

BOOK REVIEWS

A Swiss Settler in Australia. The Diary of Etienne Bordier, 1849–1851, translated by Kenneth Dutton, edited by Kenneth Dutton and Denis Rowe, Newcastle, University of Newcastle, 1987 (Auchmuty Library publication n° 6), pp. xviii, 42, plates.

The readers of *Explorations* can hardly have failed to notice the number of books in the last decade or so that have presented aspects of French-Australian contacts to an interested public in this country. Some have come from specialist groups like ISFAR itself, others have been produced by mainstream publishing houses, others again have emerged from less expected places. Bordier's diary fits into this last category. In addition it is an example of the wider and extremely important francophone interaction with Australia that extends to Belgium, Switzerland, Mauritius and French Canada. Complications can, of course, arise from the fact that, in parallel to the metropolis–frontier relationship existing between Britain and its Australian colonies, the French-speaking world has its own tensions between an assumed Parisian standard and the usages of provinces, countries and settlements perceived as marginal.

In itself the diary now translated from the French-language version published in the *Bibliothèque universelle et revue suisse* in 1863 (with a separate repaginated issue appearing under the title *Journal d'un colon d'Australie*) is a modest document. Etienne-Jean-Léonard Bordier-Roman (1821–1861) left his native Geneva in 1841 and spent about ten years in Australia from 1849. The evidence concerning most of his life—in Geneva, Paris, London, New South Wales and again in Paris—is sparse, but it is carefully laid out in the "Introduction" (pp. vi–xvii). The diary entries, with abundant annotation, run from 12 August 1849 to 15 July 1851 (pp. 3–36). They cover the arrangements made in Sydney for Bordier to spend some time at the Coopers' station in the Goulburn district, the sojourn at Lake Bathurst, a visit to "Glendon" near Maitland and, from April 1850, life at "Ramornie" on the Clarence River with his associates Chauffert and Milhau. The adventure of owning and running a grazing property was terminated by the Gold Rush of 1851, although the partners did not sell "Ramornie" till 1852. After trying his luck at searching for gold, Bordier was back in Sydney by 1854. The most tangible remnant of his career there is one of the prefabricated cottages he built at Hunter's Hill in 1855 (plate 6, opposite p. xviii). None of

this, naturally, appears in the diary, which concentrates on life up country. Two appendices—on Bordier family history, with a tree, and the text of an obituary note by Fritz Berthoud in the *Revue suisse* of March 1861—and a useful index complete the volume (pp. 37–41).

What is one to make of this testimony? The essential is said in the "Introduction". The text is sober and unadorned, no literary effort, with some inconsistencies due to its having been written up at intervals. There are no startling insights into mid-nineteenth-century Australia, but there is ample confirmation, unfortunately, of the depredations suffered by the country's fauna and of the lawlessness observable in the treatment of Aborigines. European adventurers like Bordier, however respectable their good bourgeois families, seem to have embraced colonial prejudices with little hesitation. There is some irony, perhaps, in the fact the possible owner of the diary after Bordier's death, his Paris cousin Henri-Léonard Bordier, was the co-author of *Une fabrique de faux autographes ou récit de l'affaire Vrain Lucas* (Paris, Léon Techener, 1870), recently translated in Joseph Rosenblum's *Prince of Forgers* (New Castle, Delaware, Oak Knoll Press, 1998).

The care in documentation generally extends to presentation, but there are a few literals (plate 2 caption; p. 5; p. 8; p. 20; p. 24, note 21). In addition the reference to H.-L. Bordier graduating in Law from the Ecole des Chartes (p. 37) is puzzling.

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Jim Davidson, *Lyrebird Rising: Louise Hanson-Dyer of Oiseau-Lyre 1884–1962*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 1994, pp. xiv, 578, plates, RRP \$49.95.

Jim Davidson's biography of Louise Hanson-Dyer, based on a Ph.D. thesis in History for the University of Melbourne, was eagerly awaited some time before it appeared in 1994. *Explorations* is—from the publisher's point of view—disastrously late in noticing the book, but, given its relevance to our concerns, it can hardly be ignored even at this distance. In addition its intrinsic value earns it more than summary treatment.

In his preface (pp. 1–5) the author underlines the importance of "the triad of Australia, Britain and France" in his subject's life and explains "an approach which could best be described as chronology modified by theme". There are thus different emphases in chapters that follow on in time from one another, with the exception of 11 and 12, which cover the publishing venture and then other facets of Louise's career in the 1930s in Paris.

The book is divided into four parts. The first, "Daughter and Wife", contains chapters 1, "Antecedents" (pp. 9–21), and 2, "The Education of Young Louise" (pp. 22–59), and takes the daughter of L.L. Smith, the medical entrepreneur, businessman and parliamentarian, through childhood, education at P.L.C. and her marriage to the widower James Dyer in 1911. Part Two, "Patron in a Dominion City", is developed in five chapters that show Louise at work in Melbourne in the 1920s: chapters 3, "The Neilson Ambience" (pp. 63–75), 4, "Alliance Française" (pp. 76–87), 5, "British Music Society" (pp. 88–116), 6, "The Orchestra: Jimmy's Last Stand" (pp. 117–131), and 7, "Departure" (pp. 132–142). Significantly, the move to Europe happened in April 1927 as Federal Parliament was about to meet for the first time in Canberra. Melbourne's "Indian summer [...] was at an end" (p. 142). Part Three, "Herself at Last", consists of five further chapters that take Louise down to the death of Jimmy Dyer in January 1938: 8, "London—or Paris?" (pp. 145–171), 9, "The Foundation of Oiseau-Lyre" (pp. 172–202), 10, "Lady Mayoress" (pp. 203–217), 11, "A Press of One's Own" (pp. 218–260), and 12, "Portrait of Louise" (pp. 261–302). The last part, "Partnership", covers the years of her marriage to and collaboration with Jeff Hanson in another six chapters: 13, "Realignments" (pp. 305–328), 14, "An Emigrée in Oxford" (pp. 329–348), 15, "Relocating" (pp. 349–366), 16, "The First LPs in France" (pp. 367–386), 17, "Thirty-three and a Third Cheers for Oiseau-Lyre!" (pp. 387–427), and 18, "Crest of the Wave" (pp. 428–467). One page summarizes Oiseau-Lyre's history from 1962 to 1993 (p. 468), and a "Postscript", "A Pirouette on the Late Empire" (pp. 469–475) reflects on Louise's achievements and on her complex relationship to the three countries in which she lived and whose cultures she was to enrich in various ways. A substantial appendix, "The Work of Louise Hanson-Dyer" (pp. 477–509), lists both the printed music and the records produced in Louise's lifetime. After the "Notes" (pp. 510–550), which are avowedly

abbreviated for the later chapters from those provided in the Ph.D. thesis, comes a "Bibliography" (pp. 551-565) of primary sources, including extensive interviews within and outside Australia, and of secondary references ranging widely over the topics on which Louise's career impinged. The numerous illustrations, in black and white and in colour, are listed at the beginning (pp. ix-xi).

As one should expect from the Miegunyah imprint (the volume is number 14 in the series), *Lyrebird Rising* has been produced quite lavishly. Something of the flavour of Louise Hanson-Dyer's attention to matters of presentation has been preserved. The colour reproductions of the Tom Roberts (c.1888), W. B. McInnes (1927) and Max Ernst (1934) portraits accompany images of editions and record sleeves. Beyond this it is obvious that the biography is a work of impressive documentary range and one that grapples with the problems posed by expatriates owing allegiance to more than one cultural tradition. It will remain a standard reference not only because its author is a sophisticated commentator on the subjects that preoccupied Louise, but also because the opportunity to talk to many of the witnesses—friends, collaborators, employees, acquaintances—has disappeared since the late 1970s and early 1980s. At the same time there is little likelihood that hitherto unknown or unsuspected written sources will emerge. The collection of materials has been done with unusual thoroughness. Would that all Ph.D. theses reached their published form after such long maturation and reflection!

What is the reader offered? First, much detail about Louise Hanson-Dyer's early life in Melbourne, about her travels, about her career in France and in England—notably during the Second World War—and about her work. For a long time she could enjoy the comforts of colonial wealth, including frequent opportunities to visit the Northern Hemisphere and the indulgence of serving as Lady Mayoress when her as yet unmarried brother Harold Gengoult Smith became Lord Mayor of Melbourne in 1932. Even in the 1930s, after her home city had been effectively left behind apart from visits that were to continue till as late as 1960, she figured as a salon hostess on an ample scale, thus replicating her role as a patron in Australia before 1927. After 1945 there was less that was apparently extravagant. The money that still came from investments here was ploughed into the Oiseau-Lyre business, and her overtly professional activity took over. The second present to those patient enough to tackle what is anything but a facile account is a good

deal of contextual information about late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Melbourne's literary and musical pursuits, about the British and French scenes and about the early music revival in which, as publishing and recording impresario, Louise was to play a critical role. In other words this is a highly serious contribution to the study of a remarkable cultural movement and of many of its participants in Europe and even in North America. On the side the reader can pick up a number of issues that hold out tantalizing prospects for further research.

In the end this is the inherent problem of the biographical approach to the Oiseau-Lyre phenomenon. Louise Hanson-Dyer's claim to the respect of posterity lies in her publishing and recording work. The rest is no doubt more diverting, more picturesque, but the doings of a leader of Melbourne society can hardly sustain a big book. As Joseph Bougerel remarked at the end of the preface to his *Vie de Pierre Gassendi* (Paris, Jacques Vincent, 1737), the first attempt at a biography of the great seventeenth-century philosopher:

Enfin c'est ici la vie d'un sçavant, & d'un sçavant du premier rang: pour le faire connoître, il a été à propos de donner l'histoire, l'analyse & le sujet de ses ouvrages: la véritable histoire d'un sçavant est celle de ses livres. (signature à 6')

Similarly the catalogue of editions and recordings has to be the backbone of this study, reinforced, naturally, by the correspondence preserved in the Oiseau-Lyre Archive. Why not, then, a monograph on the press itself like those that historians of books are coming more and more to write on publishing firms in a critical rather than commemorative or celebratory spirit?

One answer is revealed quite late in Jim Davidson's volume:

When Astri Mjellem came to the Monaco office in 1961, she was horrified to find that no books were kept. Bills were paid as soon as they arrived, records of payment noted, but that was that (p. 457).

This was possible because of the absence of personal tax in Monaco and because statements of Louise's income arrived regularly from Melbourne. In this sense the business did coincide with the person. However, there is a case for studying the economics of music publishing and of the

recording industry in the middle of the twentieth century. *Lyrebird Rising*, it is true, provides more than one hint on the way to this necessary research. One suspects that takeovers and the destruction of business records that did once exist will not make the process easy.

Another contextual question one would like to see further explored is that of "New World" patrons and society hostesses in pre-War Europe. The subject is opened up apropos of Princesse Edmond de Polignac and others (pp. 178–179), but more could obviously be said. The parallels with Ethel Kelly (1875–1949), for whom Florence and Sydney were the main spheres of action, are interesting, as one can discover from the article on this New Brunswick-born actress and author in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (9, pp. 553–554). Ultimately what distinguishes Louise Hanson-Dyer is her single-minded devotion to her life's work at Oiseau-Lyre.

It is always idle to wish for a book to be other than it is. None the less, on its own ground *Lyrebird Rising* is not beyond reproach. The endnote system—with multiple references gathered at infrequent intervals—is extremely cumbrous if one wants to read and follow up the information. Yet this is not a work for cursory perusal. Author, editor and copy-editor seem to have nodded in too many places. Mostly the errors fall in the literal category, but one wonders about "Sir Thomas Bent's mansion, Ripponlea," (p. 28), "a pietistic Latin tag" (p. 51), "she expostulated on that theme" (p. 189), "more equable distribution" (p. 280), "publically" (p. 287—with the correct form also on the same page), "Virgil Thompson" (p. 318) and "Schrade had spluttered out on the fifth" (p. 393).

The account of Eduard Scharf's pre-Australian career (p. 35) does not quite match what Theo Scharf told me in 1974, six years before Jim Davidson interviewed him. The answer is perhaps to have a seriously documented biographical notice of this interesting family. Louise is taken to task for writing and pronouncing "Marseilles" and "Lyons" in English (p. 285). I am afraid that I am equally guilty—it was what we were taught in the ultra-purist Nicholsonian school in Sydney half a century ago. More recent usage seems to me part of a cringe to the foreign that does not afflict the French, the Germans and the Italians in the least.