Negotiating National Identity at the Circus: the FitzGerald Brothers’ Circus in Melbourne, 1892

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‘What is a city? How do its economy, society and culture act and react upon each other?’, Graeme Davison, The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne.

Throughout the 1890s and early twentieth century, the FitzGerald Brothers’ Circus was the largest homegrown circus touring Australasia. Headed by two brothers, Dan and Tom, the FitzGerald’s Circus came to broad colonial attention as a result of its first huge season in Melbourne in 1892 when it played for fourteen consecutive weeks at a city site, then performed through the suburbs for ten more weeks. Other circuses visiting Melbourne in the period 1890–92 – even large international companies such as Harston’s American and Continental Circus or the Sells Brothers’ Circus from America – could sustain runs of no more than four consecutive weeks in the Victorian capital. The length of the FitzGerald’s first season in Melbourne seems particularly contradictory when framed by the prevailing socio-economic situation: the city was experiencing the worst fiscal depression in living memory and the years 1892–93 have been recognised by historians as the toughest of the depression. It was also the leanest of times for Melbourne’s theatres and during this period some of Australia’s best known circus organisations departed overseas or faltered due to financial difficulty exacerbated by the state of the rational economy.

When the FitzGerald set up their tents in Swanston Street next to the Hibernian Hall – now named Storey Hall – on Easter Saturday, 16 April 1892, they had arrived at a time of declining industry, contracting service sectors, and diminishing resources of disposable cash. Yet, as a direct result of their popularity and, by inference, their ticket-box takings, the FitzGerald Brothers’ Circus grew materially and consolidated its presence in the Australian cultural imaginary. In the twelve months following the inaugural Melbourne season, some of the continent’s principal newspapers enthusiastically validated their tent as a fashionable site and as a locus for the expression of patriotic sentiment. In 1893, the circus was assigned an iconic national status by Sydney’s press which construed the defining attributes of national identity in their organisation; camaraderie, collectivism, pluck, enterprise, athleticism and materialism were collective persona of the circus. Sydney’s justifiably assertion that attending the circus was an opportunity for a national institution that had battled its way out of the pro-nationalist, pro-federation Bulletin’s successful rise from the backblocks, via Melbourne mythopoeia.

Portraits of Tom and Dan FitzGerald
Australasian Stage Annual, 1900. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia

This article brings forward the period of the metropolitan season in Melbourne, discussing production strategies mobilised by the circus for influences that contributed to their extrao national culture to the formation of national identity. The circus’s popularity undeniable stemmed from the FitzGerald’s also attracted patronage factors: their nationalist agenda suited the community at their democratic performances.
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enterprise, athleticism and materialism were all discerned as part of the collective persona of the circus. Sydney’s journalists promoted the notion that attending the circus was an opportunity to show consumer support for a national institution that had battled its way out of the bush. From late 1892, the pro-nationalist, pro-federation Bulletin broadcast the FitzGerald’s successful rise from the backblocks, via Melbourne, in terms that approached mythopoiea.

In the early twentieth century, the FitzGerald largest homegrown circus touring Australasia. However, the FitzGerald’s Circus came to the end of its first huge season in Melbourne in four consecutive weeks at a city site, then for ten more weeks. Other circuses visiting 12— even large international companies such as the Continental Circus or the Sells Brothers’ Circus was of no more than four consecutive weeks in length of the FitzGerald’s first season in contradiction when framed by the prevailing social crisis, the city was experiencing the worst fiscal depression. It was also the leanest of times during this period, some of Australia’s best trained overseas or faltered due to financial squeeze of the national economy.

To their tents in Swanston Street next to the Storey Hall on Easter Saturday, 16 April due of declining industry, contracting service of disposable cash. Yet, as a direct result of success, their ticket-box takings, the FitzGerald firmly and consolidated its presence in the in the twelve months following the inaugural of the continent’s principal newspapers as a fashionable site and as a focus for the community.

In 1893, the circus was assigned an iconic role which construed the defining attributes of Australianisation; camaraderie, collectivism, pluck,

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Portraits of Tom and Dan FitzGerald published in the Australasian Stage Annual, 1900. Courtesy of the State Library of NSW.

This article brings forward the paradoxes of the FitzGerald’s first metropolitan season in Melbourne, discusses some of the entrepreneurial and production strategies mobilised by the circus, and examines ancillary cultural influences that contributed to their extraordinary success. It matches popular culture to the formation of national identity and argues that, while the circus’s popularity undeniably stemmed from the merits of its programme, the FitzGerald also attracted patronage as a result of other contributing factors: their nationalist agenda suited the times; they successfully created community at their democratic performance site; and the escapist nature of
their shows helped spectators to cope with the economic uncertainties that were unsettling social life in Melbourne.

The politicisation of the FitzGerald Brothers' Australian Circus

First appearance in Melbourne of FitzGerald Brothers' new and greatest all-feature circus ... come and see what Australians can do now. We brook no difficulty, nor do we care for expense. This is an Australian speculation, worked with Australian money, Australian brains, and Australian artists. You have just had an inroad of all kinds of circus, English and Continental, Wild West Indians, Cowboys, and American shows. Now, we claim to give a performance by Australian-born artists, who are equal to any known athletes in the world. For the first time this city will witness the performance of FitzGerald Brothers' celebrated troupe of riders, acrobats, tumblers, gymnasts, contortionists, leapers, trapeze artists and funny clowns. Lady riders and Lady performers. We alone possess the popularity, capital, facilities and experience to successfully and satisfactorily produce the one and only, real, live, legitimate Australian circus. The performance takes place in one ring, where everyone can see with ease and comfort and we, the FitzGerald Brothers, claim to give as many acts in our one ring as any other show gives in three. Remember, we are AUSTRALIANS. They are the chosen people. Therefore you should support Australian Talent, which, as athletes, incomparably surpasses that of any other nationality.

This excerpt, from a much longer advertisement, demonstrates the strident nationalism dominating the company’s promotions when it arrived in Melbourne. In April 1892, the FitzGerald’s primary argument was that their circus differed conspicuously from circuses that had entertained the city in recent times. The basis of their claim to difference was Australian-ness, although their veneration of Australian identity and belonging was a relatively recent marketing tactic. A self-conscious promotion of their status as native-born colonials had been evolving slowly in the company’s advertising over the preceding three years and the advertisements placed in Melbourne’s principal dailies, the Age and Argus, marked the apex of that trend. Earlier advertisements dating from 1888-91 reveal that the FitzGerald’s identification of who they were, and what they aspired to, had shifted gradually from an assumed and derivative foreignness to the nationalism demonstrated in the advertisement quoted above.

A few months prior to their arrival in Melbourne, the FitzGerald had also announced to the Adelaide public that their circus was a proudly Australian production, staffed by native-born colonials:

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The [FitzGerald Brothers'] Palace Circus in England or America, but is an Australian circus, and its money in Australia, and most of its shows are native-born. The proprietors’ motto is ‘Australia for Australians’, and another, Australians by adoption, or nativity. Contemporary discourses of economic and national identity in these advertising texts, reflecting a number of decades of late-colonial society. From an economic perspective, we were positioning their entertainment product in a framework in precisely the same way that local manufacturers had been doing for years. The production of locally made products as superior to those made abroad in an immediate aftermath of the labour unrest and depression, and made a great deal of entrepreneurial sense for an audience that wanted to feel strongly that they were part of an emerging, independent nation.

Circus show herald for a season in Adelaide dated October 1892. The horse-riding goat, and Dan FitzGerald with his daughter Maggie Connors, is depicted on the front side.

Arts Museum of Victoria
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... to cope with the economic uncertainties that beset our bourne. 7

FitzGerald Brothers' Australian Circus

... come and see what Australians can do! No speculations, worked with Australian and Australian artists. You have just seen one of circus, English and Continental, and American shows. Now, we are by Australian-born artists, who are famous in the world. For the first time this performance of FitzGerald Brothers' riders, acrobats, tumblers, gymnasts, pepe artists and funny clowns. Lady riders. We alone possess the popularity, experience to successfully and one and only, real, live, legitimate performance takes place in one ring, with ease and comfort and we, the owners to give as many acts in our one ring as in three. Remember, we are the chosen people. Therefore you have Australian Talent, which, as athletes, are of any other nationality. 8

The newspaper advertisement demonstrates the strident company's promotions when it arrived in Melbourne. FitzGerald's primary argument was that their Australian circus differed from circuses that had entertained the city in the past. The claim to Australian-ness, Australian identity and belonging was a focus. A self-conscious promotion of their status had been evolving slowly in the company's three years and the advertisements placed in The Age and Argus, marked the apex of that promotion. Dating from 1888–91 reveal that the FitzGerald's, and what they aspired to, had assumed and derivative foreignness to the public. The advertisement quoted above.

Circus herald for a season in Adelaide dated October 19, 1891. Several of the acts depicted were also presented on the opening program in Melbourne in April 1892: the see-saw ponies, Agnes the horse-riding goat, and Dan FitzGerald with his drill team of horses. Dan FitzGerald's young wife, Maggie Connors, is depicted on the front side of the herald. Courtesy of the Performing Arts Museum of Victoria.
Contemporary anxieties concerning the dominant racial classification of Australia's non-Indigenous population during the 1880s and 1890s are also discernible in these advertising texts. Essentially, those anxieties circulated around the issue of immigration, correlated concerns about the racial classification of who was arriving in the country, and the potentially negative effect of newcomers on the hard-won wages of Australian workers. When the FitzGerald's argued their claim to patronage upon the basis that company members were 'Australian-born', and that theirs was 'an Australian speculation, worked with Australian money, Australian brains, and Australian artists', they were reflecting current anxieties about the racial protection of the predominantly Anglo-Irish colonial population.

Emerging ideologies in the FitzGerald's advertising of 1890–92 also reflected contemporary developments in the broader political sphere. By 1890, the Federal movement had become the dominant political concern of the era. In February that year, the first Australasian Federation Conference took place in Melbourne — subsequent to the earlier meetings of the Federal Council of Australia — where political representatives from the colonies agreed that it was desirable to be united under one centralised executive and legislative government. A year later, in March 1891, representatives of each of the colonial parliaments met in Sydney at the National Australasian Convention, with the aim of developing a draft constitution and debating the methods by which federation could be achieved. It would take ten more years of political wrangling between the colonial parliaments, and a second constitutional convention in 1897–8, before the final draft of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia was determined; but salient here is the fact that the FitzGerald's embrace of nationalism coincided with political affirmations that the Australism colonies were on their way to achieving some form of independence from mother-Britain.

'An inroad of all kinds of circus ...'

In 1892, a binary opposition underpinned the FitzGerald's arguments about the desirability of their difference; they constructed this opposition in order to delineate the style of their circus from the style of other circuses which had recently visited the city. To the public of Melbourne who had witnessed those recent shows, the differences would have been immediately appreciable, and therefore it is worth examining the format of those circuses in order to understand the novelty offered by the FitzGerald's.

Throughout the preceding two years, Melbourne had received four visits from three big circuses; Harmsworth's visited twice in 1890, Wirths' visited in late 1890 and the American Sells Brothers' Circus visited in January 1892, less than three months prior to the arrival of the FitzGerald's. Both the Wirths' and Sells' companies had adopted the contemporary American circus fashion for extravagance and size, and all three companies adopted the marketing imperative that foreign talent was superior to Australian colonial talent. Harmsworth's American cowboy Texas Jack and Charlie M. Horn, 'a real American Indian', performed in the Sells' show, which was 'the complete American in style.' When the Wirths performed in Melbourne in the configuration of three rings and on two stages, all of the hippodrome track for parades. It was a spectacle that engaged the eye and offered prodigiously poor views. When the FitzGerald's referred in their advertisements as the 'South Australian States' shows that were implied. Moreover, the presentation employed by these companies' insinuations that their performances were attended by everyone who could see with ease and comfort, and as acts in our one ring as any other show gives.

'Come and see what Australians can do and what American shows do not even care for expense'

While the rhetoric of the FitzGerald's advertising reflected the inclinations of the circus management, their shows also appealed to the public of Melbourne. Compared to the huge show of Harmsworth's circus, it had a much smaller performance marquee and simplicity compared to traditional simplicity. By marketing their shows as those that had recently visited the city, they added a comparative simplicity and lack of pretense to their marketing leverage. Claims such as 'no rival'
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Concerning the dominant racial classification of population during the 1880s and 1890s are also texts. Essentially, those anxieties circulated, correlative concerns about the racial mix in the country, and the potentially negative end-won wages of Australian workers. When a patronage upon the basis that company own, and that theirs was 'an Australian money, Australian brains, and reflecting current anxieties about the racial Anglo-Irish colonial population.

FitzGerald's advertising of 1890-92 also instances in the broader political sphere. By becoming the dominant political concern of the first Australasian Federation Conference and to the earlier meetings of the Federal, political representatives from the colonies the United under one centralised executive and, later, in March 1891, representatives of each met in Sydney at the National Australasian drafting a draft constitution and debating the could be achieved. It would take ten more between the colonial parliaments, and a second 1897-88, before the final draft of the Constitution of Australia was determined; but salient debates over the FitzGerald's advocacy of nationalism coincided with Australian colonies were on their way to become from mother-Britain.

... 

Underpinned the FitzGerald's arguments about race: they constructed this opposition in order to alienate from the style of other circuses which had been public of Melbourne who had witnessed references would have been immediately borne examining the format of those circuses offer by the FitzGerald.

Two years, Melbourne had received four visits on's Circus visited twice in 1890, Wirth's 'American Sells Brothers' Circus visited in months prior to the arrival of the FitzGerald. Companies had adopted the contemporary extravaganza and size, and all three companies native that foreign talent was superior to

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Australian colonial talent. Harmston's American and Continental Cirque called attention to its American and British riders and, during their second visit to the city in late 1890, presented a Wild West exhibition. The American cowboys Texas Jack and Charlie Meadows gave displays of sharpshooting, lassoing, wild bullock and bucking horse riding, and Little Big Horn, 'a real American Indian', performed his celebrated War Dance. 11 Harmston's is acknowledged as having introduced the Wild West show to Australia in 1890, but the Australian Wirth Brothers swiftly adopted the style. 12 When the Wirths performed in Melbourne in late 1890, they presented in the configuration of three rings -- surrounded by a hippodrome track -- under a canvas purported to accommodate 6,000 people. The show was announced as being 'Direct from America', with 'genuine Sioux Indians, cowboys, Mexicans, scouts, and vaqueros, brought from Texas, Arizona and Cheyenne by Mr H. Wirth'. 13

By contrast, the Sells Brothers' Circus from America was not a Wild West show and, contrary to the popular taste for equestrianism, presented very few equine turns. 14 Among a plethora of acts, Sells presented a troupe of Japanese acrobats and an Arab display of traditional combat. However, the unique characteristic of the Sells' show was an extravagant menagerie of exotic species, including elephants and a pair of hippopotami. 15 Sells' Circus also presented its show using the American convention of simultaneous action in three rings and on two stages, all of which was circumscribed by a hippodrome track for parades. It was a staging arrangement that bewildered the eye and offered prodigiously poor viewing for many of the spectators. When the FitzGeralds referred in their advertisements to the 'inroad of all kinds of circus' recently seen in Melbourne, it was Harmston's, Wirth's and Sells' shows that were implied. Moreover, it was the confusing mode of presentation employed by these companies which underpinned the FitzGerald's insistence that their performance took place in one ring where everyone can see with ease and comfort, and we ... claim to give as many acts in our one ring as any other show gives in three'.

'Come and see what Australians can do now. We brook no difficulty, nor do we care for expense'

While the rhetoric of the FitzGerald's advertisements marked the political inclinations of the circus management, the visual and aural experience of their shows also appealed to the public of Melbourne and stimulated return attendance. Compared to the huge shows with three rings, several stages and a hippodrome track that had recently played in Melbourne, the FitzGerald's much smaller performance marquee and single ring offered a reductive return to traditional simplicity. By measuring their show against the huge circuses that had recently visited the city, the FitzGerald's foreground their, comparative simplicity and lack of pretension and used those qualities as marketing leverage. Claims such as 'no relying on side shows, no five or six
acts at one time, no bewildering the eyes, every act can be seen are correlated by journalists' observations: '[a] better ring has never visited Melbourne. It is smaller than some, but contains more talent to the square inch of sawdust than any of its predecessors.'

Editorial comments published in the first week noted that equestrian turns were a 'prominent feature' of the show. One reviewer with the Argus explained that this was what distinguished the Fitzgerald Brothers' Circus from recent circus shows:

Recent circus performances have shown a marked deficiency in regard to equestrian features owing to the necessary detention of imported horses under the quarantine law. The use of horses trained in Australia has therefore enabled the Messrs Fitzgerald to make the equine exercises a strong attraction of their entertainment. An exceptionally large number of fine looking animals were brought into requisition for Saturday's programme, and while several of them illustrated in a remarkable degree the results of careful training, some very clever riders earned unconfined applause for their meritorious achievements.

Ten weeks into the run, the Evening Standard maintained 'the Fitzgerald Brothers have done all that it was possible for man and horse to do to win success, and have succeeded'. While it may be difficult, from our current historical perspective, to appreciate the skill level of the riders and trainers, these comments indicate the high regard that nineteenth-century Australians held for equestrianism.

No printed programmes have survived from this season but newspaper reviews recorded many of the acts and the order in which they appeared. A gymnastic display of leaping by male members of the company opened the show, in which the acrobats propelled themselves off a springboard over an increasing number of horses, until Frank M. Jones turned a somersault over twenty horses, and then repeated the action with all but the most distant of the horses removed. The next item was a contortion display by ten-year-old Harry Cardello, who was joined by another child performer, George Collier, 'the Bendigo Boy', for a 'hurricane hurdle act' in which they handled two ponies each and rode them at speed over hurdles in the ring. W. E. (Billy) Jones, a veteran circus performer popular with Melbourne audiences, exhibited his skill as a trainer with two jumping horses, Ben and Curio, and Jones was followed by Dan Fitzgerald, who appeared first with Commodore (a liberty horse), then with two ponies that balanced on a see-saw, and finally with his drill team of six white liberty horses. The Argus noted the popularity of Dan's various acts:

Mr D. Fitzgerald proves himself to be one of the most successful horse trainers who has given exhibitions of his skill in

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Melbourne. His team of six hands appear in the ring without rein or under perfect control, and it is evident ruling method in their training ... Mr clever trick pony Commodore affords skill ...

The next turn was by Agnes, a goat, in compunction in getting on horseback as he and once there maintained his footing through hurdles'. After Agnes the Riding Goat came back rider as has been seen in Melbourne'. I picturesquely and daring bare-back feats' of cantering horses simultaneously. Maggie named The Olympians, in which they man executing a series of carrying poses. Lavat on horseback 'with the same ease as if followed by Charles Hogan, an Aborigine, performed a bounding jockey act: 'his con back of his horse to a standing position with gallop'. In addition, Signor Bartolo performed a solo trapeze act. Of the opening programme, not allowing for clowning and acrobatic tumbling, almost 70

Commentary in the press from the initial three characteristic features of the Fitzgerald consistently large, the 'horse excellence received, and the circus was Australian. Of attendance was a direct outcome of the equestrian character of the company. 'Fitzgerald's Circus has achieved a veritable things, from the manager down to the ticket success they are meeting with.' Aside from and size of the stud and the quality of its unpretentious embrace of its Australian identity the novelty of the company. Two weeks in Bulletin pronounced the FitzGeralds the 'Ashton and Burton', three of the continent's the preceding forty years. In the same issue editor wrote:

FitzGerald's circus hits Melbourne brethren in question have been run populated parts of Australia, picking adding new wings to the tent as they
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Melbourne. His team of six handsome white horses, which appear in the ring without rein or trappings of any kind, are under perfect control, and it is evident that kindness has been the ruling method in their training. Mr Fitzgerald's pretty and clever trick pony Commodore affords a further proof of his great skill.

The next turn was by Agnes, a goat, who 'seemed to have as little compunction in getting on horseback as he [sic] would in climbing a cliff, and once there maintained his footing throughout the swiftest galloping over hurdles'. After Agnes the Riding Goat came Albert King, 'as good a bareback rider as has been seen in Melbourne'. King's solo performance entailed 'picturesque and daring bare-back feats' while riding and handling four cantering horses simultaneously. Maggie Connors joined him for the act named The Olympians, in which they managed two cantering horses while executing a series of carrying poses. Lavater Lee gave a display of juggling on horseback 'with the same ease as if he had been on the ground', followed by Charles Hogan, an Aboriginal man from Queensland, who performed a bounding jockey act: 'his concluding feat was to jump on to the back of his horse to a standing position while it went round the ring at a gallop.' In addition, Signor Bartolo presented a contortion routine and Emma Lee performed a solo trapeze act. Of the discrete items presented on the opening programme, not allowing for the mandatory interludes of clowning and acrobatic tumbling, almost 70 percent involved horses.

Commentary in the press from the initial weeks of the run identified three characteristic features of the Fitzgerald experience; the audiences were consistently large, the horse's excellence of the show was popularly received, and the circus was Australian. Observers concurred that the large attendance was a direct outcome of the equestrian content of the show and the parochial identity of the company. "Melbourne Punch" observed, 'Fitzgerald's Circus has achieved a veritable triumph. Australian in all things, from the manager down to the ticket-taker, they richly deserve the success they are meeting with.' Aside from public admiration of the health and size of the stud and the quality of the equestrian acts, the company's unpretentious embrace of its Australian identity emerged as central to the novelty of the company. Two weeks into the run, a contributor to the Bulletin pronounced the FitzGeralds the 'right successors of Malcolm, Ashton and Burton', three of the continent's best known circus proprietors of the preceding forty years. In the same issue, the Sydney-based entertainment editor wrote:

FitzGerald's circus hits Melbourne hard ... for three years the brethren in question have been running a circus round the less populated parts of Australia, picking up horses and capital, and adding new wings to the tent as they went along, and now they...
consider themselves in a position to paralyse large cities. Their show travels on the Australian Native ticket, and claims to be superior to the swollen Yankee article in its equine department ... some of the 'osses and ponies ... can do everything except talk, and if they could talk they would observe that they were born and educated in Australia, and feel proud of the fact. One of the boy-tumblers is a pure-bred Aboriginal, and the clowns come from Parramatta. Everybody connected with this breezy enterprise is Australian, barring one or two performers, who feel heartily ashamed of themselves [...] The audiences are Australian. They are also large and enthusiastic, and the star of the FitzGerald Bros seems to be in the ascendant and likely to stay there.30

A disparity of affluence

Over the course of their fourteen-week stay in Swanston Street, the metropolis of Melbourne exerted influence on the FitzGerald's Circus, but there were paradoxes in the nexus between the circus and the city. As the populace was exposed to increasing hardship and the social fabric of the city became stressed, attendance at the circus remained buoyant and the FitzGerald's consequently grew affluent. The historian P. G. McCarthy has estimated that by 1893, 28.3 percent of Victorian breadwinners were out of work.31 For the sake of this study it must be noted that this estimate was for the whole of the colony, not simply the city of Melbourne, and the estimate refers to a period a few months after the FitzGeralds' departure. Nevertheless, for all those unemployed in 1893, many would have already been without work or severely underemployed during 1892 and unemployment afflicted all classes, from the labourers and semi-skilled workers, to the clean-handed employees such as shop assistants, office clerks and typographers.32 In February 1892, two months before the arrival of the FitzGerals, Melbourne's Trades Hall established an Unemployed Organising Committee which operated alongside other charity organisations in the city, distributing meals and bed-tickets, 'but by August 1893, with over half the colony's trade unionists out of work, the bankrupt committee disbanded'.33 In June 1892, eight weeks into the FitzGerald's season, the colonial government belatedly opened a Labour Bureau, which received 6,000 registrations within the first fortnight of operation. Within a month, the bureau had received over 8,000 registrations and throughout this period the demand for government-sponsored relief work always far outstripped supply.34

Workers of all classes who remained in employment were induced, by the frugality of the times, to accept a reduction in hours or a reduction in pay.35 Historian Bruce Scates has assembled examples of wages and income earned by a few workers in Melbourne in 1892. S. Banner, a quarryman, worked half a day in twelve over much of the year, and received shillings and four pence for his labours. Chalmers, Melbourne's anarchist movement, was a bootlegger and earned less than a shilling a week. The Gravey's parents were all dependent on the weekly wage which amounted to ten shillings a week.36 Those who supplied the daily staples of life — the baker — has also been demonstrated in Davison.37

The reduction of disposable cash resulted in many households, which in turn impacted negatively on the theatre. During the winter of 1892, the legitimate theatres experienced a downturn in business despite the presence of new companies, such as the Italian Opera Company and the Empire Palace, London, and George Edwardes Company. The latter two companies played separately but, in general terms, runs of five or six performances were truncated as a result of poor audiences. In June, the Alexandra Theatre was closed after a run of three weeks in August, the Opera House was closed, and the Royal was closed. The Tivoli, and the Theatre Royal opened a weekly wrestling match or benefit. By July, the single theatre open in the city — the Tivoli — with the exception of occasional wrestling matches or benefit performances. There was a downturn in the city's social life, with the remarkable attendance at the FitzGerald's Circus, 'enthusiastic' and 'bumper' audiences of the time. Throughout May and June, the press reported of the substantial numbers of people attending the Melbourne City. The Fitzgerald Brothers must be considered as the most successful of the Melbourne firms, and the visitor to the city is always pleased with the attendance at the City. The City has been the home of the Fitzgerald Bros Circus for some time, and the attendances at the City have been larger than those at the City. The Fitzgerald Bros Circus has a new tent, and the attendances at the City have been larger than those at the City.
position to paralyse large cities. Their Native ticket, and claims to be Yankee article in its equine department and ponies ... can do everything except walk they would observe that they were astral, and feel proud of the fact. One pure-bred Aboriginal, and the clowns, Everybody connected with this breezy barraging one or two performers, who feel themselves [...] The audiences are so large and enthusiastic, and the star of Hans to be in the ascendancy and likely to

Fourteen-week stay in Swanston Street, the special influence on the FitzGerald’s Circus, but nexus between the circus and the city. As the conditions hardship and the social fabric of the city at the circus remained buoyant and the affluent. The historian P. G. McCarthy has percent of Victorian breadwinners were out of work. It must be noted that this estimate was for the city of Melbourne, and the estimate months after the FitzGerald’s departure. Employed in 1893, many would have already been underemployed during 1892 and masses, from the labourers and semi-skilled and unskilled employees such as shop assistants, office clerks by 1892, two months before the arrival of the Shades Hall established an Unemployed operated alongside other charity organisations and bed-tickets, ‘but by August 1893, with over lists out of work, the bankrupt committee eight weeks into the FitzGerald’s season, the opened a Labour Bureau, which received first fortnight of operation. Within a month, over 000 registrations and throughout this period sponsored relief work always far outstripped remained in employment were induced, by except a reduction in hours or a reduction in as assembled examples of wages and income Melbourne in 1892. S. Banner, a quarryman, ‘worked half a day in twelve over much of 1892, earning as little as three shillings and four pence for his labours’. Chummy Fleming, the founder of Melbourne’s anarchist movement, was a bootmaker and, in March 1892, he earned less than a shilling a week. The Grave family of six children and two parents were all dependent on the weekly wage of one of their sons, which amounted to ten shillings per week. Many people sought credit from those who supplied the daily staples of life – such as the butcher, the grocer and the baker – has also been demonstrated in several studies by Scates and Davison.

The reduction of disposable cash resulted in a strained economy for many households, which in turn impacted negatively on the city’s theatres. During the winter of 1892, the legitimate theatres experienced a swift downturn in business despite the positive reception of visiting overseas companies, such as the Italian Opera Company, the Empire Company from the Empire Palace, London, and George Edwardes’ London Gaiety Burlesque Company. The latter two companies played seasons of four and seven weeks respectively but, in general terms, runs of productions generated by city managements were truncated as theatres found it difficult to attract audiences. In June, the Alexandra Theatre went dark for several months and in August, the Opera House was closed. Only the occasional benefit brightened the Theatre Royal that month and, throughout September, the Opera House and the Theatre Royal remained closed except for the occasional wrestling match or benefit. By early December, there was not a single theatre open in the city – a situation which prompted the Argus to state ‘this will be a position of affairs almost unprecedented in the history of the stage in Melbourne certainly for a great many years past’.

The downturn in business at the major theatres of the city was at variance with the remarkable attendance at the FitzGerald Brothers’ Circus, where ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘bumper’ audiences ensured the continuing season. Throughout May and June, the press reported on the remarkable attendance:

The Fitzgerald Brothers must be rapidly developing into millionaires, judging by the business that is being done at the Circus. Now, in their sixth week, the attendances, instead of being on the wane, are larger than ever, and humour and hilarity are scattered broadcast through the land ... [t]he Wednesday and Saturday matinées are just as crowded as the evening performances, and the latter are crowded.

With the advent of the tenth week, Melbourne Punch observed:

Fitzgerald Bros Circus is now an established amusement rendezvous in Melbourne, the popular feeling being such, and the attendances so large and enthusiastic at every performance, that it has merited the phenomenal success which has followed it since its first presentation to Melbourne nine weeks ago. The
tenth week was ushered in with the usual éclat, the bumper
audiences testifying their appreciation by frequent and incessant
bursts of genuine applause.  

New turns
Prior to their twenty-four-week season in Melbourne — including the ten-
week suburban run — the FitzGeralds’ longest run was nineteen days in
Adelaide during the Christmas season of 1889. Their visits to the colonial
capitals of Brisbane, Hobart and Adelaide had customarily lasted for up to
two weeks and several partial changes of programme were usually presented
in that time. Company members performed the change-of-programme acts
and advertisements promoting the new turns aimed to stimulate return
attendance. Thus, the pattern of carefully gauged programme renewal
enabled the circus to extend its short runs and garner maximum attendance
from the targeted community. Regular change also characterised the
programming of the Melbourne season, but whereas programme change was
formerly generated by company members, a long list of new performers
augmented the bills in Melbourne. The FitzGeralds were not approaching
‘millionaire’ status but their ‘phenomenal success’ undoubtedly brought
financial gains which they used to extend the variety, and thus the novelty, of
their programmes.

A former employer of Dan FitzGerald, William Hayes of Hayes and
Benhamo’s English Circus, was engaged to perform Dick Turpin’s Ride with
a ‘Beautiful Black Mare Specially trained for the Occasion’, supported by a
large contingent of supernumeraries. Intentions to produce other novelties
for the hippic stage were published in the Argus and Melbourne Punch —
‘Look out for The Steeplechase Mazeppa, Cinderella, Capture of the Kelly
Gang, and others too numerous to mention’ — but the FitzGerals instead
introduced items by comics, jugglers, aerialists and singers, drawn from the
many performers who were at large in the city at the time. Turpin’s famous
ride gave way to ‘The Harvest Home’, a comical equestrian pantomime of
rustic village life, which was produced alongside maypole dances, Irish
national dances, wrestling and boxing matches. Professional steeplechase
jockeys were also employed to ride an enactment of the Liverpool
Steeplechase; the audience’s reception of this spectacular finale was recorded
by Melbourne Punch:

The Liverpool Steeplechase still holds the boards — if we may
call it so — and is so exciting in presentation that the audience
rise, as it were, out of their seats, wave hats, call out, and when
finished a sigh of relief is felt, as when a Cup race is over at
Flemington.  

Late in the season the circus welcomed to the ring Captain Jack Sutton,
‘the Indian exterminator’. Sutton was an American who had worked as a
roughrider and lassoer with Barnum and Bailey in the 1880s and had arrived
in Australia in 1890 on engagement to the Wild West. The FitzGeralds introduced Sutton to the Melbourne public featured in scenes depicting ‘Frontier Life in America’ for which his act read, ‘Captain Jack Sutton, the renegade Indian Warfare and customs. Scapling, burning and lassoing, by an augmented company’. Less well received was the FitzGerals’ vociferously opposed Wild West Frontier for their show on the basis that it was imagined as perfunctory and unconvincing. Sutton’s representations of frontier life were consequently at variance with the nation that had coloured the FitzGeralds’ early adnouveau style. His ‘barbarous and savage’ actions, as he was sometimes described, on this issue stands out as a glaring example of Sutton’s — quite possibly comic — scenes of Wild West Australia.

Financial gains in the early weeks of the season were achieved by
to redirect profits back into their site. As the company travelled, they implemented some marked improvements to their ‘house’, which was, we must not forget, a cardboard box, a ‘bitter Melbourne winter’. ‘Innumerable gas lights’ and ‘wooden floors’ were installed and Melbourne Punch noted that the management’s care and forethought in equipping the company’s tents was such that appendages, as they must really form a barrier to the comfort of the persons witnessing the Circus during their stay in Melbourne, were successfully installed. Despite the financial hardships that all companies faced in the city, the FitzGeralds also noted that the support of the public was more than once. Overall, the attendance at the twenty-four-week season was over 3,000. In Melbourne, the circus ran for several weeks longer than planned and the city’s press urged the management to extend the season. The FitzGeralds ultimately agreed to do so.

Ameliorating the privations of the times
At the close of the fourteen-week season in February, the management announced that 112,307 people had attended the circus, which represented almost a quarter of the population of Melbourne in 1891. There was no mean performance, with an average attendance of 951 people per performance. The city’s press concerning the continually improving attendance was both happy with the company’s attendance figures and the proportion of attendance that was made up of programme change indicates that some people attended more than once. The FitzGeralds also noted that the city’s support for the circus was more than once.
in with the usual éclat, the bumper appreciation by frequent and incessant 

negotiating national identity at the circus

In Australia in 1890 on engagement to the Wirths' Wild West Show. When the FitzGeralds introduced Sutton to the Melbourne programme, he was featured in scenes depicting 'Frontier Life in America'; the advertisement for his act read, 'Captain Jack Sutton, the renowned delineator of American Indian Warfare and customs. Scalping, burning at the stake, sharpshooting, lassoing, by an augmented company.' Less than three months earlier, the FitzGeralds had vociferously opposed Wild West shows and had marketed their show on the basis that it was imagined and produced by Australians, for Australians. Sutton's representations of frontier conflicts in America's west were consequently at variance with the nationalist and isolationist ideologies that had coloured the FitzGeralds' early advertising in Melbourne. Their volé face on this issue stands out as a glaring managerial contradiction, but Sutton's – quite possibly comic – scenes were welcomed by the circus audiences.

Financial gains in the early weeks of the season enabled the FitzGeralds to redirect profits back into their site. As the winter temperatures declined, they implemented some marked improvements to the comfort of their 'house', which was, we must not forget, a canvas tent on an earthen site in a bitter Melbourne winter. 'Innumerable gas appliances, both for lighting and warmth' were installed and Melbourne Punch praised Tom FitzGerald 'for his forethought and taste in equipping this popular entertainment with such appendages, as they must really form a boon to the many thousands of persons witnessing the Circus during their sojourn here during the winter months'. Despite the financial hardships that were increasingly affecting all classes in the city, the FitzGeralds also 'bow[ed] to the wishes of the multitude' and instituted a riding school at the circus site which was 'largely attended'.

Ameliorating the privations of the times

At the close of the fourteen-week season in Swanston Street, the FitzGeralds announced that 112,307 people had attended their show – a figure that represents almost a quarter of the population of greater Melbourne, which was 473,000 in 1891. There is no means of testing this attendance claim but the circus played 118 performances, in turn permitting a projected average attendance of 951 people per performance. Observations in the city's press concerning the continually crowded state of the tent render plausible the company's attendance figure. It is impossible to estimate the proportion of attendance that was made up of return visits, but the regularity of programme change indicates that some people certainly went to the circus more than once. Likewise, the total attendance figure for the FitzGeralds' twenty-four weeks overall in Melbourne can only be speculated; once they began their suburban rounds, the city's newspapers ceased reviewing their show and, as a consequence, there is no anecdotal evidence about attendance at the ninety-two performances of the ten-week suburban season.
As regards the social constitution of the audiences, it is fair to extrapolate that the FitzGerald's appeal extended across class lines and that representatives of all classes, both the well-off and the hard-up, somehow found the entrance fee of one shilling – which for some people, at least, represented a considerable sum of money. Certainly, the city's sophisticated public transport system of trains and trams enabled patrons from suburbs beyond the city centre to travel to the site in Swanston Street and home again with relative ease and speed, while people from the poorer working-class areas immediately surrounding the city could have walked to the site. Perhaps the generation of native-born children of gold-rush immigrants, which was partially responsible for the rapid increase in the city's population during the 1880s, was naturally drawn to the vernacular tone of the FitzGerald's Circus. The entrepreneurial success of the Australian enterprise may well have appeared reassuring and attractive to this group of patrons. Similarly, the large number of immigrants who had streamed into the city from the British Isles during the 1880s may have found the equestrian entertainments and variety acts within the traditional single ring to be reminiscent of 'the old country'. Beyond these generalised observations, it is impossible to determine who went to the circus or how often they might have gone.

The FitzGerald's began their performances at roughly the moment that the public of Melbourne was coming to terms with the day-by-day realities of an economic depression unparalleled in living memory. In seeking to understand the many reasons for the extraordinary length and popularity of their season, the escapist nature of circus acts should not be ignored; a visit to the circus may have provided a welcome diversion from the daily privations of the depression. That said, however, recent shows by the Harmston's, Wirths' and Sells' circuses had also provided an escapist outlet, but those companies had not enjoyed the extended patronage that was lavished on the FitzGerald Brothers' Circus. Aside from the obvious differences of style and identity that distinguished the FitzGerald's from their internationalist contemporaries, the FitzGerald's also demonstrated an ability to create community at their performance site. As mentioned earlier, the recent visiting circuses had been huge, spectacular events. While the acts presented by Wirths', Sells' and Harmston's circuses undoubtedly inspired awe and wonder in their spectators, these shows were essentially monologic, in that the confusing method of their delivery caused them to be immune to affective participation from their audiences. The FitzGerald's single-ring performance tent was a much more intimate space than the huge spreads of canvas which accommodated up to 6,000 people. No claims as to the capacity of the FitzGerald's tent were published during the season, but it seems likely that it held approximately 1,000 people. As a result, the FitzGerald experience was closer and more intimate than those offered by recent circus spectacles. Their performance site afforded warmth and light in the winter evenings, a

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press of humanity, a co-mingling of all the inhabitants_ of animals and humans, and it provided music, humour,

In her study of the English Victorian circus, Kathleen Olynchuk notes that astonishing and sensational performances were often accompanied by the presence of the working class, who were drawn to the circus ring and other events. The assertion that the circus was capable of creating a sense of community was supported by the newspaper reports from the Melbourne season, which revealed that numerous benefit evenings for community groups and clubs and the city's shipping clerks had supported a senior cadet battalion of forty musicians who had become part of the evening's entertainment. The Grand Australian Natives Night for the benefit of the Australian Natives Association, whose concert needed a good turn-out to help the federation. Benefit evenings were not a phenomenon that became part of the entertainment, but the regular arrangement of the day of union by various social groups.

Complex cultural interactions took place between the FitzGerald's and their spectators, and Tom FitzGerald demonstrated his social populism, if ghoulishly – when they partook in the Mornington Disaster Relief Fund. The Melbourne Mornington Disaster Relief Fund. The Melbourne Football Club died after the fishing boat the Pelican Reef. The benefit was organised to assist the victims, all of whom were young men, and the patronage of the colonial Governor Lord Hobart.

Shared community was also a feature of which the FitzGerald's undertook after closing in late July. Instead of getting out of the way, they were sought after by the community – for example, in the event of a fire in 1890s – the FitzGerald's opted to stay in Melbourne. Every few days they struck their show set up again to target the community in the suburbs. The pattern of the suburban season appeared to be geography rather than class. Work was done surrounding the city centre was most affected by the FitzGerald's when they set up in the suburbs of Carlton, Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond.
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Of the audiences, it is fair to extrapolate across class lines and that both the well-off and the hard-up, somehow agreed - which for some people, at least, of money. Certainly, the city's sophisticated and trams enabled patrons from suburbs to site in Swanston Street and home again while people from the poorer working-class city could have walked to the site. 

In her study of the English Victorian circus, Brenda Assael has argued that astonishing and sensational performances could operate 'as a great social leveller, uniting unskilled workers, working-class tradesmen, and elites who were attracted to the circus ring and other democratic spaces'. Assael's assertion that the circus was capable of creating community among spectators of all classes is certainly supported by newspaper advertisements and reports from the Melbourne season, which reveal that the FitzGeralds hosted numerous benefit evenings for community groups. The metropolitan football clubs and the city's shipping clerks had separate benefit nights, as did the senior cadet battalion of forty musicians who performed in the ring and thus became part of the evening's entertainment. Late in the season, there was a Grand Australian Natives Night for the metropolitan branches of the Australian Natives Association, whose constituent members were middle-class white men, and whose agenda in the 1890s was nationalist and federation. Benefit evenings were not a phenomenon particular to the circus genre, but the circular arrangement of the arena and the illumination of the audience meant that the relatively intimate space was an ideal site for shows of union by various social groups.

Complex cultural interactions took place in the evolving relationship between the FitzGeralds and their spectators during the winter of 1892. Dan and Tom FitzGerald demonstrated their social conscience - and struck a popular, if sombre note - when they posted a benefit matinee for the Mornington Disaster Relief Fund. The Mornington Disaster, as it became known, occurred on 21 May 1892, when fifteen members of the Mornington Football Club died after the fishing boat they were travelling in capsized off Pelican Reef. The benefit was organised to offer aid to the relatives of the victims, all of whom were young men, and was held under the vice-regal patronage of the colonial Governor Lord Hopetoun and Lady Hopetoun. Shared community was also a feature of the ten-week suburban season which the FitzGeralds undertook after closing down the Swanston Street site in late July. Instead of getting out of the city and moving to a region less affected by the depression - for example, New Zealand, which remained unaffected by the Australian labour disputes and fiscal collapse of the early 1890s - the FitzGeralds opted to stay in Melbourne, but to play on different terms. Every few days they struck their site, moved to another suburb, and set up again to target the community in the immediate environs of their pitch. The pattern of the suburban season appears to have been determined by geography rather than class. Working-class suburbs immediately surrounding the city centre were most affected by the depression, but the FitzGeralds set up in the workers' suburbs of Williamstown, Brunswick, Carlton, Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond as easily as they pitched in
middle-class suburbs further out from the city centre, such as Brighton, Armadale, Prahran, Camberwell, Glenferrie and Kew. Instead of travelling to the circus in Swanston Street by public transport, the proximity of the circus provided an opportunity for extended families, friends and neighbours to get together and reinforce a sense of community.

The unprecedented popularity of the FitzGerald's first season in Melbourne was a fascinating social phenomenon. Audiences were drawn to the company because it was unashamedly Australian and its nationalist inclinations were timely; the style and quality of its equestrian show was impressive; and their circus tent became a place for expressions of shared community. Dan and Tom FitzGerald were astute showmen and, throughout the life of their circus (1888–1906), they proved sensitive to the changing tastes of their public and responsive to the shifting imperatives of Australia's domestic politics and international relations. Reflecting the complex nature of Australian citizenship, they participated in times at nationalist mythologies, as for example the Melbourne season of 1892, but at other times, such as the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902, they collaborated with political opinion advocating Australia's role as Britain's imperial partner in the Pacific. For the FitzGeralds, nationalism — that is, the idea of sharing a geographic and cultural commonality — was a dynamic and shifting construction which they negotiated, and re-negotiated, throughout their career. During an era of intense social and political change, they articulated a variety of political narratives, not all of which were congruent, concerning nation, identity, allegiance, and belonging in Australia.

NOTES
2 See Davison, in particular chapter nine, 'Making Ends Meet'; see also Bruce Scales, 'A Struggle for Survival: Unemployment and the Unemployed Agitation in Late Nineteenth-century Melbourne', Australian Historical Studies 24, no. 94 (April 1990); "Knocking Out a Living": Survival Strategies and Popular Protest in the 1890s Depression, in Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan, eds, Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993).
3 The St Leon Family Circus lost all their deposited savings with the banking collapse of 1893 and the company disbanded as a result (Mark St Leon, Spangles and Sawdust: The Circus in Australia [Richmond, Vic.: Greenhouse Publications, 1983] 55). The Wirth Brothers' Circus, at this time the largest in Australia, announced plans to leave Australia, in Adelaide's Advertiser on 16 January 1892. In fact, the company spent much of that year in Western Australia where the economy was positively affected by recent discoveries of mining resources. The Wirths departed Australia in November 1893. George Wirth,

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Round the World with a Circus: Memories of the FitzGerald Bros. (Melbourne: Troedel and Cooper, 1925) 64.
4 There are no extant fiscal records from the FitzGerald Bros. for the 1892 season. The only documents that reflect the economic health of the company across the period 1888–1906 are two cheques and letters between Dan and Tom FitzGerald and other managers and employees, as well as wages for circus riders and costs of purchases and transportation from overseas. As a consequence, an equivalently comprehensive set of economic data is not available. The 1892 season was successful for the FitzGerald Bros. and the act of marketing and advertising their circus and its entertainments to domestic and international audiences was an important part of the company's success.
5 Dates of the FitzGeralds' 1893 season in Sydney, as quoted in Round the World with a Circus, 9.
6 'The FitzGerald Bros (Tom and Dan) and their two sons, rode the baize bed-rock of their fortunes and freed Germany from the Kaiser'. (Round the World with a Circus, 1925).
7 Accounts of nationalism and national identity on the topic, such as Gilner, Hobbsbawn, and Hutchinson, have been criticised by Tim Edensor, among others, for 'seriously distorting' the actuality of national identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life. Edensor insists that popular culture and identity have been informally discussed in the Australian context.
8 'Round the World with a Circus', 9.
9 Text quoted from a circus herald dated April 1892, City of Sydney Performing Arts Collection, The Arts Centre.
10 Harmsworth's organised their company in Sydney, on 18 March 1890 (Brisbane Courier, 14 February 1890). The company's first appearance was in Melbourne at Hibernian Hall, 19 April – 19 May 1890 (Adelaide Daily News, 30 March 1890). The company's tour continued to the north coast of Queensland, where the company performed at the Grand West Show in Brisbane, from 16–20 October 1890. The company then returned to Sydney, where it performed at the Sydney Theatre Company's in Sydney, from 16–20 October 1890. The company then returned to Sydney, where it performed at the Sydney Theatre Company's Sydney Lyceum Theatre, 16–20 October 1890. The company then returned to Sydney, where it performed at the Sydney Theatre Company's Sydney Lyceum Theatre, 16–20 October 1890. The company then returned to Sydney, where it performed at the Sydney Theatre Company's Sydney Lyceum Theatre, 16–20 October 1890. The company then returned to Sydney, where it performed at the Sydney Theatre Company's Sydney Lyceum Theatre, 16–20 October 1890.
11 Argus, 18 November 1890.
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Round the World with a Circus: Memories of Trials, Triumphs and Tribulations (Melbourne: Troedel and Cooper, 1925) 64.

4 There are no extant fiscal records from the FitzGeralds’ season in Melbourne in 1892. The only documents that reflect the company’s business transactions across the period 1888–1906 are two cheque books, several quotes for shipping, and letters between Dan and Tom FitzGerald from 1896 in which they discuss wages for circus riders and costs of purchasing and shipping trained animals from Europe. As a consequence, an evidentiary analysis of the economic circumstances of this circus is not possible. In the broader field of circus scholarship, Helen Stoddart (Rings of Desire [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000], chapter 3) has produced a synoptic analysis of the economic history of the circus. By mobilising contextual evidence such as patterns of advertising and other entrepreneurial activity, Stoddart argues that economically successful circus managers owed their success, in part, to their manipulation of a variety of promotional media.

5 Dates of the FitzGeralds’ 1893 season in Sydney were 22 May – 19 August.

6 ‘The FitzGerald Bros (Tom and Dan) and their celebrated pony, “Commodore”, the bed-rock of their fortunes and a friend in need’, Bulletin (26 November 1892): 20; ‘FitzGerald Brothers’ Monster Australian Circus and Menagerie’ (20 May 1893): 15; ‘FitzGerald Brothers’ Gigantic Australian Circus and Menagerie’ (27 May 1893): 16.

7 Accounts of nationalism and national identity by some of the best-known writers on the topic, such as Gillner, Hobbsawm, Anderson, Anthony Smith, and John Hutchinson, have been criticised by Tim Edensor, who argues these accounts are ‘seriously distorted’ because they focus on ‘high’, ‘official’ and ‘traditional’ culture, and exclude popular and everyday cultural expression. Tim Edensor, National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002) 12. Edensor’s insistence that popular cultural forms also shape national identity has informed this essay.

8 Argus, 16 April 1892.

9 Text quoted from a circus herald dated Adelaide, 19 October 1891, held by the Performing Arts Collection, the Arts Centre, Melbourne.

10 Harmsworth’s organ is quoted in Sydney in 1891 (Brisbane Courier, 14 February 1891). Harmsworth’s American and Continental Cirque played in Melbourne in Swanston Street, next to the Hibernian Hall, 19 April – 19 May 1890 (Argus, 17 April 1890). Harmsworth and Wirth’s Circuses were two sites in the city later that year: at Swanston Street, 20 October – 19 November, and at the Exhibition Grounds, 20 October – 8 November (Argus, 20 October – 19 November 1890). Wirth Brothers’ Wild West Show played in Melbourne, 24 October – 24 November 1890 (Argus, 24 October 1890). Sells Brothers’ arrived in Melbourne late in 1891 and played through January 1892.

11 Argus, 18 November 1890.

see also the diary of Marizles Martin-Wirth, copy held at the Mitchell Library, SLNSW, MSS 4414. An indication of the speed with which Wirths adopted the Wild West Show is demonstrated by an advertisement in the *New Zealand Sporting Review*, supplement, 20 September 1890, which announced the opening night of Wirths' Wild West Show on 22 September 1890 (Auckland Public Library Photograph Collection, negative no. 1913644). See also George Wirth, 49–63.

13 *Argus*, 24 October 1890.
15 The Sells' desire to collect and exhibit exotic species was demonstrated by a note at the bottom of an advertisement placed in the *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 6 February 1892, which read: 'Wanted for the World's Fair. It is our intention to make a truly Representative Collection of Rare Australian Beasts, Birds and Genuine Curiosities Only, for Special Exhibition at the Great World's Fair in Chicago, America, next year, and parties owning such and desiring to dispose of the same are requested to call upon us at our Show Grounds wherever we exhibit. *White Kangaroos specially desired.*'

16 *Argus*, 30 April 1892.
17 *Evening Standard*, 18 June 1892, quoted in FitzGerald's advertisement in the *Argus*, 24 June 1892.
18 *Argus*, 25 April 1892.
19 The comment refers to the fact that Sells Brothers' riders could not perform on their usual mounts because the horses had girdles and were impounded by Australian quarantine authorities (George Wirth, 61; diary of Marizles Martin-Wirth).
20 *Argus*, 18 April 1892.
21 *Evening Standard*, 18 June 1892, quoted in FitzGerald advertisement in the *Argus*, 24 June 1892.
22 The *Mercury* (Hobart), 6 April 1896; interview with American Wild West performer, Jack Sutton. Sutton expressed his surprise at the high value Australians put upon horses and their well-being.
23 'Liberty horse' is the term applied to educated horses, or to teams of horses, that have been trained to perform complicated drill formations in unison without riders. See Antony Hipplesley Coxe, *A Seat at the Circus* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1980) 97.
24 *Argus*, 25 April 1892.
25 *Argus*, 18 April 1892 (review).
26 Carrying poses, or *classic poses on horseback*, were derived from early nineteenth-century performances by equestrians such as John Astley (son of Philip Astley) and Andrew Ducrow. The act demonstrated grace and poise and developed to an adagio tempo as two riders worked together on the back of one or two mounts cantering around the ring. The FitzGeralds usually named the carrying act The Olympians; most often performed by a male and female rider, it was occasionally performed by two male riders.

27 Thomas Frost recorded a juggler and vaulter with a similar circus, 1840–41 (Circus Life and Circus of the Winds, 1881). It is possible that it was the same juggler with FitzGerals in 1892, but if so, he would have been in his 80s in 1892.
28 In the *jockey act or bounding jockey*, the riders galloped around the ring and performed feats that implied leaps from the ring into the horse's back, without any intermediary assistance.
29 *Melbourne Punch*, 19 May 1892.
32 *Scates* 46. See also the *Argus*, 2 July 1892, the *Bulletin* (30 April 1892), and *Argus*, 5 December 1892.
33 *Melbourne Punch* 26 May 1892: 237.
34 *Melbourne Punch* (23 June 1892).
35 *FitzGerald Palace Circus*, *Melbourne Punch* (26 May 1892).
36 *Melbourne Punch* (23 June 1892).
37 *Mercury* (Hobart), 6 April 1896.
38 *Argus*, 2 & 8 July 1892.
39 *Melbourne Punch* (30 June 1892).
40 *Melbourne Punch*, 26 May 1892.
41 The audience attendance figure was published in the 1891 census figure in the Statistical Register of Greater Melbourne was 490,896. Urban I
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27 Thomas Frost recorded a juggler and vaulter named Lavater Lee with Batty's Circus, 1840–41 (Circus Life and Circus Celebrities [London: Chatto and Windus, 1881]). It is possible that it was the same Lavater Lee who performed with FitzGerald's in 1892, but if so, he would have been in his late sixties.

28 In the jockey act or bounding jockey, the rider jumped on and off the horse as it galloped around the ring and performed feats of balance on its back. Bounding jockey implied leaps from the ring into an upright standing position on the horse's back, without any intermediary assistance.

29 Melbourne Punch, 19 May 1892.

32 Scates 46. See also the Argus, 2 July 1892, regarding unemployment among clerks and shop assistants.
33 Scates 51.
34 Davison 257–8; Scates 52.
35 Davison 259–60; Scates 48.
36 Scates 48–55.
37 See note 2.
38 Argus, 5 December 1892.
39 Melbourne Punch (26 May 1892): 327.
40 Melbourne Punch (23 June 1892).
41 FitzGerald Palace Circus, Wakefield Street, Adelaide, 24 December 1889 – 11 January 1890.
42 Argus, 23 May 1892; Melbourne Punch (26 May 1892): 327.

43 Performers engaged in the latter weeks of the season included William Hayes, equestrian; Charles Naylor, vocalist; Mrs Harry Wirth, equestrienne; Miss Ray Jones; Amy Duckworth; Mons Provo, juggler; Dave Gardner, clown; Swift Bros, comedians; Jack Sutton, lassoer and roughrider; Corson and Grey, boxing exhibition; Ed Duvalli, clown; Ettie Emerie, contortionist; supernumeraries.

44 Melbourne Punch, 23 June 1892.
45 Mercury (Hobart), 6 April 1896.
46 Argus, 2 & 8 July 1892.
47 Melbourne Punch, 30 June 1892.
48 Melbourne Punch, 26 May 1892.

49 The audience attendance figure was published in the Argus, 23 July 1892. The 1891 census figure in the Statistical Register of Victoria states the population of Greater Melbourne was 490,896. Urban historians, Graeme Davison included,
dispute these figures for a variety of reasons. The population figure of 473,000 is preferred by Davison (Davison 326).

This estimate is drawn from two separate indicators: the previously stated aggregate attendance figure of 951 people per performance, and press reports which repeatedly recorded that the tent was crowded.


These benefits occurred on the evenings of 4 & 6 June and 12 July.


Argus, 2, 4 & 9 June 1892; Melbourne Punch, 2 June 1892. The matinee took place on Thursday, 9 June 1892.

Davison 258.

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‘Our Madge and Cyril’

Framings of the Public Partnership of Madge Elliott and Cyril Ritchard

Madge Elliott and Cyril Ritchard were two of Australia’s leading stage stars in the early twentieth century. In an article published in The Argus on 14 August 1955, the critic noted that they were "the ultimate term of Australian stage actors - Madge and Cyril, just as Gladys Moncrieff and her husband are "Our" Harbour. And miraculously, in spite of their long years overseas, they returned to Australia to continue their personal partnership that coalesced around comedy and song, with a touch of celebrity." Elliott’s and Ritchard’s first major starring role together, in the musical comedy *The Only Way* in 1932–33, signalled the start of their mature stage partnership. Their tours and their performances together. The pair’s professional skill and expertise, complementary physical presence, with their on-stage sexual chemistry, and the fact that their relationship was long-standing, helped to create a perfect public image for them. By 1932, they were the epitome of glamour, as identified by John Thomson.7 The appeal of Elliott’s and Ritchard’s on-stage dramatic and musical partnership, with their appearances together, and their ability to appeal to audiences both in Australia and overseas, helped to position them as one of Australia’s most popular stage teams.

I use the term ‘ghosting’ in accordance with the following definition: ghosting refers to the way in which the performative intertextuality of performances is the potential for the space of the stage to haunt them and their audiences in such a way that the character or role they are playing is seen as both authentic and fully realised. In other words, the audience’s experience of the character may be influenced by their representations in other productions and characterisations, and this may lead them to question the authenticity of the performance.8 In the case of Madge Elliott and Cyril Ritchard, their performances were highly influential and their celebrity status helped to establish them as one of Australia’s most popular stage teams. The fact that they were able to maintain their partnership for such a long period of time is a testament to their ability to work well together, and to the success of their performances. Their partnership was highly successful, and they were able to maintain their popularity throughout their career. The fact that their partnership continued for such a long period of time is a testament to their ability to work well together, and to the success of their performances. Their partnership was highly successful, and they were able to maintain their popularity throughout their career.