

TWO ADAPTATIONS OF S.T. GILL BY GUSTAVE DORÉ

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This article draws upon material gathered for a "Work in Progress" seminar presented under the joint auspices of the Humanities Research Centre and the Fine Art Department of the Australian National University on 2 June 1987. The author is grateful to the National Library of Australia for permission to reproduce the S.T. Gill illustrations, "The Found Bushman" and "Native Sepulchre" from its copy of *Rambles at the Antipodes*. Information about the circumstances surrounding the publication of Hubert de Castella's *Les Squatters australiens* and his movements and activities in 1859 and 1860 comes mainly from his largely unpublished "Réminiscences", access to which, here gratefully acknowledged, was generously arranged by Dr Bernard Schnyder de Wartensee, one of his grandsons.

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In an earlier article, "S.T. Gill and Hubert de Castella" (see *Explorations* n° 6, pp. 3-8), reference was made to a lunch in the latter half of 1860 attended by Hubert de Castella, the editors of the new French travel magazine *Le Tour du Monde* published by Hachette, and the famous illustrator Gustave Doré.

The purpose of the meeting was for Castella to show the others present the album of his Australian sketches so that they could decide whether some of these could be used to illustrate pre-publication instalments in *Le Tour du Monde* of extracts from his *Les Squatters australiens*, which Hachette was proposing to publish as a book. Doré had since the beginning of 1860 been illustrating various articles in *le Tour du Monde*, always working from material supplied to him, which was usually photographs but sometimes illustrations in other books.

The timing of this meeting and the subsequent appearance of *Le Tour du Monde*'s first material on Australia suggest strongly that Hubert de Castella was responsible for passing on to Doré and Hachette a source of illustrations for this also, and thus for introducing or re-introducing Doré to the copying of S.T. Gill in which he himself had already engaged.¹





República Dominicana en el desierto. — Vista de Dord d'après un voyage littoral : les Ruines de la Antropole (Columbiane sans sculpture).



However, a digression is first necessary to explain the background of this. In *Les Squatters australiens*, Hubert makes a friendly reference to Dr Edward Wilson, former editor of the Melbourne *Argus*, as someone who had been active in acclimatizing exotic animals in Australia. As Wilson's interest in acclimatization seems to have begun after Hubert's departure from the colony,² one must assume that there was some subsequent contact between them, apart from any acquaintance they may have had with one another in Melbourne, although if this took place it must have been a matter of Wilson's geniality and moderation of past attitudes overcoming Hubert's aversion for what had been his extreme anti-La Trobe and anti-Squatter policies.³ As Wilson made a trip to England in 1859-60, and as Hubert had also been there during that time and made contact with a number of former Victorian acquaintances, they quite possibly met there.

It is not known whether Wilson's trip had any connection with the anonymous publication of his *Rambles in the Antipodes* in 1859,⁴ but we can be certain that Hubert, himself completing a book on Australia at the time, would have come into possession of a copy of it. *Rambles in the Antipodes* was illustrated by twelve tinted lithographs after drawings by S.T. Gill, some of them apparently created for this commission, but others reusing various of his favourite subjects. None of the subjects was more than coincidentally specific to Wilson's text; the captions indicated typical scenes, as in his gold-fields series, and they were placed at regular intervals in the book coinciding with the gatherings. Among them were "The Found Bushman" (facing p. 32) and "Native Sepulchre" (facing p. 160).

In one of the September 1860 issues of *Le Tour du Monde* there appeared an article entitled "De Sydney à Adélaïde (Australie du Sud) - Notes extraites d'une correspondance particulière" (From Sydney to Adelaide (South Australia) - Notes taken from a private correspondence).⁵ The latter part of the title is an ingenious attempt to nullify the point of any search for a source, but there is internal evidence that the piece is a concoction. The itinerary followed by the anonymous writer has no practical rationale, but an obvious didactic one; the material does not read as though it comes from private letters, and the writer promises to give further information about developments in Australia in subsequent letters, as though to prepare the way for future articles.

In fact the piece is evidence of how demand for descriptions of Australia had outstripped genuine supply at a time when French naval

expeditions, which had produced very full accounts, were a thing of the past, yet when news of the gold rushes had excited a new interest in Australia. Over half of the text is a translation cum adaptation of Edward Wilson's description of a boat trip down the Murray and a visit to South Australia, which makes one confident that sources for the rest of this "private correspondence" could be found with a little searching.

The text also incorporates references to justify the four illustrations used. Two of these are from Major T.L. Mitchell's *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia...* (1839). The other two are by Gustave Doré "d'après *the Rambles at the Antipodes*" [sic]. The first "Sépulture australienne au désert" is a copy of Gill's "Native Sepulchre", while the second, "Restes d'un voyageur retrouvé par ses compagnons dans les déserts de Lac Torrens" (Remains of a traveller found by his companions in the Lake Torrens desert),⁶ is a copy of his "The Found Bushman".⁷

The "Native Sepulchre" subject is one which Gill had first done as a water-colour in 1839, after which it was very rapidly plagiarized. His broadly indicated background shows simply very sparse scrub, and his two dingoes, not particularly well executed, have a puppy-like innocence about them.

In contrast to S.T. Gill, Doré in his adaptation provides a whole variety of carefully executed but inauthentic vegetation, with an escarpment and what appears to be a lake in the background. His six dingoes are much more serious creatures, but understandably not particularly authentic, given that Gill's models do not provide much help.

In Gill's second picture there are some naively appealing touches: one of the men with his hand over his nose, the live horse sympathetically looking at the dead one, the loyal dog in the foreground with his head resting on his master's chest, and the predatory birds flying off. However the composition is fairly awkward: the men's gazes cut across each other, we cannot see where the corpse's lower legs and feet are, but if we project them we realize that the corpse is enormous compared with the two men; as usual with Gill, the skull is badly done.

With Doré's adaptation, greatly improved composition goes hand in hand with loss of authenticity. The sloping ground, balanced masses of foliage, use of light and shade, placement of the animal skeletons and the attitude of the leading friend all focus attention on the traveller's remains. However, the essential flatness of Gill's terrain is interrupted,

while the profusion of trees and plants makes the scene decidedly undesert-like and indicates the presence of water which could have saved the traveller's life. The skull is a distinct improvement on Gill's, but once again we might question the proportions of the skeleton, anatomy never having been one of Doré's strong points.

In adapting Gill's pictures in the way that he did, with a care for composition and incidental embellishment, Doré was possibly conforming to a house style, but it maybe seen as characteristic of his own predilections, as well as of a tendency already seen in *Les Chercheurs d'or* to present Australia as a land of the hazardous and bizarre, that form the twelve Gill *Rambles...* lithographs he chose the two most gruesome, both involving corpses.

While these two cases of adaptation of Gill may ebb seen as further instances of the way his work was plundered by others, it should be pointed out that the illustrations had become Wilson's property through being commissioned, and that *Le Tour du Monde* does make due acknowledgement to *Rambles at the Antipodes*. This seems to suggest that some sort of agreement had been arrived at with Wilson, whether with Hubert de Castella as intermediary or not it is impossible to say with certainty, although everything points to his involvement. If the illustrations were copies with Wilson's concurrence, presumably parts of his text were translated and incorporated likewise.

Hubert de Castella's "Réminiscences" are completely silent about this matter. Although he mentions Eugen von Guérard and Nicholas Chevalier somewhat critically as colonial artists whom he may well have equalled or surpassed had circumstances been different, he does not refer to Gill at all. This was possibly because Gill ended his days as an impecunious and pathetic figure selling his work in bars, something like that which Hubert's father had seen as typical of the artist.

If Hubert was indeed responsible for passing on the *Rambles...* material, he must have been a doubly welcome guest at that lunch: not only was he bringing to Hachette an authentic first-hand account, and illustrations to go with it, of the most newsworthy part of Australia, namely Victoria, at the time, but passing on a source of text and illustrations for *Le Tour du Monde's* first, and inauthentic, feature on two other parts of it. This complementarity was probably no accident, giving a coverage as it did of the three most important mainland colonies.⁸

Notes

1. As an example of the way Gill's sketches "were unscrupulously taken and used in other books without acknowledgement", Bowden cites the publication edited by John Sherer, *The Gold-Finder of Australia; How He Went, How He Fared, and How He Made His Fortune*, London, Clarke, Beeton and Co., 1853. Most of the illustrations in this were copied by W. A. Nicholls from Gill's gold-field pictures, and the text, taken for many years to be an authentic first-hand account, is actually woven around these illustrations. When an adapted version was translated into French by Raoul Bourdier in 1856 under the title *Les Chercheurs d'or*, Gustave Doré was commissioned to do the illustrations. However, he rarely contented himself with merely copying Nicholls' copies of Gill and other artists. More characteristically he re-created the setting and theme of some of them, and originated other illustrations, not always felicitously, from the text. Thus, almost certainly without being aware of it, Doré had already copied Gill at one remove, and it would be interesting to know whether he had a sense of *déjà vu* when later copying directly from Gill material (see K.M. Bowden, *Samuel Thomas Gill Artist*, pp. 45, 47).
2. According to Eric C. Rolls, Wilson seems first to have become interested in acclimatization of exotic species with his purchase of some nightingales from a bird-dealer who had arrived in Melbourne with a stock of European birds early in 1857 (see *They All Ran Wild: the story of pests on the land in Australia*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1969.)
3. See *A.D.B.*, 6.
4. *Rambles at the Antipodes: a Series of Sketches...*, W.H. Smith and Son, 1859. Copies with a differently coloured but otherwise identical cover and slightly different title page, but also printed in London, were published in Melbourne in 1859 by James Caple.
5. *Le Tour du Monde*, 1860, pp.182-92.
6. The mention of Lake Torrens in Doré's title constitutes an attempt to link the illustration with the text, but Gill's picture has no specific context, and is meant to illustrate a characteristic situation. It forms a pair, and thereby evokes a grim irony, with "The Lost Bushman", in which we see an anxious wayfarer with his horse and dog crossing desolate country. When found they are all dead.

7. See Bowden, pp. 103, 105.
8. It is worth adding that in the "Bibliothèque des chemins de fer" series, Hachette had already published Paul Merruau's *Les Convicts en Australie (1851-1852)*, 1853, a concoction set despite the dates in the title mainly in New South Wales in the 1830s and 1840s. However the last chapter makes a jump of twelve years to describe a visit to the Mount Alexander gold-fields in Victoria.