'Seasonal Allegory with Adam and Eve'
by Leandro Bassano

Kim Suzanne Ellis

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Abstract

What does a single work of an artist reveal? What if this work is a piece of sixteenth century Italian art and now placed, or possibly displaced, into a New Zealand gallery? How does this work fit into this new environment, does it still tell a relevant story when the context has changed? In this dissertation I will seek to explore some of the issues implicit in one such painting, namely Leandro Bassano’s *Seasonal Allegory with Adam and Eve*, in the Mackelvie Collection of the Auckland Art Gallery. Created in a collaborative workshop environment this one canvas holds a plurality of meanings both allegorical and biblical, acting as an example of the newly created biblical-pastoral genre. By examining the art historical context in which the work was painted and the genre created, along with some of the issues implicit in that, I hope to reveal its relevance, and enrich both the perception and understanding of this painting.

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I would like to sincerely thank my family, friends and work colleagues for their unfailing support and forbearance during the writing of this dissertation. My supervisor Dr Hugh Maguire, the Curator of the Mackelvie Collection, Mary Kisler, and the helpful staff of the Elam Library are also due my profound thanks.
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Chapter 1  Introduction

This dissertation is on the c1580 work *Seasonal Allegory with Adam and Eve* (Accession No. M1961/2) by the Venetian artist Leandro Bassano (1557-1622) (fig. 1). This is a biblical-pastoral oil painting (775 x 1111mm) depicting, in the foreground, peasants working in a landscape with small, barely discernible figures in the top right hand corner. It was purchased by the Mackelvie Trust¹ for £1,200 in 1961 and it comprises part of the Mackelvie Collection in the Auckland Art Gallery². Purchased as a work by Francesco, Leandro's elder brother, Edoardo Arslan later reattributed it to Leandro³. It was purchased from The Leger Galleries in London (now Spink & Sons), the previous owner was a S.A. Sanford, of which nothing further is known. The provenance of the work has not been established as searches have, so far, proved futile.

The painting is teeming with life and activity. The five foreground figures are frieze-like as they spread across the canvas surface, and they dominate the foreground. The spectator is led into the work by the back of a barefooted woman kneeling milking goats, a red-shirted boy to her right appears to be in charge of calming the animals. Her head is turned to the left and, following her gaze, we see a hatted man totting an empty wooden pail, who in

¹The Mackelvie Trust, the governing body overseeing the Mackelvie Collection, started in 1885 upon the death of its Scots-born founder, James Tannock Mackelvie (1824-1885). Mackelvie had been an avid and eclectic collection of 'paintings, sculptures, bronzes, ivories, jades, enamels, porcelain, clocks and watches, coins and medals, arms and armour, books, mosaics, bonbonnieres, rock crystal and glass.' J.M. Stacpoole *The Mackelvie Collection: A Centenary Exhibition*, Auckland, 1985, p. 7. Although only in New Zealand from 1865 to 1872 he purchased and sent back to this country a wide range of art objects and books. In 1885 his collection was displayed in its entirety for the first time and is added to as funds become available, until the present day.

²E. Benezit Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs, Grunel, 1999 cites two works of Leandro's sold at around the same time as the work under discussion - 'Londres, 27 avr. 1960: Deux Saisons: GBP 1 200 - Londres, 28 jul. 1961: Le Flot : GBP 1 260', p. 839. To give an example of how Bassano works have increased in value since this purchase, the Dictionnaire cites the most recent Leandro work sold as, 'Londres, 11 dec. 1996: Eau, h/f (135x158): GBP 45 500.' p. 839.

³Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly No. 20, 1961, p. 4. Arslan (recorded in this Quarterly but with no earlier document coming to hand to substantiate it) also suggested that this was an early work of around 1575 when both brothers were in their father's studio. Searches for the documentation on Arslan's reattribution have, unfortunately, proved futile, it would have been valuable to know on what grounds he altered the attribution.
turn looks down to a seated girl. A boy with two dogs on a lead and carrying a dead hare strides into the scene from the left. An older woman kneels, picking strawberries, in the
middle ground; with a mounted man, men and dog close by, off on a hunt. Also in the
middle ground, but to the right, a piebald goat stretches up to eat the lower branches of a
silver-branched tree. About to depart the scene, at the top right hand corner, are two naked
figures, invisible to or unnoticed by the active workers. The sky is lightening over the
mountain in the background, the darker sky lifting to reveal a pink-tinged sunrise.

This work is a single canvas from a set of biblically-themed seasons, showing Spring and
will be referred to as such in this dissertation. All four seasons show peasants at their tasks
in the foreground with Old or New Testament figures in the middle distance; Summer
shows the sacrifice of Isaac, Autumn has Moses receiving the tablets of law, Winter Christ
bearing the cross and in Spring the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise.

To establish the New Zealand context of this work I will commence by looking at its
purchase and the reasons for its acquisition. The Bassano were a family of painters and
much of their work was created in a collaborative workshop environment under the
instruction of Jacopo Bassano (c. 1510-1592). The impact of Jacopo on the work of his
sons, the difficulty in attribution, and the family’s signifier of authorship and of place is
also discussed. This work is an exemplar of the biblical-pastoral genre, newly created by
Jacopo, and the incorporation of many elements into this genre is explored. The final
section of this dissertation is on the allegorical and religious implications of the painting and
whether its meaning is transferable to contemporary viewers.
Chapter II  The Purchase

The Auckland Art Gallery director, and instigator of the purchase of this Bassano work, was Professor Peter Tomory. His directorship of the Art Gallery ran from 1956 to 1965. Born in Hong Kong, he had previously worked in galleries in England at York and Leicester and been the assistant regional director of the Arts Council of Great Britain from 1953-56. One of his aims, when taking over the directorship of the Gallery from the outgoing director, Dr Eric Westbrook, was to build up the permanent collection.4

The Bassano was amongst several other works purchased on a buying trip to Europe in 1961. Other old master works purchased at this time were Pieter Brueghel The Younger’s Village Fair (M1961/1), Pietro Paolini’s The Fortune Teller (1961/2), Hendrick Mommer’s Landscape with Peasants (1961/14/1), and Marco Ricci’s Rocky Landscape with Figures (1961/14/2). These purchases were made by Professor Tomory on behalf of the City Council, the Mackelvie Trust Board and the art patron, Norman B. Spencer. The Mackelvie Trust Minutes for 6 December 1960 noted that Tomory, already in Europe, had forwarded a photograph of the Bassano work to them. In these Minutes the work is described as A Landscape with Figures and Numerous Animals, attributed to Francesco, with an asking price of £1,200. The Trust had agreed to the purchase but, ‘if there was a possibility of a better picture offering in the near future and the purchase of the “Bassano” could be held over meantime, then it was suggested that Mr Tomory might recommend postponing the purchase. It was pointed out however, that the Board did not want to “miss out” on the purchase of the “Bassano”.5

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5 Minutes of Meeting of the MacKelvie Trust Board, Tuesday 6th December 1960, p. 66.
Apparently there was some competition for these purchases, Tomory stating, “There were four other galleries after the Brueghel and the Bassano ...,” but did not specify which galleries these were. A *Christchurch Press* article quotes Tomory as saying ‘... that all the works purchased had a definite and important place in the permanent collection of the gallery. Of the Italians, the Bassano was an important addition in terms of landscape, representing the North Italian school of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; the Bassano studio in Venice has strongly influenced [the] young El Greco.”

Paralleling Tomory’s interest and instigation in building up the European old masters was his drive for modernist works to be purchased and displayed. The last of four casts of Jacob Epstein’s bronze torso *The Rock Drill* (1961/8) of 1913 was also purchased at this time. This work Tomory considered pivotal in the development of twentieth century sculpture and important in the building up of the Gallery’s sculpture collection. It was under Tomory’s directorship that an exhibition of contemporary British sculpture took place in 1956. He also purchased works by New Zealand artists or works with New Zealand subject matter, it was under his directorship that Colin McCahon’s *North Canterbury Landscape* (1960/24/1) and *The Maries at the Tomb* (1960/24/2) were purchased in 1960. Acquired also for the Gallery was Christopher Perkin’s canonical work, *Frozen Flames* (1962/33) in 1962. An *Auckland Star Weekender* article of 1979 stated that, ‘It was Tomory who turned the gallery into a fully professional institution and was responsible for establishing an international standing.’ Such was the impact of his directorial guidance on the gallery, that he earned this praise eleven years after his resignation.

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6 *Press* (Christchurch), 21 March 1961, unpaginated.
7 Ibid.
8 This particular exhibition, which contained works by Henry Moore, caused a furor, with the Mayor Mr John Luxford stating “I have never seen the art gallery desecrated by such a nauseating sight.” Reported by Tony Potter, ‘Culture fog clouds city gallery’, *Auckland Star Weekender*, 5 May 1979, unpaginated.
Tomory wrote an article entitled ‘Looking at Art in New Zealand’ for the magazine *Landfall* in 1958, a full three years prior to the Bassano purchase and two years into his tenure at the Gallery. In it he elucidated some of his thoughts on the New Zealand art scene and its spectatorship, acknowledging the lack in New Zealand of ‘one single great example of European art,’\(^{10}\) and the realisation that without seeing first-hand great works of European art it is difficult to grasp the full impact of the artist’s creativity, and hence be able to derive pleasure from it. He establishes for discussion a major point in this dissertation stating, ‘... what I would like to discuss is not the validity of a painting as a work of art, but rather the significance of a work of art when it is placed in a quite different environment to that in which it was created, and seen by a people isolated in the main from the resources which produced it ...’\(^{11}\) Tomory indicated that without touchstones of European art for contrast, stimulation and education, the New Zealand artist, their critics and public cannot knowledgeably and seriously judge art. It is both the producer and spectator who *need* strong examples of European art in order for both their work and criticism to intelligently and creatively grow. In order for New Zealand art and its criticism to move ahead, the European art continuum must be acknowledged, one must look back in order to move forward and in so doing claim an identity.

In acknowledging that New Zealanders use the landscape as ‘some kind of aesthetic yardstick’\(^{12}\) it is interesting to note that Tomory brings up the image of Giorgione’s *Sleeping Venus* (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden) which can be seen to depict an allegorical interpretation of fertility and man’s relationship to the bountiful landscape. In his writing

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 153.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 157.
he weaves together contemporaneous New Zealand ‘totems’ or visual icons, his reasoned opinion and Renaissance images which incorporate the landscape.\(^\text{13}\)

Some of the works purchased in the 1961 period of art acquisition have been hung together in the Gallery’s 1999/2000 exhibition *Pavillioned in Splendor*. The Bassano, Mommers and Brueghel were all hung in close proximity and all depict rustic figures in the landscape, with Brueghel’s revelers at play in a village setting. Tomory was well aware of the New Zealand liking of landscape art and its tradition from early colonial days of this genre. Perhaps he saw the purchase of good quality European works depicting the landscape as a way of both enriching the Collection by filling in the art historical gaps and as a point of entry for a community already comfortable with landscape images. He had earlier asked the question, ‘Is a public collection of art a passive repository of segregated images of various cultures, or is it an active unity of images expressing a significant influence on the community within which they are placed?’\(^\text{14}\) Tomory appeared to be looking for works that would enhance the Collection, offering not just an aesthetic engagement but one that was intellectually participatory. The purchase of these works, and their joint hanging communicates something of the cross fertilisation of Northern and Italian influences on both subject matter and depictions of the common people. The Brueghel is a characteristic example of a Flemish narrative painting humourously depicted, but containing a covert moral message. The Bassano shows the influence of Netherlandish genre art by placing a biblical scene into a vernacular environment. The sixteenth century pastorale is contrasted with seventeenth century historia where Salvatore Rosa’s *Cavalry Battle* (1700/30) is placed above the Bassano - the genres skillfully offered for comparison and contrast. Paolini’s *The Fortune Teller*, was placed nearby and is an example of the rise of naturalism developing, in this instance, from the work of Caravaggio (1571?-1610). The Mommers’

\(^{13}\) In this short essay, Tomory mentions Poussin, Claude, da Vinci, Giorgione, Velasquez, Murillo, El Greco and Rembrandt among others.

work shows the impact of Italian art on the Flemish, particularly in the foreground ruins, but retains the fastidious detail of the Northerners.\textsuperscript{15}

Tomory’s purchase of the Bassano and the other landscape works can be seen as having a didactic intention in that it introduces further pieces of European art into this ‘young country, bounded by the wide Pacific and yet retaining its European culture.’\textsuperscript{16} Tomory could well have had the Bassano in mind when he stated that there are ‘no masterpieces of European art in New Zealand but there are some very good pictures here, of all sorts of periods. There are, for example, three good Gainsborough portraits and three Turners. But I believe that galleries should buy good painting or good sculpture; they should not worry about whether they are buying big names or not. Even the masters slip from time to time, or there can be an uneasy attribution. It is much better to have a very good second-rung artist.’\textsuperscript{17} Perhaps there is an inference in both the Mackelvie Minutes and in Tomory’s comments that the Bassano was not considered a major European work. According to the Minutes, its purchase was not to be missed out on, but it could well be delayed if a more worthwhile work presented itself to Tomory. He neither confirms nor denies whether, in his mind, the Bassano is a masterpiece or a competent ‘second-rung’ work. Its purchase and inclusion in the Mackelvie Collection, however, surely infers both he and the Trust felt it exemplified an aspect of Italian art that was a worthy addition to the Gallery. His remark on the uneasy attribution of various works is particularly pertinent to Bassano works in general, and specifically to this painting, as will be seen in the next section.

\textsuperscript{15} Visits to Italy by Dutch painters were quite common in during the seventeenth century with many stopping in Venice and Rome to for a chance to ‘worship at the shrines of classical Antiquity and the High Renaissance, and also to become familiar with more recent developments in Italian art.’ C. Brown, \textit{Scenes of Everyday Life: Dutch Genre Painting of the Seventeenth Century}, London, 1984, p. 212

\textsuperscript{16} Tomory, 1959, p. 91.

Chapter III The Bassano Family, Their Signature of Place and Attribution Difficulties

This section looks at the Bassano family, their workshop practice and the influence of their genre works on several of their followers. Also encompassed here is the Bassano signifier of place and of authorship which is paralleled with the regional realist concerns of some New Zealand artists in the 1930-1960 period. Also discussed is the difficulty in irrefutably attributing the collaborative or unsigned Bassano works to a specific hand. Conceptualised and created by Jacopo, Spring has been attributed to the hand of Leandro, who acted as Jacopo’s skillful amanuensis. It is therefore important to clarify the overarching significance of Jacopo both to Leandro’s art and that of the whole Bassano workshop.

The family acquired the surname ‘dal Ponte’ as their workshop in Bassano was close to the bridge over the Brenta River. The name Bassano was initially used in Venice for Jacopo but later for the whole family. Bassano is both the family’s taken name and the place they came from, Bassano del Grappa in the Veneto region, approximately sixty-five kilometres north-west of Venice. The dal Ponte workshop was started by Leandro’s grandfather, Francesco il vecchio (c1475-1539), a minor provincial artist, whose workshop created paintings, altarpieces as well as decorative frames, religious emphemia, votive candles and even designs for marzipan. Jacopo, along with his brother Giambattista, had been apprenticed to his father and, as he developed, worked collaboratively with him. To varying degrees the paintings and designs coming from the dal Ponte workshop were generally regarded as collective efforts, making it difficult to distinguish one hand from another.

\footnote{It was common for a Renaissance artist to be called after his birthplace or to have his birthplace included into his name for identification, reflecting the regionalism of the Italian states, as seen with Pordenone (Giovanni Antonio de Sacchis from Pordenone), Parmigianino (Girolamo Francesco Mazzola from Parma), and later Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio).}
Jacopo initially followed in the rather retardaire footsteps of his father, as Bruce Cole explains, ‘Renaissance artists were strongly conservative; they built their art upon the sturdy foundations of the past. Originality, invention, and change for change’s sake were seldom, if ever, part of their mental apparatus.’

Jacopo was inventive, however, and over his long and experimental career he was influenced by many styles and artists, both Italian and Northern. He referenced a large collection of graphic material, keeping abreast of artistic developments in Italy, Germany and the Netherlands. His creative life was long, his experimentation in various manners and styles wide-ranging and the sources of influence extensive.

After 1540, Jacopo directed the family workshop, and, as with other dynastic families of artists, such as the Bellini, Vecelli and Caliari, Jacopo trained his sons to follow his profession. He had four artist sons, Francesco (1549-1592), Giambattista (1553-1613), Leandro, and Gerolamo (1566-1621). When one refers to the Bassano workshop or bottega it is generally these artists, although apprentices were also taken on from outside the family. The workshop was a place of imitation and co-operation, of replicating Jacopo’s inventions which were commercially successful. Rearick states,

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20 Jacopo trained briefly in the Venetian workshop of Bonifazio de’Pitati, which Creighton Gilbert cites as being in the early 1530s. C. Gilbert, ‘Bonifacio and Bassano, ca. 1533’, Arte Veneta, 1978, p. 131. In this article Gilbert discusses the possibility of Jacopo being the skillful and autonomous member of the Bonifacio shop who assisted in the teacher’s Last Supper (Bob Jones University Collection, Greenville, South Carolina) of around 1533.

21 Jacopo was influenced by the works of Titian throughout his life, either by engravings or by seeing Titian’s works first hand on his visits to Venice. The Martyrdom of St Catherine 1544 (Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa) shows the influence of Raphael, Jacopo then went through a phase influenced by Mannerist tendencies, such as those of Parmigianino shown in The Beheading of St John the Baptist 1550 (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen). The engravings of Giuseppe Porta called Salviati and those of Domenico Campagnola can also be seen as influential. Towards the end of his life, Jacopo’s experimentation with iridescent nocturnal light effects as in Christ Crowned with Thorns (1589-90) (private collection, Rome) are similar to those of Tintoretto. Both of these artist’s shared Biblical narratives as in Tintoretto’s Christ in the House of Mary and Martha (Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakotheek) but Tintoretto puts the protagonists in the foreground whereas Jacopo backgrounds the biblical episode. These are just a few examples of the influences that Jacopo absorbed and translated over his extensive oeuvre, there are, however, almost as many influences citable as there are works painted, discussion of which the parameters of this dissertation will not allow.
To meet the rising demand for these genre-like pictures Jacopo established a programme for their mass production in which his sons and assistants were set to duplicating compositions *seriatus*. Francesco began this process as early as 1567; he was joined by Giambattista after 1570, by Leandro about 1574, and much later by Gerolamo.\textsuperscript{22}

The members of the workshop learnt their craft by strict imitation of Jacopo’s style. The result of these efforts aimed to be a seamless whole with no distinction between the various hands working on a painting. Replication, as Bruce Cole asserts, was an ‘important aspect of Renaissance art, and present-day ideas about an “original” or a “unique” work of art are simply not applicable. Renaissance artists were capitalistic; they would make as many replicas as the market would support, and no one even hinted that they were compromising their artistic originality.’\textsuperscript{23} Jacopo’s main apprentice, and later his collaborator in design, was Francesco. Their working method was generally to use a design created by Jacopo, which might be reassembling his repertoire of stock figures into biblical compositions or perhaps a new design for an altarpiece. Jacopo would sketch in the format which Francesco would then complete with Jacopo checking, correcting poses, adding highlights and such in readiness for its owner. In 1578 Francesco departed for Venice, taking some of Jacopo’s designs or *modelli* with him, to create his own workshop and act as a conduit for the Bassano product. Jacopo then turned to the artistically competent Leandro for greater assistance.

Leandro was trained in, and built upon, the style and forms created by his father. It is debatable that he took these forms and his father’s experimentations further, although later in his career he was well known in Venice for his portraits, and in 1595 was made a knight of St Mark\textsuperscript{24}. Part of the Bassano workshop for much of his career, he assisted in the


\textsuperscript{24} One of Leandro’s portraits, *Portrait of a man with a statuette* (Royal Collection, Hampton Court) has now been identified as of Tiziano Aspetti c. 1592/93, himself a sculptor who worked on the Doge’s Palace and the Rialto Bridge. (C. Kryza-Gersch, ‘Leandro Bassano’s portrait of Tiziano Aspetti’, *Burlington*
almost mass production of the various genre series as well as altarpieces. Leandro departed for Venice in 1588, initially working in Francesco’s studio and eventually starting his own. He still remained in the orbit of the family workshop, continuing to produce, with the retention of Jacopo’s modelli, the Bassano genre pieces for art market consumption.

Jacopo’s oeuvre was responsive to the influence of other artists, and in turn his works can be seen to be influential to those coming behind him. Dubbed ‘the Spanish Bassano’, Pedro Orrente’s (1580-1645) works took Jacopo’s realism a step further. His genre scenes are full of activity, animals, country folk and everyday objects painted in great detail, the kneeling woman in The Adoration of the Shepherds c. 1617 (Prado, Madrid) (fig. 25) is remarkably reminiscent of Jacopo’s milkmaid in Spring, as is the striding man with the dog on the left hand side of the canvas. Orrente travelled extensively and trained in Venice at the time Leandro’s studio was in operation and obviously came under the Bassano influence. Writing of another artist with Spanish connections, Tomory has already been quoted in this dissertation on the influence of the Bassano oeuvre on El Greco (1541-1614). Born in Crete, then a Venetian possession, he visited the lagoon city probably around 1566. The influence of Tintoretto is probably more pronounced than that of Jacopo, but Rearick cites the motif of a boy blowing on a firebrand from the jointly


\[\text{Upon Francesco’s death by suicide, Leandro completed much of the painting Francesco had started for the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, Palazzo Ducale and Arslan attributes parts of the painting The Meeting between Alessandro III and the Doge Ziani (Palazzo Ducale, Venice) to Leandro. E. Arslan, I Bassano, Milan, 1960, plates 306 & 307.}\]

\[\text{A full set of Months was prominently signed by Leandro and was sent to Emperor Rudolph II in Prague, Rearick deduces that this set dated from the 1590s. An inventory of Jacopo’s studio effects in 1592 includes modelli canvases for a set of Months according to C. Ridolfi, Le maraviglie dell’arte ovvero le viti degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato descritti da Carlo Ridolfi, Venice, 1648, I, 387 as quoted in W.R. Rearick, ‘The Life and Works of Jacopo dal Ponte, called Bassano c.1510-1592’ in Jacopo Bassano c.1510-1592, ed by Brown & Marini, Bologna, 1992, n. 305, p. 147. From this Rearick deduces that the Bassano workshop members retained modelli sketches in order to continue supplying the market with the successful designs well after Jacopo and Francesco’s deaths. Leandro apparently had little communication with the Bassano-based workshop after his father’s death due to squabbling over the estate.}\]

\[\text{Orrente, El Greco and Caravaggio are merely representative of the many artists seen to be influenced by the Bassano oeuvre, subject matter, treatment, compositional devices and motifs.}\]
signed work of Jacopo and Francesco of *Joachim’s Vision* (The Methuen Collection, Corsham Court) as a possible source of inspiration for El Greco.  

The critical tag, once used for Jacopo, of being ‘the painter of modern labourers within religious themes’ could as easily, and justifiably, be used for Caravaggio (1571-1610) who could be seen to respond to Jacopo’s realistic rendering of country workers. Zampetti notices the parallels between these two artists in the work *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (Kunsthistorisches, Vienna) stating, ‘Here it is all reality beginning with the feet of the kneeling shepherd which are thrust right into the foreground a true anticipation of Caravaggio. It is a pathetic and homely scene filled with a moving and religious feeling of humanity.’ Jacopo’s lack of satire and his sensitive treatment of the ‘common people’ may well have inspired Caravaggio. A cycle of paintings depicting scenes from Christ’s Passion were ordered by the church of Sant’Antonio in Brescia around 1580, which is approximately fifty-eight kilometres east of Caravaggio. These works are now scattered but when *in situ* Rearick writes that their ‘realism and dramatic illumination made an impression that the young Caravaggio would long remember.’ His *Pilgrim’s Madonna* or *Madonna di Loreto* (Chiesa di Sant’Agostino, Rome) (fig. 26) of 1604 shows the poor at prayer before the Virgin and Child, the man’s grubby feet presented to the audience. The poor are no more the figures of fun than they are in Jacopo’s respectful paintings, they are as capable of piety as those able to purchase or commission such works. There is no evidence that Caravaggio visited either Brescia or Venice but the distance factor makes it plausible, coupled with Jacopo’s chiaroscuro and details such as the dirty upturned soles. Caravaggio could also have encountered Bassano works when in the service of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte in Rome, as Helen Langdon explains, ‘Del Monte particularly

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29 Rearick, Bologna, 1992, p. 143. This is probably an allegory of fecundity, Jacopo may also have taken the image of a boy holding a lit candle in Titian’s *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (fig. 14) and modified it.
liked Venetian painting ... his collection had five Titians, all optimistically claimed as originals, and pictures by the Venetians artists Palma Vecchio, Berardino Licinio and Jacopo Bassano.\textsuperscript{33}

To compare and contrast 16th century Italian paintings to works created over 400 years later in a land then unknown to European culture, may seem tenuous to say the least. When, however, one looks at the manner in which these seemingly disparate groups of artists depicted their worlds some similarities can be seen. There is a shared sense of the periphery looking at the centre - the provincially-based Jacopo producing for the sophisticated Venetian art market, and New Zealand artists from the 1930s to 1960s searching for an aesthetic expression of a national identity. These antipodean artists often used aspects of European, and particularly English culture, dictomously - one moment for inspiration, the next as a source of cultural rebellion against which to react. It is interesting to parallel Jacopo's refusal to take up a post in the Prague court of Emperor Rudolph II with Colin McCahon's declining the offer of a visiting lectureship in Australia\textsuperscript{34}. The periphery, it seems, could well reject the centre, or at least the larger vistas. In explanation of this refusal, McCahon - the landscape painter - stated, 'I don't trust myself with new land. But here I know what I'm on about and don't have to wonder where I belong and the problem is solved right away ...'\textsuperscript{35} One can assume by the joint rejections that both artists felt they could better paint what they knew intimately - the landscapes of their birth, their patria.

\textsuperscript{34} Jacopo's connection to Bassano was so strong that according to Carlo Ridolfi, Jacopo refused to become court painter for Prague's Emperor Rudolph II. C. Ridolfi, Le maraviglie dell'arte ovvero le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato descritti da Carlo Ridolfi, Venice, 1648, 1, 387 as quoted in Rearick, Bologna, 1992, n. 305, p. 147.
The term often used to denote nationalist New Zealand art, particularly of the 1930s-1950s, ‘regional realism’, could well be applied to Jacopo 36. In his genre pieces he looked not to classicism for models and inspiration, but in the Albertian sense, he depicted his natural environment complete with the rustic accoutrements of a provincial town, as if through a window. 37 The Italian and New Zealanders, separated by time and distance, also share an interest in realism, of painting what was before them rather than looking elsewhere for subject matter. Roberto Longhi, searching for Caravaggio’s naturalistic forerunners, notices that once artists left Venice for the terra ferma ‘their work grew clearer and more straightforward almost at once.’ 38

In the quest for a visual national identity and a symbol of place, regional realist painters often depicted easily recognisable places, regions or geographic icons. Entering the Auckland Art Gallery Collection in 1968, Christopher Perkins’ Taranaki (1968/35) (fig. 2) of 1931 is an aptly mountainous exemplar of this movement. Similarly, from the early 1540s, Jacopo frequently included depictions of Monte del Grapa in his paintings. The Monte forms part of the Dolomite range and overlooks the town of Bassano del Grappa. Such is the frequency of depiction over the years that the local landmark was obviously taken up as a trademark, initially by Jacopo, and continued by his workshop. 39 The blue mountain range that Jacopo painted in the background of many works is not simply a compositional or perspectival device, nor is it a generalised depiction of the natural world.

36 In the New Zealand context, ‘regional realism’ is a term usually ascribed to landscape painters particularly (but not exclusively) in Canterbury in the 1930s to 1960s and includes such artists as Colin McCahon, Rita Angus, Doris Lusk, William A. Sutton and Christopher Perkins, however this list is by no means exhaustive.

37 Alberti describes how he commences painting with, ‘First of all, on the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen...’ L. B. Alberti, On Painting and On Sculpture, 1435, trans. by C. Grayson, London, 1972, p. 55.


39 Jacopo’s Flight into Egypt of 1534 (Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa) shows an early example of what could arguably be a depiction of a rather pointed Monte del Grappa. Another early work, The Miraculous Draught of Fishes (Private Collection, London) (1545) distinctly shows the familiar blue Monte behind the town of Bassano. Above the head of a genuflecting shepherd a distant view of the blue slopes is depicted in The Adoration of the Shepherds (Royal Collection, Hampton Court) of 1546 (fig. 3).
The mountain is specific and arguably acts as a signifier of place and of authorship. Just as the dal Ponte family took on the name of Bassano to differentiate themselves in Venice, I would argue they also utilised Monte del Grappa as their specific motif. This would assume a strong identification with the land, so that specific land masses act as an authorial presence on the picture plane, the artist’s specific signifier of both place and themselves.

With Monte del Grappa as their signature and icon of place, there might not have been the need for a Bassano workshop member to actually sign a painting. According, however, to Louisa C. Matthews, the Venetians were the most consistent of all Italian artists in signing their works.\(^{40}\) This did not mean that the collaborative Bassano painters signed every work that left the workshop. It also did not signify that every work signed by Jacopo was in fact worked on by Jacopo - his signature often acted as a guarantee of authenticity, a sign of completion or mark of prestige. Rearick states that it would not have been ‘unusual for Jacopo to leave the canvas on which he worked out his original ideas unsigned. Subsequently, he added his signature to replicas to advertise his invention, if not the totally autograph character of the work.’\(^{41}\)

Dubious attributions have stemmed from this lack of authenticated signatures, and globally there is great difficulty in correctly attributing a great many Bassano works.\(^{42}\) The Auckland Art Gallery work is an example of this difficulty with the painting purchased as a Francesco but Edoardo Arslan, consequently reattributing to Leandro.\(^{43}\) My searches have

\(^{41}\) Rearick, Bologna, 1992, n. 299, p. 144.
\(^{42}\) T. Formicicva notes in her article on Venetian paintings in the Hermitage Collection, that ‘the study of Bassanesque painters has been fraught with even more difficulties than that of Veronese and the extent of the Hermitage collection helps scholars to resolve this major problem: the study of several different series representing the seasons and the elements and of several portraits in need of reliable attribution is still being pursued.’ T. Formicicva, ‘Venetian Painting of the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries’, *Apollo*, Dec. 1974, p. 472. She also noted that the Hermitage collection includes about thirty five works attributed variously to the Bassano workshop.
\(^{43}\) Rearick states that Leandro had a cooler tonality and puts in fussier detailing, he notes the ‘drier thready texture of Leandro’s brushstrokes.’ W.R. Rearick, Bologna, p. 144. Whether the Auckland Art Gallery
revealed at least two other galleries having the same near-identical copies of Spring as the Auckland gallery. The first is the Castello Sforzesco in Milan (fig. 3). This gallery’s Spring was attributed to Gerolamo by Edoardo Arslan, but now to Jacopo. The Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna names Jacopo as the artist yet Bernard Aikema instead argues for the possibility of it being the work of Francesco. While Tomory stated that the attribution of works purchased for the Auckland Art Gallery are ‘checked by contact with art historians in Europe and America,’ it is easy to see how ‘uneasy attributions’ can be placed on works, with art historians often unable to agree to a particular hand. The following section will look at how these genre scenes came to be created and their consequent serialisation which led to these attribution difficulties.

work is by the hand of Francesco or Leandro, it is certainly a competent work with a lack of pentimenti or obvious corrections. The Auckland Art Gallery Accession Sheet states there are traces of a signature on the bottom left. These, unfortunately, are not readily visible which still leaves the attribution of the work in a somewhat querulous state. Francesco was twenty five years old before Jacopo allowed him to sign a work alone. If the work was painted in 1575 as the Art Gallery Quarterly No. 20, 1961, p. 4 states then Leandro would have been eighteen years old, and theoretically too young to sign. With the retention of modelli and the replication of these successful genre pieces, this work could well have been painted any time after 1574 when the Seasons were created. Both Francesco in Venice (after 1576) or Leandro still in Bassano until 1588 could have replicated the set Spring came from.

44 Arslan, Milan, 1960, plate 345 cites Gerolamo as the painter of this work. I would argue that this is probably a correct attribution although I have neither seen the original nor a good colour representation. By close observation of the black and white photograph, however, several discrepancies are revealed. In this Castello Sforzesco Spring there is a curled blade of grass whereas in the Auckland Spring it is a lizard, which indicates an inattentive copyist (Jacopo and workshop have often shown lizards in other works). The face of the barrel holding man in the Castello work is not as confidently painted, nor is the horizon line of the Monte, in comparison to the Auckland work. Eugenio Bianchi, Catalogo Generale della Pinacoteca del Castello Sforzesco, p. 38 cites Jacopo as the author of this Spring.

45 B. Aikema, Jacopo Bassano & His Public - Moralizing Pictures in an Age of Reform ca 1535-1600, New Jersey, 1996, p. 133. The image of this work was too poor to reproduce for this dissertation. Arslan may also cite Francesco as the painter, he states there is a fragment of Spring in the Vienna gallery which is signed FRANC. BASS./F. E. Arslan, Milan, p. 226.

Chapter IV The creation of the biblical-pastoral genre

Jacopo’s placement of tiny vignettes depicting episodes from the Old and New Testaments into a peopled landscape created an entirely new genre, the biblical-pastoral. This new genre was the synthesis of many elements and this section will consider some of the components that led directly or indirectly to its innovative creation.

Jacopo had no need to look to mythology in which to test his painting skills, creativity and inventiveness, he turned instead to the Bible for its rich narratives. Paolo Veronese (1528-88), Jacopo’s contemporary, preferred the depiction of sumptuous and figure-laden feasting scenes taken from the Bible. Veronese, unlike Jacopo, used personifications of the seasons and was a great painter of allegories and mythologies. His fresco in the Villa Barbaro, Maser (Treviso) c. 1561 includes harbourside and landscape panoramas, illusionistic architecture and trompe l’œil servants stepping through doorways. He personifies the seasons and elements, with one lunette showing Summer and Autumn between Cybele (Earth) and Neptune (Water). These are large scale and highly decorative works commissioned for the public rooms of a luxurious private residence, unlike Jacopo’s easel paintings which were generally purchased by the more modest home owner. Apart from the difference in scale and the different markets Veronese and Bassano were working for, Sir Joshua Reynolds singles out these two artists regarding their depiction of people, with ‘The difference between Paulo and Bassano seems to be only, that one introduced Venetian gentlemen into his pictures, and the other the boors of the district of Bassano, and called them patriarchs and prophets.’

This integration of the natural environment with the spiritual was not the invention of Jacopo, holy figures had long been placed in the landscape. Some saints, especially Sts.

Jerome and Francis, were largely depicted in the natural world. The landscape became as much an attribute for these saints as Jerome’s rock, lion and book, and Francis’ birds. Jacopo inverted the traditional spiritual hierarchy and emphasised the worker and landscape - focusing more on the secular rather than the sacred world. An earlier Venetian artist who retained this spiritual hierarchy was Giovanni Bellini (c1433-1516). Bellini combined a close observation of nature with holy figures, as shown in his *Madonna of the Meadow* (National Gallery, London) of c. 1505 (fig. 5). Here the centrally staged and near-symmetrical figure of the Virgin prays to the Holy Child in her lap. With no cloth of honour dividing her from the ploughed land and walled town behind her, she can be seen as integrated into the vernacular environment. With her drapery cropped by the frame she is close to the spectator’s space, and exists in the interstices between the sacred and secular worlds. Bellini, however, did not let his naturalistic and poetic landscapes overwhelm the divinity of the Mother and Child, the land was still simply a beautiful backdrop. Jacopo, on the other hand, inverts the spiritual and natural worlds by placing the rural workers to the fore and sublimating the biblical content to a vignette played out in the middle ground.

In order to look at the important pastoral aspect of Jacopo’s work, in which he emphasises the landscape rather than using it as a backdrop, it is valuable to look first at the rise of the landscape art tradition. During the Renaissance landscape, as a genre in itself, did not exist, it was instead, as Rosand states, ‘in the service of another art.’ Rosand posits architecture as the vehicle for landscape painting, as found in the decoratively painted interior frescoes of palaces and villas. This use of landscape as a background setting has a long history, written of by Vitruvius. On the subject of fresco painting for the apartments of the ancients, he mentions landscape as an pertinent backdrop:

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48 Examples of these are Giovanni Bellini’s *Saint Francis in Ecstasy* c. 1479-85, (The Frick Collection, New York) and Paris Bordone’s (1500-71) *Saint Jerome in the Desert* c. 1535-40, (John G. Johnson Collection of Philadelphia).

49 Catering to the demands of the art market, however, Francesco had no qualms about eliminating these biblical episodes from the Seasons if a buyer lost interest in the religious implications.
... they decorated with a variety of landscapes, copying the characteristics of
definite spots. In these paintings there are harbours, promontories, seashores,
rivers, fountains, straits, fanes, groves, mountains, flocks, shepherds; in some
places there are also pictures designed in the grand style, with figures of the gods or
detailed mythological episodes, or the battles at Troy, or the wanderings of
Ulysses, with landscape backgrounds, and other subjects reproduced on similar
principles from real life.51

It is interesting, in relation to Jacopo’s seasonal series and his oeuvre as a whole, that
Vitruvius describes these ancient frescoes as being naturalistic, showing actual places like
mountains, inclusive of rural workers and scenes from real life. Alberti’s comments in Ten
Books on Architecture on the decoration of private houses with images of rustics and
landscape, are reminiscent of Vitruvius:

And as the subjects both of poetry and painting are various, some expressing the
memorable actions of great men; others representing manners of private persons;
others describing the life of rustics: The former, as the most majestic, should be
applied to public works, and the buildings of princes; and the latter, as the more
cheerful, should be set apart for pleasure houses and gardens. Our minds are
delighted in a particular manner with the pictures of pleasant landscapes, of havens,
of fishing, hunting, swimming, country sports, of flowery fields and thick
groves.52

Both Vitruvius and Alberti deemed that landscape art with the occasional decorative
depiction of rustics was appropriate. It was acceptable for landscape murals to show the
natural environment inhabited by rural workers; however the rustic’s landscape was in
more of a comic vein, and not the place for heroic deeds. Genre has traditionally been seen
as a lesser art form to narrative-rich historia. Berdini states that genre works are
‘dispossessed of narrative,’ with the peasant ‘unable to enact history, only able to declare
his nonhistory, rendering his unperformative status, where he appears, either comic or
auxiliary to the landscape he tends to inhabit.153 In mentioning performance and the
peasant’s role, Berdini, like Vitruvius, links these landscape murals to another art form,

50 D. Rosand, ‘Giorgione, Venice, and the Pastoral Vision’, Places of Delight: The Pastoral Landscape,
52 L.B. Alberti, Ten Books on Architecture, 1485, translated into English by J. Leoni, 1955 reprinted 1965,
London, p. 192. Leoni’s translation has been updated slightly here.
that of theatre. Vitruvius suggested the depiction of scenes in the tragic, comic, or satyr
style and clarifies these modes with:

There are three kinds of scenes, one called the tragic, second, the comic, third, the
satyrlic. Their decorations are different and unlike each other in scheme. Tragic
scenes are delineated with columns, pediments, statues, and other objects suited to
kings; comic scenes exhibit private dwellings, with balconies and views representing rows of windows, after the manner of ordinary dwellings; satyrlic
scenes are decorated with trees, caverns, mountains, and other rustic objects
delineated in landscape style.54

These theatrical modes had not altered substantially in the Renaissance - the settings for the
tragic and comic scenes were architectural and urban, with streets perspectivally leading to
a fictive upstage. These exterior architectural scenes were socially differentiated - the tragic
scene was to depict a very grand urban location with impressive buildings, and the comic
was of a more run down cityscape. The third scenic type was of a wooded glade with
humble dwellings, although this leafy scene was considered 'comparatively rare.'55
Rosand states that, 'Alberti had followed this model in distinguishing the pictorial types
appropriate for the decoration of houses. Below the heroic grandeur of tragedy (presenting
the noble deeds of great men) and the domestic activities of comedy (describing the habits
of private citizens) was the natural world of the peasant and shepherd. There, on the
lowest rung of the generic ladder, landscape found its place.'56 Sebastiano Serlio (1477-
1554), illustrated these three modes in woodcuts; his treatise, L'Architettura was published
in six parts in different locations, with Venice being one of them, between 1537 and 1551
(fig. 6). It might then be assumed that Jacopo, a keen reader, was aware of this
publication. It is unknown, however, if it borne any direct influence on his work, although
he did occasionally explore perspectival architectural settings for some works.57

54 Vitruvius, ibid, p. 211.
set for the satyr play would indicate a rustic farce for the Italian audience. The Concise History of the
57 Examples of these architectural works can be seen in Jacopo's Susanna and the Elders of c. 1555-56
(National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa) which has the three protagonists in the foreground with one Elder
gesturing to Monte del Grappa on the horizon. They are as if in the garden of a Venetian villa, with a
centrally positioned classical gate behind them and the villa to the left. Interestingly, the figure of Susanna
In Jacopo’s *Spring* the cleared space of the middle and foreground acts as a natural stage setting for the rustic tableau. This is not the tragic or comic modes of Renaissance theatre, but a version of the satyric.\(^5^8\) The ‘actors’ playing out the role of rustics in *Spring* are positioned frieze-like across the down-stage of the canvas. Obviously Jacopo’s figures are not a band of *commedia dell’arte* performers in their traditional costumes, but his own cast of types that are attired and compositionally shifted to perform in other works. Jacopo and his workshop use their cast of figures interchangeably both between these sets of *Seasons* and throughout their individual and joint oeuvre. Figures (and animals) are repeated either exactly, with slight variations of dress and size, or reversed and appear in other compositions. This is illustrated by the kneeling milkmaid who appears in *Spring*, and bending over a bucket in *The Annunciation to the Shepherds* (Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington) (fig. 7). A pencil sketch of this kneeling woman is in the Uffizi, Florence, which is either a preparatory drawing or a *ricordo* for the Annunciation (fig. 8). She appears again, but perhaps in a more startled pose, in the joint work of Jacopo and Gerolomo, *The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple* (National Gallery, London) of around 1585. Jacopo’s stock figures are much like a familiar and finite cast who exchange attire and roles to suit the audience or scene.\(^5^9\)

is portrayed and positioned similarly to that of Eve in Jacopo’s c. 1562 work *Adam and Eve after the Fall* (Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence). A later work, that of *Saint Lucille Baptized by Saint Valentine* of c. 1575 (Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa) has the two saints with attendants in a classical architectural setting which Vinco da Sesso likens to an evocation of Imperial Rome. L.A. Vinco da Sesso, *Jacopo Bassano c. 1510-1592*. Bologna, 1992, p. 394.

\(^{58}\) Interestingly, Shakespeare has Polonius in *Hamlet* satirise an acting troupe and Renaissance theatre genre types, with, ‘The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene indelible, or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy nor Plautus too light for the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men.’ Scene 2.2.401. Interesting too, but perhaps irrelevant to this discussion, is the naming of a character in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* - Bassanio - the friend of Antonio a Venetian merchant.

\(^{59}\) While discussing the influence of theatre on the works of the Bassano family, it is interesting to note that Leandro took up a theatrical theme after his arrival in Venice (c. 1585) the city of carnivals and masks. Various dates have been attributed to his signed work *The Month of February (Carnival)* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) (unfortunately the quality of image available on this work was too poor to include here). Two possible dates for this work have been given, one as the late 1580s, and a later one of 1595/1600. (M.A. Katritzky, ‘Lodewyk Toepue: some pictures related to the *commedia dell’arte*, *Renaissance Studies*, Oxford, 1987, p.112 cites the earlier date and substantiates this by explaining Leandro’s knighthood of
Continuing with the landscape aspect of Jacopo’s work, and negating any theatrical inference, Bernard Berenson, in *Italian Painters of the Renaissance* of 1894, contextualises Jacopo’s efforts by comparing him with other Venetian painters, and credits him as being ‘the first modern landscape painter.’

Another thing Bassano could not fail to do, working as he did in the country, and for country people, was to paint landscape. He had to paint the real country, and his skill in the treatment of light and atmosphere was great enough to enable him to do it well. Bassano was in fact the first modern landscape painter. Titian and Tintoretto and Giorgione, and even Bellini and Cima before them, had painted beautiful landscapes, but they were seldom direct studies from nature. They were decorative backgrounds, or fine harmonizing accompaniments to the religious or human elements of the picture. They never failed to get grand and effective lines - a setting worthy of the subject. Bassano did not need such setting for his country versions of the Bible stories, and he needed them even less in his studies of rural life. For pictures of this kind the country itself naturally seemed the best background and the best accompaniment possible - indeed, the only kind desirable. Without knowing it, therefore, and without intending it, Bassano was the first Italian who tried to paint the country as it is, and not arranged to look like scenery.\(^6\)

Jacopo’s continual stressing of the vernacular over the fantastical or expressive landscape, according to Berenson, places him in a different category to his Venetian counterparts. Jacopo asserted the importance of the landscape in his biblical-pastoral works. Monte del Grappa appears and links all four seasons to the specific Bassano region. What Jacopo had done was create a ‘setting worthy of the subject’ that was an articulation of his own

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vernacular environment. True to the prerequisites of genre painting, this rusticated environment on the Venetian periphery was unidealised, nor was it the Albertian landscape for ‘expressing the memorable actions of great men,’ and yet the rustics are ennobled by their simplicity and their engagement in both their tasks and their environment.

The pastoral works as depicted in the Seasons are not the sensuous, mysterious and evocative worlds created by Giorgione (c.1476/8-1510) as in his Tempest (Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice) c. 1505-10 (fig. 9), or Titian (c.1487/90-1576) shown in his Nymph and Shepherd c. 1570-75 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) (fig. 10)61. Jacopo’s seasonal landscapes are simple country scenes peopled with workers, not with enigmatic gypsy women or naked nymphs. His contemporaneously dressed workers do not inhabit the same realm as Giovanni Bellini’s satyrs and pagan gods as illustrated in Feast of the Gods of 1514 (Widener Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC). According to Zampetti, Jacopo depicted for ‘the first time, the country theme [as being] neither idyllic nor Arcadian, as in Giorgione or Titian, but a commonplace. Nature is no longer a dream, typifying the eternal flow of things but a faithful image reflected from everyday life.’ He continues with, ‘This is what “genre painting” means, the glory of Bassano’s school, and a force to reckon with throughout the seventeenth century.’62 As Rosand has noted, the figures in Spring depict a ‘sense of well-being and self-sufficiency that was a traditional theme of georgic discourse.’63

The biblical-pastoral genre is the synthesis of ideas both literary and artistic emanating from various sources. The landscape is the place of romance and beauty written of in Virgil’s

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61 Note the similarities between the piebald goat reaching for the low branch in Titian’s Nymph and Shepherd with Jacopo’s straining goat in Spring.
63 D. Rosand, 1988, p. 70.
Eclogues, as well as the environment of honest land labourers in his Georgics. Jacopo depicts the natural environment not with other-worldly scenery and improbably rocky promontories, but instead as a domesticated and vernacular environment, with the ever familiar Monte del Grappa on the horizon. The manner in which Virgil (70BC-19BC) wrote of the fruitful country and its inhabitants is full of affection and written with such ardour that it almost sounds spiritual. Perhaps for Virgil a sense of the divine was in the natural world. In the Georgics he writes of the cycle of the seasons and of the corresponding agrarian life. In the passage on Spring he describes the earth as being bountiful, dewy and protective of her inhabitants, the ‘children of the earth,’ arising from the ‘raw champaign,’ living in peace with their animals and their environment. In the biblical tradition, however the ‘children of the earth,’ Adam and Eve, were condemned by God to return to it, as, ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’ Genesis 3:19.

64 W.R. Rearick noted in the article From Arcady to the Barnyard that of all the Latin sources Jacopo might have known, the ‘Georgics was certainly most sympathetic to his own view of the world.’ Studies in the History of Art, 1972, p. 156.

65 It is interesting to compare Virgil’s Georgics Book II, alongside Jacopo’s Spring, with its poetics adding a deeper dimension to the visual,

Oh, spring is good for leaves in the spinney, good to forests, (323)
In spring the swelling earth aches for the seed of new life. [...] 
Then are the trackless copes alive with the trilling of birds, (328 to 345)
And the beasts look for love, their hour come round again:
Lovely the earth in labour, under a tremulous west wind
The fields unbosom, a mild moisture is everywhere.
Confident grows the grass, for the young sun will not harm it;
The shoots of the vine are not scared of a southerly gale arising
Or the sleety rain that slants from heaven beneath a north wind.
No, bravely now they bud and all their leaves display.
So it was, I believe, when the world first began,
Such the illustrious dawning and tenor of their days.
It was springtime then, great spring
Enhanced the earth and spared it the bitter breath of an east wind -
A time when the first cattle lapped up the light, and men
Children of the earth themselves arose from the raw champaign,
And wild things issued forth in the wood, and stars in the sky.
How could so delicate creatures endure the toil they must,
Unless between cold and heat there came this temperate spell
And heaven held the earth in his arms and comforted her?
To contextualise the Italian to the antipodean, it might be worthwhile to contrast an example of New Zealand art that combines rural workers with Old Testament spirituality, as found in Colin McCahon's (1919-1987) work *The Promised Land* (Auckland Art Gallery) of 1948 (fig. 11)\(^67\). The worker is a self-portrait of McCahon, he is one with the land, his black-singlet signals he works it and his brown-hued skin is the same as the tone as the monumental land masses behind him. The spiritual is present in the dry and familiar Takaka hills, with the lightening sky holding promise and redemption. Tomory writes of New Zealand as being 'Eden undefiled'\(^68\), the earth as God made it, a pure and innocent landscape before the Fall. The title *The Promised Land* references the Old Testament prophet Moses. He was deemed not to have sufficient faith in Jehovah to be permitted to enter the Promised Land and instead was given a distant view of it from Mt Pisgah, after which he died. The use of a familiar landscape in a spiritually referential fashion is shared by both these artists, the New Zealander uses the Takaka hills and the Italian's oeuvre is rich in depictions of Monte del Grappa.

Depictions of the seasons with rustic workers or the illustration of calendars was a commonplace in Renaissance Italy and allowed artists to explore secular themes. Rearick states that,

> Northern graphics had helped to disseminate the subject of the Elements in Italy prior to 1575. [...] Venetian patrons seem not to have been interested in the realistic depiction of the Elements until Jacopo began to produce sets of four canvases of moderate size for domestic interiors. In a circular exchange of influence, the Dal Ponte pictures inspired Netherlandish artists early in the next century.\(^69\)

\(^66\) Virgil was born in Mantua, Lombardy which shares a border with the Veneto, so the landscape he described would have been very similar to that in which the Bassano family resided.

\(^67\) Colin McCahon worked at the Auckland Art Gallery from 1953 until 1964. Tomory was a personal friend, supporter and of course Director of the Gallery for the period McCahon worked there.


\(^69\) Rearick, Bologna, 1992, p. 163.
Along with this established convention of seasonal depictions, the influence of Northern art is another aspect of Jacopo's biblical-pastoral synthesis. Aikema states that 'the solution of identifying the Elements by means of vignette-like figures ... stems indubitably from northern graphic art; noted examples are the series of Seasons by Maaretten van Heemskerck and The Penitent Magdalene by Pieter Breghel.'\textsuperscript{70} Aikema might well have added Pieter Aertsen (1508/9-75) to this duo with his Christ in the House of Mary and Martha series. Aikema cites Aertsen's work Christ in the House of Mary and Martha (Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent) as an illustration of his statement that, 'several of the Netherlandish master's surviving pictures contrast hypocrisy or worldly superficiality with the true faith as exemplified by a biblical story.'\textsuperscript{71} This work shows a group of revelers greedily reaching for food in the foreground, unaware of the spiritual scene of Christ and the woman behind them.

While Aertsen was best known as a still-life painter, both he and Jacopo painted religious subject matter (often illustrating the same biblical narrative) and the Dutch artist can be seen to preempt Jacopo's inversion of the profane over the sacred. Aertsen's Christ in the House of Martha and Mary (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) of 1552 (fig. 12) is a realistic interior scene with foodstuffs taking up the foreground with a vignette of Christ in the throes of blessing a kneeling woman in the background. He contrasts the corporeal and transient (food) with the spiritually eternal. His images of rustic life appear affectionate and are free from overt satire. Another Northern artist, Pieter Brueghel the Elder (c.1525/30-69), omitted religious significance but depicted both the life of rustics and the landscape they inhabited. In his Dark Day (February?)(Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) the landscape with its fantastic mountain peaks all but dwarfs the peasants gathering firewood. Brueghel also did a set of seasons with peasants industriously going about their quarterly tasks. These were later engraved by Hieronymus Cock and Aikema informs that they were

\textsuperscript{70} Aikema, 1996, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, p. 65.
known in Venice, ‘... even if there is no evident parallel between the compositions. A few motifs, such as the peasants harvesting grain in Jacopo’s Summer, could possibly stem from the eponymous print.’ 72

Jacopo had a large collection of both Northern and Venetian prints at his disposal. These were an economical way for an artist working on the periphery to be kept informed of developments at the centre and further afield. As well as being a Mecca for Northern artists, Venice had become a major printing centre in Europe. Lucas van Leyden’s c. 1510 engraving of a Milkmaid is often cited as having inspired Titian’s woodcut Landscape with Milkmaid of c. 1525 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, Rosenwald Collection) (fig. 13). 73 This work by Titian, in turn, can be seen to have inspired Jacopo. Titian’s work shows peasants in a landscape setting not with any overtly biblical content but depicting allegorical motifs which have yet to be successfully interpreted. A biblical woodcut by Titian and engraved by Giovanni Britto, has unrefuteably influenced Jacopo - The Adoration of the Shepherds of c. 1535-40 (Harvey D. Parker Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) (fig.14). This design served as a model for several variants for Jacopo, most particularly his Adoration of the Shepherds painted 1546 (The Royal Collection, Hampton Court) (fig. 3). The similarities of the mise en scène are remarkable. Both show classical ruins and a thatched roof stable, the Virgin uncovers the Child with the same gesture as the Holy Family are approached by shepherds genuflecting.

Prior to creating the Seasons, Jacopo had already produced paintings that were sold not as individual pieces but as series. The choice of subject matter may well have been dictated by the individual patrons since a number of biblical narratives, such the Jude and Tamar story, had been neither popular, nor frequently depicted. The serial work started in the 1560s with the episodes from the life of Jacob, then Jude and Tamar, four paintings in the Noah

or Flood series and by 1576-77, the Christ in the house of Mary and Martha series. The Venetian art market was familiar with paintings in series, from the large scale works for public places, down to the ornamentation of furniture such as cassoni and credenze. In the workshop of his father Jacopo too had painted such decorative works. Rearick states that, ‘By 1576 demand for these bucolic evocations of country life had burgeoned to such a degree that Jacopo was forced to dedicate serious thought to creating several new compositions that would serve singly or in series as useful and repeatable pictures that could be sold to a much wider market.’

Although there are many sets of Seasons disseminated around the world (both in their entirety and singly), there are two distinct types of seasonal sets in existence. For ease of clarity just two complete sets will be used as examples of these two different cycles - one in Vienna and one in Rome. The Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna has a set which corresponds to the Auckland Art Gallery’s Spring. These Vienna Seasons were painted around 1574-75 (figs. 15 & 16). This could well be the date of their development and invention, but once created they could be replicated repeatedly over the subsequent decades. The canvas sizes of the Seasons closely match that of the Auckland Art Gallery’s Spring. The Summer (fig. 15) held in Vienna is 78.5 x 110.5cm, the Autumn (fig. 16) is 75.5 x 109, with the Auckland Spring being 77.5 x 111cm.

A different set of Seasons is in the Galleria Borghese, Rome and were painted around 1576 (fig. 17 Spring and fig. 18 Autumn). While the iconography of the set in Rome is not significantly different from the set in Vienna, the important biblical vignette is omitted. However they are very similar, with rustic workers in the foreground complete with a

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73 Aikema, p. 75 and also D. Rosand & M. Muraro, Titian and the Venetian Woodcut, Washington, 1976, p. 140.
kneeling milkmaid. The boy from the Vienna *Spring* with the dogs now has a shaggy oriental hat and is on the right but the dogs are identical, with the mounted huntsman larger and more clearly discernible, and a classical structure replaces the figures of Adam and Eve on the right hand middle ground. The treatment of light in the Roman *Spring* is far cooler and the detailing more intricate than the one held in Vienna. L. Alberton Vinco da Sesso notes that ‘A new sense of space, more balanced between the different planes of the scene, is related through the introduction of certain elements along the edges of the canvas such as, in this [Roman] *Spring*, the old man on the right shearing the sheep.’

The seriality of genre scenes was a profitable venture and provided a steady income for Jacopo’s workshop. However unskilled copyists or those lacking in Jacopo’s artistic feeling, both in the workshop and outside it, weakened the originals and flooded the market. The work *The Animals Entering Noah’s Ark* was hugely popular on the art market, with there being over fifty copies still in existence. Replicas of this painting were produced particularly by Leandro, but also Francesco and their shop associates repeated the motif over the years. Michelangelo Muraro, stated that, so great was the success of these genre paintings in general that they were ‘repeated *ad infinitum*, copied by Jacopo’s sons, by his nephews, by his most distant heirs, by artists of every nationality, until the memory of the precious originals was lost.’

Giorgio Vasari in his updated *Lives of the Artists*, briefly praises Jacopo, stating that his ‘small pictures and the paintings of animals of all kinds [...] are dispersed throughout

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76 L.A. Vinco da Sesso cites Ballarin in the dating of this set of Seasons. Ballarin ‘considered these three Borghese pieces [Spring, Autumn and Winter] to be largely by Jacopo himself and probably to have been executed between the end of 1576 and the beginning of 1577’. Bologna, 1992, p. 404.
77 The two hounds being led by the boy are continually repeated across the oeuvre. A preparatory pencil sketch of the dog turning its head is held in the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool. The incompleteness of the sketched dog’s lower legs and paws could explain why they are never fully shown in any work. (fig. 19)
80 Muraro, p. 299.
Venice, where they are very highly regarded. The paired or serialised paintings that Jacopo created in the early 1560s sold increasingly well over the following decades - not simply to his traditional market of Bassano residents and Venetian connoisseurs, but the greater Veneto region and, as their fame spread, to outside Italy itself. There was a burgeoning demand in Venice for the images of simple rural folk about their tasks, comfortingly reinforcing the social hierarchy and ‘meant to appease the ancient nostalgia of Venetians for the terra ferma. La Serenissima’s fortune had come from the sea - navigation and commerce - but from the early fifteenth century on there was a gradual transfer of Venetian interests from the water to the land - the terra ferma. There were political and socio-economic reasons for Venetians to look increasingly to the land, particularly after the 1530 peace treaty with the League of Cambrai, when agricultural support was needed as the Venetian domination of sea trade ebbed. The rise of the villa culture was at hand, wealthy Venetians and the inhabitants of the inland territories, were encouraged to settle and cultivate the land. The writings of Vitruvius on classical architecture inspired, in part, the designs of Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) who constructed the Villa Rotonda (begun 1550) in Vicenza. Also of Palladian design was the Villa Barbaro at Maser, the walls of which were decorated in allegorical and landscape frescoes by Veronese.

The Auckland Art Gallery’s *Spring* is one season from a set and suggests a reading comparable to the traditional reading of a triptych, which Tomory clarifies with the centre

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82 V. Romani cites *Jacob’s Journey* (c.1560) as ‘art historians also agree in considering ... among the earliest pastoral inventions of the painter,’ in Bologna, 1992, p. 339.
84 At the beginning of the fifteenth century the Venetian *stato di terraferma*, their territories held on the mainland, were ‘Padua, Vicenza, Verona, and Friuli, not to mention Brescia and Bergamo with their respective territories.’ A. Tenenti, ‘The Sense of Space and Time in the Venetian World’, in J.R. Hale (ed), *Renaissance Venice*, London, 1973, p. 19. Added to this colonial expansion, driven on by economic interests, was Venice’s *stato da mar* or the maritime territories under their control, among which were ‘Dalmatia, the island of Corfu, the coasts of the Morea and various islands in the Aegean (the most important of which was Negroponte) and Crete.’ ibid, p. 24.
panel read as the most important and the two wing-panels as ‘near related’ and ‘complementary’.\textsuperscript{85} For Tomory, paintings cannot necessarily ‘be read like poems - from left to right,’ he gives no information, however, on the reading of a work that in its entirety comprises four panels. An art historian of the stature of Tomory must have been familiar with the Bassano oeuvre and cognisant he was purchasing but one of a set of four seasons. The title given at its purchase, however, and the one still used, \textit{Seasonal Allegory with Adam and Eve}, belies the fact that it should ideally be complemented with its counterparts. A complete hanging of all four \textit{Seasons} would perhaps clarify the allegorical aspects of these works as the spectator would be able to view each scene and perhaps make linkages. To view a complete set of \textit{Seasons} would enable the viewer to more fully grasp an aspect of Jacopo’s extensive oeuvre and would exhibit a fine example of late sixteenth century Venetian art. Without the complementary seasons to \textit{Spring} we are left viewing what amounts to a wing panel, a finely executed example, but a wing panel nevertheless.

Chapter V  Rich Allegory or Banal Rustic Scene?

Alberti noted that, '... when the spectators dwell on observing all the details, then the painter’s richness will acquire favour.' A recommendation to look closer, such as this, can assist in unlocking the moral and biblical allegories in paintings such as Spring, in a similar way Jacopo’s idiosyncratic iconography is revealed both in this work and across his oeuvre. In order to reveal this iconographic detail, however, a degree of intellectual engagement is required of the spectator.

There is much disagreement as to whether Jacopo’s genre canvas are richly layered allegorical works, a form of religious and visual exegesis or merely pleasant bucolic scenes with an incidental, or even unnoticed, biblical motif. Bernard Aikema applauds Jacopo’s ‘exceptional visual language’ and attempts to reveal the moralizing aspect of his work. Paolo Berdini theorises on Jacopo’s intense scriptural reading and the ways in which he may have transformed or expanded texts into a visual exegesis. W.R. Rearick denies both stating, ‘These biblical episodes are not allowed to interfere with the primary purpose of the set, that is the straightforward depiction of the agrarian activities associated in Bassano with the changing seasons.’ Pietro Zampetti sees no allegory, he writes of the Parable of the Sower (which he calls Country Scene) saying, ‘It may or may not have had an illustrative reference - and perhaps it can be related in some way with the painting of the four seasons, a subject greatly to the taste of Jacopo’s sons who copied it a number of times, but the fact remains that in it a country scene is looked at with the loving attentive eye of a born country man who sees in the soil itself the whole reason of life; neither is it an idea for idyllic contemplation in the Giorgione tradition which was still alive in the young Titian.’ He continues with, ‘There are no philosophical undertones, only love and affectionate

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87 Aikema, 1996, p. 4.
contemplation. Consequently it is up to the spectator to observe the details, and grasp, or not, the allegorical aspect to a work.

Although allegorical readings can sometimes be strenuously multi-layered, with such a plurality of meaning as to be obtuse or lost to viewers today, it seems reasonable to assume that Jacopo had a moralizing message to impart since the majority of Jacopo’s œuvre is religious in theme, rather than secular or mythological. Biblical scripture would have been well known amongst the wealthy Bassano patrons, but ‘even if the Renaissance spectator did not understand the allusions being conveyed, there was a general expectation that intelligible allusions would be present.’ What looks like a rather pleasant pastoral scene to contemporary eyes could well have been a pointedly didactic or a devotional work to the class of people able to purchase or view these large easel paintings designed for the domestic environment.

Alberti’s comment on the need to dwell on the images, his request for spectators to look longer, allows the narrative to unfold, the layers of allegory to reveal themselves to the cognoscenti and for any meditative prompt to register. The apparent contradiction of time zones, of biblical figures inhabiting the same world as those dressed contemporaneously, would not have been problematic to viewers of the day, accustomed as they were to seeing living patrons included in religious representations such as sacre conversazione, illustrated in Jacopo’s The Madonna and Child with Saint Roch and Sante Moro of 1576 (Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa) (fig. 20). L. Andrews clarifies the concept of continuous narrative, such as Jacopo uses, stating the ‘idea was that when depicting a single instant the artist should hint at earlier and later moments, before and after the main scene, without actually showing them explicitly or at least without seeming to violate prevailing standards

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89 Zampetti, 1958, p. 39. The figure of the sower shown in the work The Parable of the Sower is present also in the Galleria Borghese, Rome copy of Autumn.
of pictorial unit and verisimilitude to any great extent. Jacopo’s insertion of a diminutive scene within a scene is certainly in keeping with this premise; the pictorial unit of the rustic workers remaining intact.

Jacopo’s biblical-pastoral works are a feast of linkages - the four seasons combined with four major acts in the Old and New Testaments; the bucolic with the spiritual, and the allegory in the everyday. Rearick states that, 'Since no exact literary source can be found for them, we might simply assume that the cycle of the Seasons is paralleled by the sequence of man’s fall from a state of grace and the stages whereby he achieves the promise of redemption. Thus, Spring includes Adam and Eve expelled from Paradise, Summer has the sacrifice of Isaac as the Old Testament prefiguration of Christ’s crucifixion for man’s sins, Autumn shows Moses receiving the Commandments as the way to salvation through the law, and finally Winter depicts Christ carrying the cross as the promise of redemption for all mankind.' To the right of the peasants in Spring, the tiny naked figures fleeing are Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden, God’s experiment in immortality has failed due to their disobedience at eating the forbidden fruit. God declares to Adam that ‘... dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,’ (Genesis 3:19) from then on mankind must earn a living by the sweat of his brow, gone is the easy life and immortality. A direct contemporary of Jacopo, Tintoretto (1518-1594) had already painted The Fall of Man (fig. 21) approximately twenty years previously for the Scuola della Trinità in Venice. Adam and Eve were painted as part of a cycle of nine episodes from Genesis, with other artists completing several of these episodes. This work by Tintoretto was in all probability known to Jacopo who traveled occasionally to Venice from his base in Bassano. What makes this example of the couple relevant to this discussion is Tintoretto’s illustration of two moments in time depicted on the one picture plane - in the foreground is Eve presenting the apple to Adam while in the background is the result of this

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temptation with their being expelled from Paradise. In this painting tiny naked figures are being pursued by an angel, driving them from the mid-ground into the margins, their positioning comparable to the tiny figures in Jacopo’s *Spring*.

Jacopo shows the couple in several works, such as in *Adam and Eve in the Earthly Paradise* c. 1570-75 (Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome) (fig. 22) which precedes *Spring* by five years and shows the couple apparently enjoying their sojourn in Paradise, joined by sheep, a goat, rabbit, cockerel, and assorted birds including a peacock (seen as a symbol of the all-seeing nature of the Church and immortality). Similarities between these two works can be seen in the same turn of the head in both women (Eve and the milkmaid), the bending male figures are reversed (Adam bending towards Eve, the peasant bending away from the milkmaid), the lizard on the rock (symbol of vanitas, and of resurrection and renewal), Monte del Grappa dominates the skyline and both works are perspectively constructed in the same way. In relation to this work, Vinco da Sesso states that similar compositions are probably ‘the antecedent for the allegories of the *Seasons* such as those in Vienna of c.1574, which have a very similar *mise en page* and where the same unifying power of light dominates the composition.’

The Auckland Art Gallery copy of *Spring* is almost identical to the one held in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

This skull foreshadows the Crucifixion at Golgotha - the place of the skull - which tradition has is the place also of Adam’s death. (Unfortunately a suitable copy of this image was not available for inclusion in this dissertation.)
that Jacopo depicts the figure of Eve (who is replicated as Susanna in other works) leaning convivially towards Adam as if attempting to make the best of a bad situation.

Inverting the tendency of art practice which is to centralise or foreground religious subject matter, Jacopo instead imbeds the biblical into a bucolic scene, such as Pieter Aertsen’s *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, 1552 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) (fig 12). Aertsen’s work is primarily a still life, the entire foreground is given over to an animal shank, open cupboard, crockery, linen and flowers (all with their own symbolic references) with the scriptural passage backgrounded through an arch and taking up less than a third of the canvas. The only narrative of this domestic piece is in the figures in the background, with Jesus blessing the devoted Mary. Pieter Bruegel also relegates the biblical event to the margins in his *The Parable of the Sower* of 1557 (San Diego, Timken Art Gallery). The landscape with the sower going about his task, are the predominant features of this work, but, as Berdini notes, it ‘relies on the presence of Christ and the crowd gathering along the shore to ensure that the beholder’s attention to the sower in the foreground not be secularized.’ In Jacopo’s Spring the peasants seem completely absorbed in their work, the biblical event unseen. For Aikema this unawareness represents a negative outlook on life, and ‘the dilapidated *casoni* are not lacking in the four *Seasons*, clearly indicating that this series should be interpreted in a dialectical, moralizing sense as well.’

In a sense Jacopo has reversed a work like *The Holy Trinity* (Museo Civico, Bassano) c. 1547 (fig. 23) which has the crucified Christ borne aloft by God the Father and putti, beneath them a view of Bassano and Monte del Grappa with villagers going about their daily jobs, unaware of the holy mystery above their heads. The peasants in both *Spring* and *The Holy Trinity* share the same disinterest or unawareness of the spiritual in their

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97 Aikema, p. 136. *Casoni* are village dwellings, similar to thatched cottages.
vicinity. Bassano and Monte del Grappa are in the background of *The Holy Trinity* and the ‘delapidated *casoni*’ are distinctly shown on the left beneath the crucifix, the antithesis of the immaculate dwellings on the right hand side. The contrasting houses can be seen to symbolise two ways of life - that of spiritual awareness and piety and the other of spiritual torpidity.\(^98\)

The genuine religious significance for Jacopo of these *Seasons* can be seen as a continuation of his sacred works, and his own iconography, simply put into another guise. Although these works were seen as paintings for the home, their public and religious use was illustrated in a set of *Seasons* bequeathed in 1584, upon the wishes of their owner, *cavaliere* Simon Lando (a Venetian knight and ducal secretary), to decorate the choir in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Venice, where they remained on display until the early nineteenth century.\(^99\) Lando’s Will describes the many items he is leaving for the decoration of the church as ‘casa devoti’, or devotional things, and lists amongst them a set of the four seasons\(^100\). Lando’s description and the fact that this set remained in the church for two centuries puts an iconographic emphasis on both the religious and secular aspects of the work.

Renaissance artists were under pressure to perform by two hard masters - the wishes of their patrons (and by extension, the art market) and the wishes of the Church. Religious iconography was to become increasingly important following the Council of Trent (1545-1564). One highly significant result of the Council was a campaign undertaken to ensure that the Church could assert its supervisory role over all things moral and religious. This

\(^{98}\) It is interesting to contrast Giorgione’s *Enthroned Madonna and Child (Castelfranco Altarpiece)* (Church of S. Liberale, Castelfranco) to Jacopo’s *Holy Trinity*. In the background on the left of the Giorgione work the roof to the tower looks in need of repair, while on the right hand side of the Madonna the scenery is serene and has just two armour-wearing men present. It is pure conjecture on my part as to whether there is something to draw from this comparison and whether Giorgione was deliberately inferring two ways of life with this delapidated roof.

\(^{99}\) Zorzi 1977, II, pp. 534-55 quoted in Aikema, p. 137. The works Lando gifted to the church were later dispersed, their whereabouts not now known.
was to include art and sacred images. So, artists' work now came under closer scrutiny by the Church, an often quoted example of this scrutiny is Paolo Veronese going before the Tribunal of the Holy Office in 1573. This was on the charge of introducing gratuitously fanciful and disrespectful elements into his *Feast in the House of Levi* of 1572-3 (Venice, Accademia). The Tribunal, strengthened by the edicts of the Council, were dubious of his filling up the work with attendants, butlers, servants with bleeding noses and armed men. His confident reply says much for artistic creativity, of artists mixing the biblical with their own inventiveness and in filling up considerable space, in stating, 'We painters take the same liberties as poets and madmen take.' He clarifies this with, '... I was commissioned to adorn the picture as I judged best, and it is large, and had room for many figures, as it seemed to me.' Veronese was justifying his own canvas', particularly his paintings of feasting which are full of figures, colour, gesture, animals and sub-plots within the greater narrative. Although Veronese was known as a painter of historia and Jacopo one of genre scenes, their interpretative and creative sensibilities were somewhat similar. Both were taking a Scriptural narrative moment and extending it as they judged best. Veronese foregrounds a biblical scene - Christ dining at the house of Levi - into a

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101 The concluding Session of the Council, in December 1563 recommended: 'Moreover, let the bishops diligently teach that by means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of faith, which ought to be borne in mind and constantly reflected upon; also that great profit is derived from all holy images, not only because the people are thereby reminded of the benefits and gifts bestowed on them by Christ, but also because through the saints the miracles of God and salutary examples are set before the eyes of the faithful, so that they may give God thanks for those things, may fashion their own life and conduct in imitation of the saints and be moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety.' Rev. H.J. Schroeder (trans), *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Rockford, 1978, p. 215.
102 These two artists were colleagues as well as contemporaries - Veronese painted a portrait of Jacopo as a musician (behind his own self-portrait) in *The Marriage at Cana* (Louvre, Paris) 1563. The Bassano-Veronese connection continued with Francesco and Veronese receiving a joint commission in 1582 to paint the *Paradiso* mural in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, Palazzo Ducale. Veronese enrolled his son, Carletto Caliari, in Francesco's studio so he might assimilate the Bassano style. However the project was delayed by both parties and Francesco was released from the joint-commission on Veronese's death.
richly decorative and heavily peopled scene\textsuperscript{104}. With \textit{Spring}, Jacopo adds a spiritual dimension by the inclusion of the tiny Adam and Eve, to a bucolic scene with little narrative content. One artist depicts the biblical with great secular content, the other illustrates the secular with a small but highly charged biblical reference. Although there are no records of the Bassano workshop being challenged by such Tribunals, it was probably due to their genre pieces being largely destined for private use (unlike Veronese's large public works) which was not controlled as strictly by the authorities.

Religious imagery acts as an aide memoir to the sermons, but before the narrative can have any resonance, the story and relevance of the symbolism must already be known to the viewer. This is even more true when a painter has depicted a pregnant moment, 'because only one moment can actually be depicted, that moment should be as suggestive, as pregnant with information concerning the entire course of events, as possible.'\textsuperscript{105} Allegory assists in communicating more than just the single moment, it enriches the viewing by referring to many other events and times; it can allude to literature, scripture, mythology and topical political situations. While allegorical devices deepen or multiply the meanings within a work, these meanings can be difficult to categorically define. Allegorical signs are fluid and their meanings are dependent upon the context in which they appear, and upon such interpretative experience that the viewer can bring to the canvas. In 1965, Hamish Keith, while working at the Auckland Art Gallery was interviewed by the \textit{Woman's Weekly} on the meaning and symbolism of Jacopo's \textit{Spring}. While the contemporary viewer may find the inherent symbolism complex or possibly incomprehensible, Keith asserted that the people of Bassano's time would have been able to read the established language of symbols freely. His own reading of the work's symbolism does not focus on the dawning of Spring, but instead is portentous of death, stating that the 'sun is setting, a

\textsuperscript{104} This work was originally a \textit{Last Supper} but Veronese, on pressure from the Inquisition, judiciously changed its name to \textit{Feast in the House of Levi}, a lesser known Biblical episode, and so avoided having to make numerous changes to the work.
storm is brewing and amongst the birds in the trees there is almost certainly a portent of the plague.\textsuperscript{106}

It is difficult to establish a single sustainable allegorical interpretation as in the case of Nicolò Boldrino’s woodcut of Titian’s The Milkmaid of c. 1525 (fig. 13). Rearick suggests, then discounts, the political allegory in this woodcut - although unable to explain the galloping horse and the eagle, he believes it improbable that they relate to the French occupation of Northern Italy and their subsequent flight in 1521.\textsuperscript{107} Aikema responds differently to the same Titian image, stating the eagle is a symbol of Resurrection, the galloping horse indicates unbridled passion and the rocky promontory is Mount Zion.\textsuperscript{108} Whatever the definitive meaning, the actions of Titian’s milkmaid parallel those of the milkmaid in Spring, who continues with her task, as does the barefooted boy scattering feed to the sheep and goats, ignoring the possibly portentous signs around them. It is a shared belief among Bassano scholars that Jacopo adopted and developed the motif of the kneeling milkmaid from this Titian image. Rearick cites Jacopo’s Annunciation to the Shepherds of c. 1558 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection) (fig. 7) as the first instance of his adoption of this figuration.\textsuperscript{109}

Monte del Grappa is an anchoring backdrop in each of the Seasons as well as many of their religious works as shown in The Holy Trinity. The familiar shape of Monte del Grappa on the horizon can be seen to have a religious significance - it becomes difficult to read much of Jacopo’s work in any other way - with the Bible often likening high places to holy places. A line from Psalm 121 is but one reference to this, ‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help.’ Aikema likens Monte del Grappa in Jacob’s Journey


\textsuperscript{108} Aikema, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{109} Rearick, 1992, p. 102.
c. 1578 (Venice, Palazzo Ducale) as representing Mount Zion. Biblical instances of mountains are numerous. It was on Mount Sinai that God made a covenant with Israel. Moses descended from this mountain with the ten commandments (Exodus 34:29) after spending forty days and forty nights with God, as shown in Jacopo's Autumn. Jesus preached to his disciples and followers, giving a series of blessings which includes the Lord's Prayer in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:3-7:27). Abraham placed his beloved son Isaac on an altar planning to sacrifice him to God before He halted him, stating 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.' (Gen 22:14) Jacopo depicts the tiny figures of Abraham and Isaac in his work Summer on steeply raised ground in the left hand middle ground. Clearly, spiritual commandments, gifts and enlightenments emanate from these high and holy places. Could it be pushing the analogy too far to wonder whether Jacopo saw Monte del Grappa as a sublime emblem of God's presence, combined with a regional and family emblem of place?

If Jacopo did portray this mountain as a sign of the divine, then he pre-empted the Romantic movement by three centuries. Tomory paraphrases an aspect of this movement with, 'Thus, mountains were the sublime works of the Creator, and the landscape profile could be rendered as the 'side face' of God.' He then juxtaposes this theory of the spirituality of high places with an acknowledgement that prior to the Romantic movement, 'Mountains, particularly ... were considered with horror by the mass of people. Even Leonardo da Vinci, when he introduces glaciers and mountains into the background of his Mona Lisa, contrasts the elegant Florentine intellectual woman with the chaotic terrain of the Alps. In his drawings, mountains are the homes of storms and cataclysmic eruptions.'

\[10\] Aikema, p. 90.

\[11\] P.A. Tomory, 'Imaginary Reefs and Floating Islands, The Romantic Image in New Zealand Painting', Ascent, Christchurch, Vol 1, No. 2, July 1968, p. 8. In this article Tomory quotes Thomas Gray's belief that 'Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry,' from Correspondence of Gray, Walpole, West and Ashton, 1, p. 259.

It is with some irony that contemporary spiritual allegory becomes accessible through Colin Mc Cahon, the painter famous for his landscapes and mountain ranges. Paralleling sixteenth century Italian art with that of Mc Cahon is not without foundation, as his early iconography comes by way of Giotto and later Renaissance artists such as Titian. Mc Cahon’s 1947 work *Entombment, after Titian* (National Art Gallery, Wellington) charts his personal response to the Venetian master’s own work *Entombment* of 1559 (Prado, Madrid). With this work, Luit Beiringa states Mc Cahon’s ultimate aim was ‘to reconcile those religious symbols of especially European derivation with his New Zealand setting.’\(^{113}\) If Tomory speaks of our allegorical perception being blunted, then perhaps we are requanted with aspects of it through Mc Cahon’s iconography.\(^ {114}\) Several works by Mc Cahon share the pictorial devices present in Jacopo’s *Spring*, especially his portrayals of allegorical and religious landscapes, seen for example in his *Promised Land* of 1948 (Auckland Art Gallery) (fig. 11). Here in a familiar mountainous landscape (the Takaka hills - seen and named in other Mc Cahon works) resides both the divine presence (as evidenced by the ‘angelic’ profile, jug and candle) and a portrait of the artist dressed in a rural worker’s black singlet. The shed to the right and Mc Cahon’s attire attest to this being a landscape of use and of labour, a Georgic vision of New Zealand, a worker’s paradise. Inset below is a vision of an idyllic pastoral world, the just reward for labour. The poet John Caselberg sees that ‘Colin Mc Cahon’s paintings map a relationship between man and his God.’\(^ {115}\) The geographical language indicates that the map or mediator between man and his God is the landscape, seen in the white-tinged horizon line or the brooding hills.

In another work of 1948, *The Blessed Virgin compared to a jug of pure water and the Infant Jesus to a lamp* (fig. 24), Mc Cahon textually clarifies these allegorical devices which become abbreviated symbols of the spiritual. As in *Promised Land* the jug (refering to the

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Virgin - the vessel of the Lord) and the lamp (Christ - the light of the world) appear with no explanatory text, and can be seen to be spiritualising both the inhabitants and the landscape. As Neil Rowe asserts, 'The sources of McCahon's imagery have always been vernacular. His Crucifixions and Ascensions are set in the local landscape, they depict his family and friends.' He also notes that McCahon, 'continues to invest the stuff of everyday life with a deeper significance ...' McCahon's art, and that of Jacopo, is where the spiritual and the vernacular unite. As Gordon Brown states, 'McCahon wanted the events of the divine drama made real to New Zealanders as if they were the players themselves. In attempting this aim, he drew upon the people he knew around him and upon the environment with which he was familiar.'

In much the same way, Jacopo brought biblical stories into his own familiar and vernacular environment. Berenson wrote that Jacopo was 'inspired, although unawares, by the new idea of giving perfectly modern versions of Biblical stories, [he] introduced into nearly every picture he painted episodes from the life in the streets of Bassano.' The familiar and uneventful have been transformed into symbols of spiritual experience. Writing of McCahon, Gil Docking states that, 'As in the parables of Christ the elements are homely; but the inferences are profound. In this way, particulars may be bonded with universals and become archetypal symbols ...'

McCahon said, 'Once the painter was making signs and symbols for people to live by: now he makes things to hang on the walls at exhibitions.' Venetian painting in the Renaissance was synonymous with glorious colour and the capture of light, not with heavy intellectualism or a search for greater meaning. A cycle such as Jacopo's Seasons can be

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116 N. Rowe, 'Notes Toward a McCahon ABC', Art New Zealand, No. 8, Nov/Dec/Jan 1977, p. 44.
119 G. Docking, Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting, Auckland, 1990, p. 186.
seen to have a foot in each camp so to speak - it could read as a rich allegory or as an easily understood decorative piece. Perhaps the contemporary viewer, much as a Venetian spectator in the 1580s, might see this work as just so much decoration and fails to register any revelatory allegorical or spiritual meaning. But it may also be that the work still calls the viewer to look more closely, to engage in the work, with the gallery an active not passive space.

Tomory’s comments are specifically on New Zealand artists, but they are pertinent to contemporary viewers of Jacopo’s work regarding its effective comprehension. He states that what an artist ‘cannot be sure of is whether his picture, once it leaves him and becomes a means of communication, is going to communicate anything at all to people who are unable, mostly through no fault of their own, to read the language he has used’\textsuperscript{121} I fear too that even with the assistance of Mc Cahon there is still doubt that the idiom of one culture and time can be coherently be transferred to another.

\textsuperscript{121} Tomory, 1958, p. 163.
Section VI Conclusion

In responding to the question of what this one work, Spring, can reveal to a contemporary audience, several issues presented themselves. To contextualise a late Renaissance work into a New Zealand gallery and to contrast it with New Zealand works has been illuminating. Jacopo could be seen as an early 'regional realist' with his biblical-pastoral scenes, placing the spiritual into the vernacular environment, is a technique that is used, although modified, by McCahon. Those seeking a national signifier of place and of authorship would have recognised Jacopo's geographical icon, the blue-tinged Monte del Grappa.

The decision to purchase Spring by Tomory and the Mackelvie Trust came on the heels of Tomory's knowledge of the New Zealand liking for landscape depictions. His concerns were also to enrich the Collection, rounding out relevant art historical gaps and to offer something of an intellectual engagement with the works. I feel either a show dedicated to Italian art from the early Renaissance to the present day, or the exhibition of all four Seasons together would most certainly offer this engagement.

A thoroughly researched provenance could prove interesting, tracing the movement of one work across Europe to the antipodes and across the centuries, charting the fluctuations in taste that has seen Bassano works go out and then back into favour. The very seriality that helped found the Bassano name ironically led to the weakening of Jacopo's oeuvre. This seriality provokes questions on authenticity and originality and is perhaps something contemporary viewers would not be aware of, or might only know through Andy Warhol's 'factory' production.

The hanging of this work within the context of Pavillioned in Splendor contrasts a genre piece with large scale historia, landscape works, portraiture, revelling peasants and an exploration of naturalism to name just a few of its neighbours. To enhance, however, the landscape element, the rural industry aspect, the allegorical or the biblical, the painting would need to be hung in shows that focus on those elements. To clarify further the allegorical significance, a fuller description on the attribution plaque would be useful. Once again, to stage something of a 'reunion hanging' with the other Seasons would, I feel, allow the allegorical and religious content to be revealed to spectators and make the linkages between the images more clear. Just as Tomory cannot be sure how an artist's work will be interpreted once it leaves their hands, it is doubtful anything near a complete allegorical
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reading would be possible for today’s audience without textual prompting and clarification, the Renaissance language of signs being close to defunct for contemporary eyes.

In all, the Auckland Art Gallery copy of *Spring* or *Seasonal Allegory with Adam and Eve* is a proficient example of the biblical-pastoral genre, it might not be the masterpiece Tomory wrote of, but, once its place in the art historical continuum is established, neither is it a second-rank work.
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