw up the ironies of received fantasies of public culture's fabricated, selective vision of working-class Australia and undermine social realism with a sprightly wayward – albeit clumsy, naïve – Jungian mythopoeism, it also engages with a highly influential model of Australian media and journalistic history.

Sylvia Lawson's vision of 1880s-1890s literary reading culture, widely published and republished via the *Archibald Paradox* (2006), is regarded as foundational and informative, as with Bernard Smith's model of art history. Her construct of an extended community of *Bulletin* readers writing in and debating, offering critique and suggestion, mutating the core text in a postmodern fashion, not only indicates the sense of agency and independence that the working class often signifies in the context of writing about Australian history, but it situates itself as a precursor to that collaborated and consensual culture of the postwar universities. In this interpretation, Archibald's resourceful intellectuality and responsiveness to his times and society thus invokes an inferred collective self-portrait of later generations of cultural and intellectual workers.

However, this vision of perfected cultural insight and agency is sullied and exposed by the *Police News*. Firstly, chronologically: Egan Lee already was setting himself up by editorial address to the reader as leader of an imagined community of readers, a decade before the *Bulletin*. Egan Lee's demands for social reform and his radical critique of privilege and public corruption in Australian society predated Archibald by decades.

Equally, he anticipated Archibald's idiosyncratic behaviours in performing a highly individualised and expressive mode of newspaper production where the editor became both symbol and driver of demands for political transformation. Through text and picture Egan Lee shared personal beliefs with a large community of readers, if sales figures are to be relied upon. His thoughts and opinions captured the popular imagination.

Yet *Police News* readers not only consumed what the editor served them, they also spun out a hypothetical community, an Australian state governed by shared opinions and sympathies as an alternative to the petty error and incompetence of colonial regimes. The pages of the *Police News* were as open to its readers as were the *Bulletin*'s and by the same mechanism for interaction: an invitation for readers to send in copy, written and visual.[5] Suggestions and copy came in from the bush as well as **the** suburbs, although what crossed Egan Lee's desk seemed to be mostly news about gruesome deaths and freak accidents rather than breaking free from the British crown or discussing bush egalitarianism.

This overlap between the *Police News* and the *Bulletin* perhaps offers a different, more haphazard, random possible identity for the *Bulletin* and its audience. The *Bulletin*'s intimate and empowering exchanges with its readers and co-producers may be judged no longer as so unique. Ordinary nineteenth-century Australians were writing and thinking about many issues, not necessarily political and not necessarily intellectually uplifting. Do subsequent generations tend to idealise the *Bulletin* and could the *Police News* offer an antidote to such hagiography?

Secondly, Egan Lee's journalism ratifies and implicates Archibald's strange hostility towards women. Whilst Archibald and Egan Lee shared a vision of an underclass harassed and pursued by corrupt colonial officialdom[6], Egan Lee did not see the punishment of rape and violence towards women as an expression of statuary injustices towards the disenfranchised, but as appropriate punishment for intolerable actions[7], with no relation to issues of state governance.

Unlike the lurid fear of women that dominated the *Bulletin*, the *Police News* is fascinated by female agency. Women shoot guns, defend themselves against rapists, repel burglars, track down and punish peeping toms, expose and mock wandering, unfaithful spouses, or equally attempt to bigamously marry other women's legal husbands. Not only do they drink in public bars, smoke opium, pick fights in public places and turn to prostitution in various plates and stories, but also they present far less abject and decadent *personae* than these extremes. Fashionably dressed and confident women move about freely, take public transport, walk in public places, work at a variety of jobs and play and watch sports. Egan Lee's women were neither angels in the house nor Ruskin's queens in the garden sequestered from the impure and grimy world of public life, industry and commerce.

The world Egan Lee constructs is also cosmopolitan: he happily copies and publishes strange and extreme news from around the world, especially Britain, Europe and the United States. He often creates a sense of intimacy and urgency by keeping reference to the foreign origins of his stories to a minimum, perhaps an indication of Egan Lee's creatively casual attitudes to expected tropes and shibboleths.

Given the postwar generation of public intellectuals were substantially engaged in a process of choice and censorship, the zincotype illustrations from Richard Egan Lee's *Police News* have remained substantially invisible in the visual canon associated with a collective figuring of Australia.

Conversely, Elizabeth Gertsakis's substantial arts practice in the 1980s and 1990s has attuned her to looking beyond the accepted and familiar. She brokered a distinctive reputation by probing the accepted mannerisms of visualising Australia. Her starting point was the perspective and eyes of a postwar migrant, tolerated as necessary for our homegrown *Wirtschaftswunder*, when we – the people – still manufactured so much within our own shores, but in the 1950s not necessarily made welcome.

The postwar migrant was excluded substantially perforce from the magic of the Australian dream or the workers' paradise – there was no humping the bluey and the pint pot for the freedom of the open road when the boss turned mean in the factories of South Melbourne, Richmond, Collingwood, Fitzroy, Brunswick and Darebin. (Where could one go? Down the road to a peas-in-the-pod, birds-in-the-nest same-same outfit**?)** Thus unaccounted for and barely thought of, the eye is free to roam and speculate.

Egan Lee's image of Australia is forgotten both in nationalist right-wing narratives of male courage and endurance and in left-wing celebrations of a fantasies of workers' lives with much of the basal and medieval edited out.

For art historical purposes his zincotypes indicate how the nineteenth-century city has often been excluded from mainstream Australian visual narratives, as too non-pastoral and non-landscape imagery – not McCubbin's bush where

children are lost, nor Streeton's plains where the river meanders gracefully to the horizon, or Roberts' camp where the artists cook an alfresco dinner. Egan Lee's Melbourne is a technologicised modern city of public transport, railway stations, shipyards, factories and commercial sports and entertainments.

At the same time other *Police News* images belong to the oeuvre of press illustrations of Australian bush life from the glamorous weeklies and monthlies that are now seen as providing sources to the nationalist Heidelberg School high art oil paintings.

Egan Lee noted that *Police News* was reprinting some of its 'bushranger' material because it was so popular and there was great public demand for such subjects.[8] Yet this vernacular nationalist content is placed amongst images that could be seen to be the lost Australian grand salon figurative paintings, a baroque and mannerist aesthetic, missing substantially from surviving high art oils, turbulent, wild, voluptuous and grandiloquent, highly appropriate for the boundless excesses of boomtime Melbourne and its ambitious public statements of its (alas relatively few) surviving buildings.

Partly the *Police News* story speaks of the middle classes – with circulation such as 17,000 copies (Cannon 1977, n.p.) in a day [9]– reaching far beyond the kitchen table or the factory workbench, into a middle class that supposedly also distanced itself from what is now termed 'trash' or 'pulp' culture. Buying the *Truth* for the football columns and not –heaven forbid – for the accounts of sexual crime and misconduct was a byword throughout much middle-class life in twentieth-century Melbourne.

Equally in the 1870s, given the circulation figures, the respectable would have sighted copies of *Police News*. Likewise, the stories leached out into more middle-class narratives as well as the usual suspects of the unruly working classes, denizens of Collingwood or prostitutes or members of the itinerant and rural poor. Many of the victims and transgressors attended schools, owned houses and operated businesses.

Lodge members and suburban fraternal societies were a constant target of mockery, as too fraudulent mediums, again very much a middle-class story. Egan Lee frequently celebrated the capture and foiling of burglars in words and pictures, being on the side of the property owners, rather than advocating radical wealth distribution.

The *Police News* challenges a conservative, genealogically driven vision of the past as well as the academic focus upon working-class experience. This Rabelaisian bacchanal of excess was the reality of four generations ago in any long-resident Melbourne family and has been erased in family memory as much as institutional memory, often in favour of a model of complaining about increasing social changes and new arrivals corrupting a now lost benign authentic Australia, of greater moral and religious circumspection than the present anarchy.

According to *Police News* there were public shamings of adulterers, tarred and feathered, in South Melbourne and ritual hangings of effigies in Northcote, all tapping into longstanding traditional folk-justice practices of Britain and Europe.

This (white) Australia was far more disorderly and more folkloric than is now thought, closer to the vibrant society that multiculturalism is now considered to have brokered. The omnipresence of disturbances of the peace, of feuds and vendettas, of suicides, murders, botched abortions and infanticides were not only Egan Lee's invention but can be also tracked in the mainstream dailies where these graphic stories without the over-the-top illustrations are visible alongside more formal and circumspect news.

Puritanism and public self-control came to the Melbourne bourgeoisie later than the Victorian era. The modernity and currency of Egan Lee's subjects, even if the fashions, interiors and streetscapes seem distant, is also striking. Tabloid newspapers, electronic media and audiences still are fascinated with stories particularly of lurid and tragic crime and innocent victimhood, virtually identical to those that may be found in the *Police News*. Although, the large parallel oeuvre of virtue rewarded, of near misses and last-minute rescue that was a *Police News* staple, does not seem to have maintained the same lustre with present-day audiences that successfully accomplished crimes still do.

Egan Lee often pursued public sensations that are usually assumed to be of recent standing, particularly the widespread abuse of minors and dependants by clergy of various denominations, child sexual abuse and general neglect and cruelty towards children, violence by both strangers and intimates towards women. The vigour of his interest in these issues throws into question assumptions that these crimes have been given increased (and possibly erroneous in the eyes of libertarians) prominence by a greater public obsession in recent times. Cycles of public and press hysteria around crimes, manners of reading and deploying criminal stories to create rolling anger, but never any solutions, are brought into sharp and ironic focus by the *Police News*.

Certainly the *Police News* zincotypes present a violent age. However, the picture built up image after image and by columns of texts is not that of postcolonial discussions, which foreground racially directed violence and discrimination. The only racial narrative that threads through *Police News* with any frequency is his intense dislike of the Chinese, another parallel to the *Bulletin*, although the Chinese are conversely shown as being skilled, exerting personal agency and visible in the community, running businesses and owning pubs, inter alia of Egan Lee's persecution. Blackness, whether indigeneity, or references to Africa, India or North and South Americans of colour, or even minstrelsy and black-face entertainments, does not appear with any specific frequency or emphasis. That silence/gap could equally speak of 'normalcy' as much as 'racism' and it does not share the vehement consistency of the anti-Chinese theme. Egan Lee's crude direct world is ironically highly akin to Symbolism and Aestheticism (at first surely an unlikely statement), as Stevenson's 1884 musing on the theatre cut outs of his childhood implied about this unexpected conjunction.

The *Police News* zincotypes make the gestures – sweeping, complete, all-embracing – set forth the action, but never seek to drive home a pedantic or platitudinous explanation.

The return of the Queen

However, with the a priori opposition of the Victorian to the 'Avant Garde', like all truisms evidence can mustered against that position. Art historians and theorists are increasingly questioning the mutual exclusion of contemporary art practices and theories with the Victorian and pointing to a more complex set of interdependencies (Teukolsky 2009, Yeazell 2010).

At least one claim for the radicalism of the British tradition and substantially the Australian tradition involves the percipience of Hogarth and his anticipation of both modern mediated cultures and also the autonomy of the formal and visual in avant-garde theory (Solkin 1995, p. 2). Hogarth's crude, surreal but endlessly engaging world remains that of today's newsfeeds on mobile phones, the endless opinionated and subjective nattering of Twitter, the breaking-news tickers at the base of the TV streaming news channels and the internet memes, complete with hoaxes, manipulations and exaggerations for the sake of making a visual and cultural point.

Hogarth's disaster-prone universe, which delights the eye but issues warnings, gives moral advice and exposes wrongs, is also directly akin to the zincotype illustrations of the *Police News*, now imagined as art pieces by Gertsakis.

Certainly arguments have been made that the Victorians *are* quintessentially postmodernist (Llewellyn 2008, p. 167) and the dethronement of modernism allows the virtues and rewarding complexities of Victorian culture to become apparent and ascendant once again. Yet plausibly the Victorian was never as far from the modern as manifestos and public rhetoric claimed. There were modernist uses of Victorian texts, particularly Nicholas Pevsner's examination of early design reform in Britain that referenced Ruskin, Cole, Pugin, Jones, Dresser and Morris, starting as early as the 1930s[10]. Actually the Bauhaus, the *ne plus ultra* of modernist clarity of line, would have been impossible to conceive of without the Victorian foundations of design thinking provided by Morris and others proposing that attentive focus upon objects and materiality is as important to modern values as discussing 2-D imagery and surfaces or killing the bourgeoisie. The left re-examined Morris as a socialist in the mid-twentieth century via the finely detailed advocacy of Paul Thomson who published his first study, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary,* in 1955 and the Anglia Ruskin University (former University of East Anglia) and the Ruskin Library and Research Centre at Lancaster University have even more remarkably rehabilitated Ruskin as a source for modern thought in politics and art.

The Victorian impacts upon current creativity more directly than being redeemed as a theoretical source. Globally the Victorian is a tangibly core element in a number of creative practices. Altogether these practices are extremely diverse, and stretch into performative subcultures and popular fandom as much as contemporary art.

Steampunk and goth very consciously deploy Victorian material and visual practices in a contemporary context, particularly in fashion and decoration. Many uses of the Victorian in contemporary practice tend towards a subversion of accepted avant-garde amateur versus professional hierarchies and institutional/

curatorial validation, given that the Victorian has always been more accepted in mass and popular culture, especially screen cultures. The Neo Victorian has now become a genre in its own right, deriving from an oeuvre of commercially successful British novels, including those of AS Byatt, Sara Walters and the Dutch/Australian/Scottish author Michel Faber in the 1990s and early 2000s (Llewellyn 2008, Llewellyn 2009, Schnitker and Gruss 2011).

The term is extending into studies of consumption, gender, theatre, crime and policing, especially considering the perennial aesthetic and cultural fascination in many media with Victorian true crime, Jack the Ripper, and Victorian criminal fictions such as Sweeney Todd. This currency of Victorian imagery in art, design, media and literature becomes a valid, transnational and on-trend context for placing Gertsakis's artworks derived from the *Police News*.

Some contemporary photography practices centre directly and candidly upon nineteenth-century material to reconceptualise it in a transformative theoretical context. *The Poor Man's Picture Gallery: Victorian Art and Stereoscopic Photography*, 2014, at the Tate Gallery, is a well-informed retheorising of Victorian stereoscope photographs that outlines multiple interchanges between working and middle-class consumption of images and the fine arts. Linda Fregni Nagler's *Hidden Mother* installation at the Venice Biennale of 2013 and the Liljenquist family's revisiting and collating abandoned family photographs, found often in estate auctions and secondhand shops in the 1980s and 1990s and now donated to the Library of Congress, exemplify this thread of practice.

All identify a conceptual art impetus in formerly ignored Victorian photographs and grant them a refocused cultural importance. The Liljenquist family emphasis a North American aspect of conscious patriotism as its motivation (Liljenquist 2010) to deflect from the sacral immolation of the young god that its collection actually speaks of. Yet its assemblage, as does that of Linda Fregni Nagler, unveils the aesthetic potential of the seemingly ordinary and uncelebrated. This power is expressed by the image itself and via the agency of those who made, commissioned and sat for these images.

Both Linda Fregni Nagler and the Liljenquists direct our gaze to an army – literally so in the case of the Liljenquist collection – of unidentifiable co-producers generating compelling visual content. Questions about ascribing creative merit and agency to anonymous makers, not legitimised by art-school training or the network of curatorial/critical validation concomitant to the avant-garde system of cultural production, are precisely those raised by Gertsakis's reframed/repositioned *Police News* imagery.

Could the governing narratives of institutional recognition be arbitrary, if professional skillsets can be found so far from the centre and mainstream acclamation?

This possibility is reinforced by the samizdat collecting and curatorial practices encouraged by the promiscuity of Internet trading in antiques.

Highly refined scales of connoisseurship and analysis for trading in certain popular genres of anonymous photographs have emerged in recent years. These typologies of selected and prioritised anonymous imagery include

daguerreotypes, post-mortem photographs, hidden mothers, (especially Confederate) soldiers, circus stars, freakshows, medical experiments and erotica.

These found images then reflect back into 'practice' with American photographer Joel Peter Witkin (and a legion of steampunk, goth and art-student aspirants) staging evocations of such imagery, and living artists taking daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, calotypes and tintypes of present day subject matter. The poetry of *unheimlich* strangeness and the bluntness with which the nineteenth century imaged the cruel and horrifying, including death, deformity and amputation, links Witkin directly to the values that engaged Gertsakis in the *Police News* zincotypes.

Australian artist Patrick Pound delves into less obvious and propitious tranches of imagery to locate profound and sometimes disturbing surrealism and disjunctions. Since the 1980s Gertsakis has engaged in the collection, consideration and juxtaposition of private and public photographic imagery, random and intentional photographic auteurship, and state-sanctioned narratives of being and identity versus the *realpolitik* and exigencies of personal choices against a background of wars, genocides, cultural displacement and economic meltdowns.

Given this backstory, shifts in meaning and status occasioned by re-privileging certain tranches of Victorian image-making are entirely within her recognised purlieu. Equally, even given the different medium, the *Police News* images throw back the same questions about the uncontested, unquestioned reign of the avant-garde, its acceptance across the whole of the cultural industry and the essentially contingent and shifting basis to its confident pronouncements and boundary settings. We can also see how nationalism and postcolonialism/postorientalism also stand in this position of the rigid, arbitrary and ultimately self-seeking and intolerant in that they equally sift and classify, as does censorship.

The Victorian is not a twenty-first-century discovery. Fascination with Victorian fashion and design was a robust and visible element of modern culture in the 1890s–1900s, more a Central and Eastern European tendency than within the dominant French/American avant-garde, although one of the most celebrated exponents was the Australian British artist Charles Conder. Thanks to the expanded fin de siecle art press, Conder's work was visible across Europe, including in Sergei Diaghilev's journal *Mir Iskusstva,* which covered art nouveau artists from Germany, Britain and France, as well as Russian artists. Diaghilev's circle and his Ballets Russes have been a conduit – as with films such as *Gone With the Wind,*1939, the Sissi films, 1955, 1956, 1957 *Les Enfants du Paradis* 1945, and *Il Gattopardo,* 1963, a highly cross-referential set of meditations upon life, death and the state and the exigencies of the state exerted upon the individual performed in an intensely nineteenth-century mise en scène – by which the Victorian hid in plain sight of modernist intolerance.

Whilst the Ballets Russes are praised for their revolutionising of colour and design, their orientalist, futurist, and constructivist stage sets and costumes, or

even the modern dress of *Jeux*, 1913, *Le Train Bleu* 1924 and *Les Biches*,1924 rendered as theatrical and high art spectacle, Neo-Victorian visuality threaded strongly throughout the company's working life. Fascination with the past was a continued leitmotiv in the journal *Mir Isskusstva* (Bowlt 1998, p. 23), as too the Ballets Russes including Benois' designs for *Les Sylphides,* 1909 *Petrushka,* 1911 and *Graduation Ball,* 1940, and Bakst's *Fairy Doll* 1903 *Carnaval,* 1910 *Spectre de La Rose* 1911 and *Papilions*, 1914.

Other Victorianists in the Diaghilev circle included Serge Sudeikin and Konstantin Somov. Further commissions for nineteenth-century settings in Ballet Russes productions included Derain's 1860s **styled** *Boutique Fantasque,*1919, *le Beau Danube*, 1924/1933 after Baudelaire's favourite artist of modern life Constantin Guys, *Union Pacific* 1934 set in the Wild West, and *Gaite Parisienne,* 1938 filmed by MGM in 1942. A number of these productions were performed by the Ballets Russes in Australia in the 1930s.

For the purpose of this essay the most remarkable of Diaghilev's re-presentations of the nineteenth century was *The Triumph of Neptune* 1926. One of his less remembered productions, but once highly successful, its score was by the English modernist composer Lord Berners and its sets based on popular nineteenth-century British theatre cut-outs[11], which like the carvings and typography of the English fairground have formed a particular fascination for British proto pop and pop artists. The backdrops for *The Triumph of Neptune* were marked by broad energetic graphic slashes and splashy washes of colour, giving the same expressionist directness that the prints of *Police News* displays. Gertsakis's canvases use the same technique of upscaling popular Victorian print imagery to emphasise and unleash its expressionist graphic rhythms.

The Ballet Russes circle's Victorianisms resonate in several levels with Gertsakis's suite of artworks derived from the *Police News* zincotypes. Gertsakis's images take their place in an Australian art historical narrative that is about neither nationalism nor the bush, drawn from the overlaps between Diaghilev's circle and Conder.

Synergies to Conder's art – particularly the interest in historic costuming, the dreamlike poses in architecturally embellished lush parklands and the updating of the eighteenth-century rococo *fetes gallante* to a c 1830–1860 period – can be found throughout Russian avant garde art in the two decades prior to the Russian Revolution.

Concurrently in London, Thea Proctor thoroughly assimilated such imagery into her early watercolours and fan paintings and it extends into her prints and drawing in Sydney in the 1920s and 1930s. She even painted a homage to Diaghilev's *Le Carnaval* quoting the designs of Leon Bakst in a fan painting of 1911, bought by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1913. Harlequin, Columbine, Papillion and Pierrot, as conceived by Bakst, are clearly legible. 'The Russian ballet are the most inspiring things that exist' she stated in a Sydney press interview in 1921 (Sayers 2005, p. 35).

The Victorian designs of the Mir Isskusstva artists or very close derivatives/ pastiches of their productions including *Les Sylphides, Carnaval* and *Petroushka* can be seen as still tangibly in movement via YouTube videos. Continual use and reiteration of these century-old designs have made the 'Victorian' live long after the nineteenth century, whenever the ballets are still staged. Whilst the misadventures of a Flemish altarpiece foetus dredged up from a suburban cesspit or the sufferings of an unfortunate epileptic travelling several times between Geelong and Melbourne without any neighbourly offering of assistance may seem the antithesis to Benois' moonlit glade, poet shirts and gauze wings of *Les Sylphides,* Gertsakis's digital colourisation has the effect of setting the *Police News* images in motion and releasing them from the fixed and desiccated archival limbo of neglect and amnesia.

Like those of the Ballets Russes, these nineteenth-century images have a second and modern life. Working in a reverse manner, the artificiality of the *Police News* zincotypes resonates with the ubiquitous metaphorical interest in the *Mir Isskusstva* and Ballet Russes circles with performance, puppets, toys, masquerades, charades, disguises, commedia del arte, plays within plays, as a metaphor for the contestations, ironies and reversals of life, and the interchange between the grotesque, the artificial and the poetic, and back to elements of nineteenth-century art writing including that of Wilde and Baudelaire who also praise the superior insights offered by the posed and performed. Equally the zincotypes reach forward to pre-empt the current fascination with the staged and extreme in photography as exemplified by Witkin. To port the *Police News* illustrations into a gallery is both an act of historical documentation in bringing the images to public attention, but also a creative act, unlocking the inherent power of their design values and blunt expressionist energy of line, juxtaposition and spatial compression.

The past in the practice of Elizabeth Gertsakis

The Queen can do no wrong (Rudyard Kipling)[12]

Brett Jones (1999) and Osmond and Murray (2011) highlight the particular hybrid space that Gertsakis has brokered between historical research and reinterpretation, interrogating visual and textual narratives, engaging with questions of identity, public space and national governance.

Gertsakis's practice fits neatly into a broader return of narrative and message in the visual arts and debates about Australian identity and inhabitation of land that have significantly redirected contemporary high art practice in Australia in the late twentieth century. Her practice also resonates with shifting understandings of the curatorial brief. Art curating increasingly deploys generative and flexible gestures in relation to material culture, as much as documenting artworks or showcasing text-based investigations.

Post Master Gallery curatorial activities brought Gertsakis during the 1990s into dynamic contact with the multiple meanings and voices of objects and

printed matter. The philatelic object – universal, political, highly designed, intentional and purposed, yet wrongly ignored and dismissed (Osmond and Phillips 2011, p. 1138–39), became central to her working life and in turn allowed for an eloquent and expressive curating to emerge from that brief, a fusion of practice and history, an imbrication of straight research and creatively driven manipulation.

Gertsakis's back catalogue has shifted historical artefacts to being not just things of beauty and joy forever, but to being units of media in conceptual thinking and parsing. Items that she has scrutinised include cigarette cards, postcards, magazines, book illustrations and religious tracts. Postal functions and aesthetics had alerted her to the surreptitious, unexpected and motely presence of visuality and design in everyday life.

She shows particular sensitivity to where it is not consciously named as the marketplace for 'design', linked on the one hand to branding and value adding and commercial snobbery, and equally the politics and status of an expanding academic practice of makers but where the visual both enhances and frames the mundane.

The appearance of a more globalised and classicising fulsome vision, rather than an autobiographical impetus in Gertsakis's art-making, was triggered from her curatorial work in 2006 on the life and achievements of the remarkable Melbourne entrepreneur John Wren. Her curating uncovered a visual and textual archive substantially erased by the delimiting factoids and fictions of Hardy's *Power without Glory*[13]. The details of the material survivals of Wren's world and the Australia that he inhabited were multiple, sumptuous.

This vision of Australia also was not overawed or inhibited by placement at the colonial edge of empire (Peers 2007) and spoke of a classicising and baroque quality to everyday life in urban Australia and amongst ordinary Australians[14].

The spectacular visuality of the *Police News* zincotypes, despite and because of the almost illiterate, incoherent clumsiness of handwork and design, likewise speaks of this grandiloquent and untrammelled past that is unfamiliar in light of the conventional imagery of a cultural and intellectually despised white Australia.

Could in fact the vehemence of rhetoric directed against Howard and now Abbott be also a rage and shame about our own tainted meagre origins, so without culture and redemption – let alone romance and charisma? We settler Australians are neither those powerful whites who still accrue meaning in the world, British, American or Russian nor do we have the virtue of the Romantic Other of the Third World of the colonised and victims of capital expansion, who habitually are ascribed meaning.

We are Jean Rhys's 'white cockroaches' without either power or authenticity. The Australia that current public culture offers up to us is bitter, struggle-ridden, driven by an ever present sense of lack against the ongoing undiminished reality of the imperial centre, the new aura of indigenous authenticity, the narratives advocating the deserving innocence of refugees

against our own lacks and selfishness and the omnipresent, relentless demands of global capital and resource stripping.

Indeed, Gertsakis's poetical response – as opposed to historical debate and analysis that will not permit either emotion or indulgence – is perhaps the most cogent response to the luscious, operatic, Greek tragedy, otherworldly aspect of these illustrations.

The zincotypes, now extracted from their textual frame, offer much speculation upon the presence and life of the visual in the everyday and the low cultural. They pose the question about the practice and poetry of the everyday and banal, as do Linda Fregni Nagler's Hidden Mothers and the Liljenquists' quadrupally armed white-trash adolescents. Even as they offer a relentless inescapable presence of death by malice, misadventure or often one's own hand, the *Police News* images offer us redemption and an eternal life via aesthetics, practice and the imagination.

*Acknowledgement to Meredith Rogers for her support in providing a hospitable environment during the writing of this essay. JP.

ENDNOTES

[i] Die Brücke (The Bridge) was a group of German expressionist artists formed in Dresden in 1905. Founding members were Fritz Bleyl, Erich Heckel, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. Later members were Emile Nolde, Max Pechstein and Otto Mueller. The group had a major impact on the evolution of modern art in the twentieth century and the creation of expressionism. They were interested in primitive art and in the expressing of extreme emotion through high-keyed colour that was very often crude and non-naturalistic.

[ii] Although his illustration was meant to be a portrait of a fictional detective, I'm tempted to think it was Egan Lee slipping in a portrait of himself for posterity.

[iii] The original *Peter Parley's* (Samuel Griswold Goodrich) *Tales* is cited as an American publication with both legitimate and illegitimate offshoots. I am unable to find a documented connection between Egan Lee and Hewitt's *Peter Parley's Illuminated Library* and the Goodrich journal that mentions both of them as being linked.

[iv] Lee, Richard. Coote, William. Creators; Published Hobartton: Huxtable and Deakin. 1853–54

[v] Darragh, TA Printer and newspaper registration in Victoria, 1838–1924 Wellington, NZ.: Elibank Press 1997

[vi] Morgan, Patrick *Working Class Melbourne* in *The Penguin new literary history of Australia,* General editor: Laurie Hergenhan Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin 19881988

[vii] www.annemarie-mcallister-on-the-temperance-movement-Branchmovement

[viii] Sinnema, Peter Dynamics of the Pictured Page 1998

[ix] Brantlinger, Patrick The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth Century British Fiction Indiana University Press, 1 Jan 1998

[x] Altick R D, The English Common Reader – A Social History of Mass reading 1800-1900. University of Chicago Press, 1957

[xi] Ibid.

[xii] Ibid.

[xiii] en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Newgate_Calendar

[xiv] Altick op. cit.

[xv] James, Louis Print and the People 1819-1851 (London, Allen Lane 1976)

[xvi] Altick op.cit.

[xvii] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Condition_of_England_questions

[xviii] http://www.victorianweb.org/history/riots/sixacts.html

[xix] Altick op. cit

[xx] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penny_dreadful

[xxi] www.roy-stevenson.com/executions.html

[xxii] Ibid.

[xxiii] Stewart, Ken 'Journalism and the World of the Writer' 1855-1915

[xxiv] Brown, Joshua Beyond the Lines*. Pictorial reporting, everyday life, and the crisis of gilded age America*. University of California Press. Berkely. Los Angeles. London 2002

[xxv] Op.cit. pgs87, 97.

[xxvi] Journalism as news and information as well as literature in Australia had to be fiercely competitive of its limited though growing markets because the bookseller component of it was too happy to receive vast quantities of dumped excess stocks in Australia and the colonies from England. Cheaper postage encouraged the distribution of book lists and catalogues. In 1873 Robertson Booksellers imported ninety eight thousand pounds worth of books and issued a total of fifty-five thousand copies of trade (retail reading) lists for a total of Australian and New Zealand population of two million people. The Victorian book trade (Kirsop &Wallace) Books for Colonial Readers – The Nineteenth Century Experience. The Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand in association with The Centre for Bibliographical and Textual Studies. Monash University 1995.

[xxvii] Gardener, Don; Victoria. A History. Chapter 3.Thomas Nelson 1984

[xxviii] Ibid

[xxix] Ibid pgs. 175-76

[xxx] By December 1 1877, Egan Lee's trials by press and the Magistrate's court had worn him down sufficiently for a final gesture to the broadsheet's viable audience. Trying to present itself as a more benign paper for a 'Saturday Evening', the paper now under the title 'INOFFENSIVE' says it 'will be our constant endeavor, it does not come within the scope of a secular journal to interfere with religion in any form',

[xxxi] PN 21 April 1877

[xxxii] PN 16 June 1877

[xxxiii] Ibid

[xxxiv] PN 5 February 1876

[xxxv] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milo_of_Croton

[xxxvi] Blurring of this image and others was caused in the zincotype process by prolonged etching and caused ruin to the finer parts of the work such as 'hair lines' or 'delicate stipples' owing to the undercutting action of the acid creeping under the lines and undermining them. From *Joseph Goodman Practical Modern Lithography,* Joseph Goodman 1913.

[xxxvii] *Police News* did not even exist in a public state archive as a newspaper until the late 1970s when it was purchased from a private collection by the State Library of Victoria.

[xxxiii] Sinnema, Peter W, *Dynamics of the Pictured Page Representing the Nation in the Illustrated London News,* Ashgate, 1998.

[xxxix] James, Louis op cit.

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ENDNOTES (ESSAY)

1 1938, originally written as one of 'Four Cabaret Songs for Miss Hedli Anderson' now published in the best selling anothology *Tell Me the Truth About Love* (1999)

2 The prints were interchangeably referred to as zincographs in the nineteenth century. This is the more prevalent term in current usage but Egan Lee used the term zincotypes when referencing his medium.

3 Although not in low culture, cinema, popular stage works and popular literature

4 The rambunctious multi coloured cosmopolitanism of the Hawke years – governance by the Dodgy Brothers or Arfur from Minder or even a quiz show aesthetic– does not register. Howard changed the politics and shifted some of the emphasis but infiltrated and co-opted the labour legends for the right, keeping much of the content and symbolism without substantially refuting them [Peers 2006] – the lack of change masked by the vociferous opposition to his government. Conversely the lurching, shambolic leadership of Mark Latham, a Police News zincotype just waiting to happen, seems to have ushered in era of provisional transient, selfish and pragmatically late capitalist governments with no use for big picture idealistic notions of identity

5 An example is printed on September 16 1876

6 Cannon 1977 notes that Egan Lee wrote and published pamphlets, which protested the persecution of working-class people in dire and desperate circumstances by the police, who then manufactured them as 'criminals'. That he shares a typical Bulletin viewpoint via such pamphlets shows that one could hold progressive vies without the obsessive campaign against women waged by Archibald

7 May 20 1876 editorial – he suggested that flogging was appropriate (and also published images of floggings of paedophiles) but he added using convicted criminals for live medical experiments was not

8 July 8 1876. In the early twentieth century bushranger themes in films were censored as they were thought to provoke popular notions of disturbance ad resistance

9 On December 1 1877 Egan Lee claimed that Police News had the potential to attain the largest circulation of any paper in the southern hemisphere

10 Pevsner's 1968 *Studies in art, architecture and design, Victorian and after* identified a modernist impetus in much of Victorian design theory. As early as 1936 he identified William Morris as a 'pioneer of the modern movement' in a study looking at the origins of modernist design.

11 George and Robert Cruikshanks' satirical and ribald engravings are also often cited as a source for the designs, again linking the ballet to the popular tradition which the *Police News* zincotypes draw upon. English pantomime traditions also made an impact upon Diaghilev.

12 A phrase used on several occasions in the novel *The Light That Failed* first published in 1890 in *Lippincoats Magazine* and later in standalone format and in his collected works

13 Again an example of where the Australian scholarly community often prefer the neatly organised and edited factoids and myths created from within their community above the primary sources that – as with the *Police News* – present a more diverse, less simplistic and not so explicitly politically coloured content. The inability of a politically driven interpretation to heed and be mutated by the diversity of the actual public record has contributed to the continuation of repetitive public cultural models in Australia

14 A cross-reference to this visual richness of every day life is provided by the Australian artist Anne Marie Power, who has often highlighted the fact that the Catholic Church brought to ordinary Australians in the mid- and early twentieth century a wealth of historical images of European high art as devotional images, images of major architectural treasures as sites of pilgrimage and accounts of centuries of European history as part of the lives of saints and church dignitaries.

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