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Document A

One day in the middle of the nineteenth century, when settlement in Queensland had advanced little more than halfway up the coast, three children were playing at the edge of a paddock when they saw something extraordinary. They were two little girls in patched gingham and a boy, their cousin, in short pants and braces, all three barefooted farm children
5 not easily scared.

They had little opportunity for play but had been engaged for the past hour in a game of the boy's devising: the paddock, all clay-packed stones and ant trails, was a forest in Russia – they were hunters on the track of wolves.

The boy had elaborated this scrap of make-believe out of a story in the fourth grade
10 Reader; he was lost in it. Cold air burned his nostrils, snow squeaked underfoot; the gun he carried, a good sized stick, hung heavy on his arm. But the girls, especially Janet, who was older than he was and half a head taller, were bored. They had no experience of snow, and wolves did not interest them. They complained and dawdled and he had to exert all his gift for fantasy, his will too, which was stubborn, to keep them in the game.

15 They had a blue kelpie with them. He bounced along with his tongue lolling, excited by the boy's solemn concentration but puzzled too that he could get no sense of what they were after: the idea of wolf had not been transmitted to him. He danced around the little party, sometimes in front, sometimes to the side, sniffing close to the earth, raising his moist eyes in hope of instruction, and every now and then, since he was young and easily distracted,
20 bounding away after the clipped insects that sprang up as they approached, or a grasshopper that rose with a ponderous whirring and rolled sideways from his jaws. Then suddenly he did get the scent. With a yelp of pure delight he shot off in the direction of their boundary fence, and the children, all three, turned away to see what he had found.

Lachlan Beattie felt the snow melt at his feet. He heard a faint far-off rushing, like wind
25 rolling down a tunnel, and it took him a moment to understand that it was coming from inside him.

In the intense heat that made everything you looked at warp and glare, a fragment of ti-tree swamp, some bit of the land over there that was forbidden to them, had detached itself from the band of grey that made up the far side of the swamp, and in a shape more like a watery,
30 heat-struck mirage than a thing of substance, elongated and airily indistinct, was bowling, leaping, flying towards them.

A black! That was the boy's first thought. We're being raided by blacks. After so many false alarms it had come.

The two little girls stood spellbound. They had given a gasp, one sharp intake of breath,
35 then forgotten to breathe out. The boy too was struck but had begun to recover. Though he was very pale about the mouth, he did what his manhood required him to do. Holding fast to the stick, he stepped resolutely in front.

But it wasn't a raid, there was just one of them; and the thing, as far as he could make it out through the sweat in his eyes and its flamelike flickering, was not even, maybe, human.

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40 The stick-like legs, all knobbed at the joints, suggested a wounded waterbird, a broilga, or a
human that in the manner of the tales they told one another, all spells and curses, had been
changed into a bird, but only halfway, and now, neither one thing nor the other, was hopping
and flapping towards them out of a world over there, beyond the no-man's-land of the swamp,
45 that was the abode of everything savage and fearsome, and since it lay so far beyond
experience, not just their own but their parents' too, of nightmare rumours, superstitions and
all that belonged to Absolute Dark.

A bit of blue rag was at its middle from which sleeves hung down. They swung and
signalled. But the sticks of arms above its head were also signalling, or beating off flies, or
licks of invisible flame. Ah, that was it. It was a scarecrow that had somehow caught the spark
50 of life, got down from its pole, and now, in a raggedy, rough-headed way, was stumbling
about over the blazing earth, its leathery face scorched black, but with hair, they saw, as it
bore down upon them, as sun-bleached and pale-straw coloured as their own.

Whatever it was, it was the boy's intention to confront it. Very sturdy and purposeful, two
paces in front of his cousins, though it might have been a hundred yards in the tremendous
55 isolation he felt, and with a belief in the power of the weapon he held that he knew was
impossible and might not endure, he pushed the stick into his shoulder and took his stance.

The creature, almost upon them now and with Flash at its heels, came to a halt, gave a kind
of squawk, and leaping up onto the top rail of the fence, hung there, its arms outflung as if
preparing for flight. Then the ragged mouth gapped.

60 'Do not shoot,' it shouted. 'I am a B-b-british object!'

**David MALOUF, *Remembering Babylon*, 1993,
pp. 1-3 of the Vintage edition.**

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Document B

The first British settlers to arrive on the Great Southern Land in 1788 found it a strange, bewildering continent. The unique flora and fauna were enchanting, the native people intriguing, but the land itself appeared monotonous and frightening. The settlers feared being speared and, even more, being lost in the endless wilderness or bitten by venomous snakes or spiders. They soon found that the soils around Botany Bay and Sydney Harbour could not support crops. This new land seemed inhospitable.

The struggling penal settlement of New South Wales was not conducive to landscape painting. The colony's first semi-professional artist, the convict Thomas Watling, an illustrator, who arrived in 1792, described his and other settlers' responses to their new environment: 'The landscape painter, may in vain seek here for that beauty which arises from happy-opposed off-scapes ... The land, an immense forest, extended over a plain country ... trees, hoary with age, or torn with tempests.'¹ Watling, like almost all the earliest artists in Australia, was more interested in recording the wondrous native animals, birds, reptiles, fish and plants there, and the native people and the developing colonial settlement.

For decades, artists focused on views of the settlements rather than what was to them the more disturbing landscape that surrounded the enclaves. *View of the Town of Sydney in the Colony of New South Wales* (c. 1799; cat. 42) is one of a group of four oil paintings, the first made of Sydney. Painted in London, the canvas was probably based on Watling's drawings, or possibly painted by Watling himself after returning to Britain. At the end of the eighteenth century, the neat, rudimentary Georgian buildings of Sydney Town keep to a harbour shoreline backed by dark forest wilderness. This oil painting inspired an aquatint published in London by W. S. Blake in 1802, the first separate and frameable print of an Australian landscape. The print emphasises the sun rising over Sydney Harbour like a new beginning at the dawn of the nineteenth century (fig. 22), but it is more a statement of British endurance and survival in this precarious foothold on the far side of the world than a celebration of a new land or landscape.

About a decade later, G. W. Evans, a surveyor and artist who arrived in the colony in 1802, painted *A View of Sydney New South Wales on Entering the Heads* (c. 1809; cat. 43), one of many watercolour views of the settlements made at this time by himself and others. Seen across the harbour at sunset, a light, almost heavenly civilization rises from a dark abyss, encircling wilderness emphasised by a sombre foreground peopled with shadowy native figures.

Nearly ten years further on, settlements remained the main focus of Australian landscape painting. The convict artist Joseph Lycett, who arrived in 1814, was ordered by Captain James Wallis, Commandant of Newcastle, to produce a few oil paintings of that twenty-year-old convict town 90 miles north of Sydney. *Inner View of Newcastle* (c. 1818; cat. 50) accurately records Wallis's improvements, among them Christ Church, a hospital, gaol and barracks. Although it portrays a penal settlement, Wallis's commission maintains the primacy of civilisation over nature. He was not interested in a view of the local bush. The town sits on unproductive coastal land and Lycett can unleash a feeling of natural beauty only in his rendition of a vast Australian sky with whirling clouds.

Despite the settlers' initial reluctance to embrace the foreign beauty of their adopted land, landscape was soon to become the main stimulus for painting in Australia and would remain

¹ Bernard Smith (ed.), *Documents on Art and Taste in Australia*, Melbourne, 1975, pp. 11 and 14. The now obsolete word 'off-scape' means a distant prospect that needs improvement.

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45 so for at least 150 years. Landscape is central to the culture of few other countries, but after
225 years of European occupation, Australian art still celebrates the diversity of terrain,
vegetation, light and human settlement peculiar to the island continent.

50 When Australia was first colonised, the art of landscape painting was gaining greater
strength in Britain than in other European countries. It was soon to surpass portraiture, which
had dominated British art for the past three centuries. Not only were the British embracing
views of their own countryside and tourist vistas of continental Europe, but they also wanted
to see more distant ‘New Worlds’, especially the rapidly expanding British Empire. Demand
grew for paintings and prints of these British-claimed lands. At the same time in Australia,
free settlers, emancipated convicts and locally born colonials wanted images of the land for
themselves and to send back with pride to curious relatives.

55 The first professionally trained landscape painter to travel to Australia was William
Westall, a young student of the Royal Academy Schools and younger half-brother of the
Royal Academician Richard Westall. He accompanied Matthew Flinders on his 1801-03
voyage to chart, for the first time, the entire coastline of the continent. Westall was required to
draw coastal profiles, but he also executed meticulous and sensitive pencil drawings, and a
60 few watercolours, of characteristic coastal scenery (fig. 23). He commenced his drawings of
the ship’s first Australian landfall, Cape Leeuwin on the extreme southern tip of the western
coast of Australia, on Monday, 7 December 1801 at 7.30 am; thus noting to the minute the
birth of the venerable Euro-Australian landscape tradition. Back in Britain, the Admiralty,
encouraged by Sir Joseph Banks, commissioned Westall to make finished oil paintings from
65 his on-the-spot drawings.

Beautiful as his landscape drawings are, Westall, shortly after the Australian voyage, wrote
to Banks from China complaining that he found the Australian landscape un-picturesque and
the coast ‘barren’. He claimed that his Australian subjects ‘can neither afford pleasure ... nor
curiosity from their singularity’.² Nevertheless, Australia inspired his finest works: after
70 Westall exhibited his Admiralty canvases at the Royal Academy of Arts he was promoted to
Associate of the Academy in 1812.

75 *View in Sir E. Pellew’s Group, Gulph of Carpentaria, Discovered by Captain Flinders,
1802* (c. 1812; cat. 46) has little precedent in the European tradition of landscape. Brighter
than any previous painting of the South Seas, it shows a sandy island with rocks and palms off
the northern coast of Australia, the beach and other distant islands bleached with sun-glare. A
small bark shelter in the centre foreground contains an Aboriginal totemic ritual object, a
rangga, of stone decorated with charcoal, feathers and down,³ a reminder that this country was
never *terra nullius*.⁴ As well as this depiction of a scared artefact, Westall sketched
watercolours of rock art in a cave on Chasm Island (1803; cat. 45), the first European visual
80 records of Aboriginal paintings.

**Ron RADFORD, “Land and Landscape: The Colonial Encounter 1800-80,”
in *Australia*, 2013, Royal Academy of Arts exhibition catalogue, pp. 92-93.**

² Ron Radford, in Sarah Thomas (ed.), *The Encounter, 1802: Art of Flinders and Baudin Voyages*, exh. cat., Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2002, p. 112.

³ T. M. Perry and Donald H. Simpson (eds.), *Drawings by William Westall*, London, 1962, p. 62. Others have suggested that the object in the cave is a decorated shield.

⁴ The Proclamation of Governor Bourke, 10 October 1835, implemented the doctrine of *terra nullius* upon which British settlement was based, reinforcing the notion that the land belonged to no one prior to the British Crown taking possession of it.

Document C



Ford Madox BROWN, *The Last of England*, 1852-1855, oil on panel, 82.5 x 75 cm, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.