

# THE DELAMOTTE PHENOMENON

## CULTURAL RECIPROCITY

In any discussion of present-day study or activity in the field of French-Australian relations and literary connections, the names of Jean-Paul Delamotte and his wife Monique must inevitably emerge, and with very good reason. Their contribution has been so immense and multi-faceted that had it not existed, it could not have been imagined, let alone be carried on by other means.

Behind the story of the establishment of the Association Culturelle Franco-Australienne (ACFA) and subsequently of the related Atelier Littéraire Franco-Australien (ALFA) with its publishing house *Editions La petite Maison* ® are two love stories.<sup>1</sup>

The first is that of Jean-Paul and Monique, who had been involved in different branches of the film industry when they both experienced a downturn in their expectations. Monique had been working for the French branch of MGM for seven years when the parent company went into a decline and decided to withdraw from France, while the founder and backer of the French film production company that Jean-Paul was involved with suffered a fatal heart attack in a plane between Teheran and Tokyo.

Having married at the beginning of 1974, they decided to make a fresh start away from other complications in Paris and Jean-Paul felt drawn to the idea of teaching French in an Australian university. He had happy memories of the three years that he had earlier spent in the United States as a student, first at Amherst College then at Harvard, where in 1958 he took the degree of Master of Public Administration. With spare time enough to continue his creative writing, he much appreciated the easy access to splendid libraries, so different from the system prevailing in academic libraries in Paris. He would have had to confront this again when preparing his thesis, 'Les relations de l'Etat et de l'industrie cinématographique en France (1945-1960)', which he successfully sustained at the Sorbonne in December 1960 for his 'Doctorat en études politiques'. He was also fortunate enough to have a good friend, the poet Didier Coste, teaching at the University of Sydney.<sup>2</sup>

Coste sent him details of all the Australian universities teaching French and drew his attention to the beauty of the campus of the comparatively new University of Newcastle.<sup>3</sup> A letter to the head of the French department there, Professor Ken Dutton, and the support of three prestigious referees: Eugène Ionesco, Serge Doubrovsky and the sociologist Georges Friedmann,

led to the offer of a tutorship and in the event a tutorship in language teaching became available for Monique also.

Thus they took up duties there in Second Term of 1974 and Jean-Paul soon went on to lecturing in French literature, including in the course a collection of his own short stories. Meanwhile, as they enjoyed the friendliness of a small campus (though they would also have brought with them what they found there), the pleasantness of life on the Hill, the oldest most historic part of Newcastle, and the discovery of the many amenities of this much-maligned town and its surroundings, there began the second love story, that of their growing acquaintance with Australian culture.<sup>4</sup>

First of all there was the literature, which they had only known through Patrick White and Morris West. Close behind, naturally, came cinema. In 1975, Jean-Paul presented a course in French cinema at Newcastle and every second week at the University of Sydney also. In 1976 they moved to Melbourne where Jean-Paul worked as a Senior Tutor in the Media Centre of La Trobe University and attended a course on Australian film. Now also began another part of his expanding mission as a mediator between French and Australian culture through his collaboration with Unifrance Film, David Stratton and Irwin Rado to present a French Film Week in Melbourne and Sydney.<sup>5</sup>

Towards the end of 1976 they returned to Newcastle for five months which Jean-Paul devoted to his creative writing, after which family matters called them back to France. Jean-Paul resumed work in the film industry, taking charge of the French production subsidiary of United Artists, but already their role of cultural mediators for Australia was growing more important.

It was some time after meeting the poet and Australian ambassador to France then in office, John Rowland, and becoming close friends with him, that the idea crystallised of a body designed to put the work or rather the vocation of a sort of reverse cultural ambassadorship on a more organised basis.

In October 1980 ACFA was officially founded as an 'Association Culturelle à but non lucratif', in other words as a non-profitmaking organisation, but to describe it thus is to tell only part of the story: in fact over the years since then it has been generously subsidised by Jean-Paul and Monique, quite apart from the many hours which they devote to its diverse gamut of commitments.

One of the most important of these, if at times seemingly the most unfruitful, has been Jean-Paul's constant indefatigable activity as publicist and champion of Australian literature. Through reviews, articles and letters in publications such as *le Monde* and *le Magazine littéraire* he has lost no opportunity to bring it to the attention of the French public, always with good grace and, if necessary, with considerable tenacity. Alongside all this have gone encouragement and moral support to like-minded initiatives such as Elaine Lewis's Australian Bookshop in Paris, whose success and vicissitudes featured in the Australian press last year, and the review *Australie* run by Mme Odile Smadja of *Ecosoft*, 11 bd St-Marcel, 75013 Paris.

ACFA was also one of the prime movers in facilitating the impressive Colloque d'Etudes Franco-australiennes, which was held at Paris and Le Havre in December 1987 under the patronage of the Comité Français pour le Bicentenaire de l'Australie and under the auspices of the Australian Embassy in Paris. The proceedings of this, consisting of thirty different papers, were published in 1989 with the assistance of the Université de Paris X - Nanterre, the University of New South Wales and its French-Australian Research Centre, and thanks to the generosity of Norman J. B. Plomley of Launceston, Tasmania, as *Les Français et l'Australie: Voyages de découvertes et missions scientifiques de 1756 à nos jours*, with texts compiled by the organizers, André Dommergues and Maryvonne Nedeljkovic and publication by the Université de Paris X - Nanterre.

Since their initial stay in Australia the Delamottes have returned here frequently, every eighteen months on average, for short visits. It was on one such visit, in 1992, that Jean-Paul received a fitting recognition of all his activities in fostering French-Australian relations with his induction as a Member of the Order of Australia by Governor-General Bill Hayden at The Lodge, Yarralumla, in the presence of Mrs Margaret Whitlam, Présidente d'honneur de l'ACFA, and the French Ambassador to Australia, M. Philippe Baude. Many members of ISFAR will remember that later the same year, on 31 July, we were honoured to have him as guest speaker at our Annual Dinner.

What probably stands out most in the minds of many of us among such splendid achievements, is the eminently practical and extraordinarily generous initiative of the Delamottes in helping solve for Australian writers, academics, researchers and journalists visiting Paris the perennial problem of accommodation. This was done by assuming control of two 'studios' or small self-contained fully furnished flats, one their direct responsibility and

the other allocated for the exclusive of ACFA by a French couple who have long been members.

These are let with a minimum of formality at rates which one would certainly not find anywhere else in Paris, and what is absolutely certain is that nowhere else in Paris, or anywhere else at all for that matter, could one find more hospitable, welcoming and obliging landlords. To arrive at their home in Boulogne-Billancourt before being taken along to the studio one has arranged to rent is to experience a civilised friendliness which soon dissipates whatever traumas arrival in Paris may have held. Monique handles all the practicalities with calm efficiency, they both display the utmost cordiality during one's stay, and Jean-Paul does everything to make one's departure as painless as possible.

The studios are both in the Boulogne-Billancourt quarter, technically just beyond the limits of the twenty arrondissements of Paris proper, but very much part of it thanks to the extension in comparatively recent times of the Métro line No. 10 to the Boulogne-Pont de St-Cloud terminus, beyond its former concluding loop. There is also an RATP bus which takes one along the right bank of the Seine into the heart of the city.

On the boundary of Boulogne-Billancourt overlooking the Seine is one of the best-kept secrets of an area not famous for its architectural beauties or open spaces, despite the presence of the little Square Léon Blum, the name of which at least is heart-warming. This secret is the existence of the Musée Albert Kahn, a name which does not reveal the fact that its most important part is a series of gardens covering 3.9 hectares. These were originally established by the wealthy banker Albert Kahn between 1895 and 1910 as a setting for his bachelor home and now comprise Japanese, English and French gardens, an orchard and rosarium, a palmarium with tea-rooms, a 'forêt bleue', a forest of the Vosges and finally a swamp. This beautifully maintained microcosm of natural and horticultural diversity was a reflection of Kahn's conception of the underlying unity and brotherhood behind human diversity, an ideal in pursuit of which he sent teams of photographers and cinematographers all over the world to record the daily life and environment of its inhabitants. The resultant incredibly rich series of images now enables a constantly changing succession of exhibitions in the striking gallery which is also the entrance to the whole complex. Kahn also formed a number of organisations to pursue his ideal, some of them still housed in buildings on the property.

The above is not so much a digression as a way of leading to the related ideal of Jean-Paul for ACFA, namely for it to be the instrument of 'une constante sociabilité' in everything concerning French-Australian cultural relations, following the model established by Valery Larbaud of altruistic service to another culture, while maintaining one's own independence as an artist.<sup>6</sup>

The Albert Kahn concept is also repeated in miniature at the Delamotte home in that behind it is a remarkably beautiful garden and at the bottom of the garden is an edifice known as 'la petite maison', though one hastens to add that this should not be taken in the sense of the now almost obsolete euphemism for the edifice that one found at the bottom of many an Australian backyard. It is a former coach-house and servants' quarters now converted into the base of the most tangible expression of Valery Larbaud's ideal through the establishment in 1995 of ALFA, which has grown partly from the needs of ACFA while remaining formally independent of it. This small press, founded by Jean-Paul's immediate family and two collaborators, both relieves ACFA of the pressure of printers' costs and enables Jean-Paul to publish some of his own creative writing. Under the control of Arabelle Perkins, *La petite Maison* ® has brought out in limited print runs a whole range of French and Australian literary and historical texts in several different series or collections. The listing below will give some idea of the wealth of material produced.

ACFA, in keeping with the laws governing 'Associations culturelles à but non lucratif', holds an Annual General Meeting at which the various members of the Executive Committee present reports of the past year's activities and a balance sheet, followed by an election of members for the coming year. Thus at the last Annual General Meeting on 16 May 1998, Jean-Paul Delamotte was re-elected as President, John McManus as Vice-President, and Monique Delamotte as Treasurer, while Bettina Krebs was elected as General Secretary. Given a membership spread over five continents but concentrated largely in France and Australia, the role of proxies is vitally important, and Jean-Paul takes considerable pains to stress that members not able to attend in person should return a proxy form properly filled in.

The active membership list of ACFA is like a roll-call of academics, authors and poets, cinema people, diplomats, journalists, musicians, publishers and many others involved in some way, ranging from lay interest to professional commitment, with the French-Australian connection. It has the civilised touch of including their partners too, and as with many a French association

of this sort, prominent deceased members continue to be listed. Thus, in the most recent list under the heading Membres d'honneur one finds:

*In Memoriam:*

Dominique AURY, écrivain

Alain BOSQUET, écrivain

Louis MARCORELLES, critique de cinéma

Lloyd REES, peintre

John R. ROWLAND, poète, ancien Ambassadeur d'Australie en France.  
(On the next list, sadly, one will have to add 'Geoffrey DUTTON, écrivain')

Australian writers who appear are: David Carter, Nancy Cato, Donald Horne, William La Ganza, Brian Matthews, Colleen Mc Cullough, Judith Rodriguez and Robin Wallace-Crabbe. Michel Butor, New Novelist, frequent visitor to Australia and author of *Boomerang, le génie du lieu*, 3, Paris: Gallimard, 1978 (translated with an Introduction and Afterword by Michael Spencer as *Letters from the Antipodes*, St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1981) is the most prominent French author to appear, along with the poet Claude Vigée, while there are three relatives of French authors with some Australian connection: Eugénie Brauquier, Catherine Gide and Nicole Wenz.

ACFA also has a Vice-Président d'Honneur in the person of M. Xavier Pons of the Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, who must be counted the doyen of Australian studies in France and then there is his counterpart in the US, Professor Robert Ross of the E. A. Clark Center for Australian Studies, the University of Texas at Austin. At least seven different Australian universities are also represented.

Diplomats and former diplomats are represented by two former Australian Ambassadors to France, Peter Curtis and Kim Jones, the present Ambassador John Spender and his French counterpart S. E. M. Dominique Girard, Ambassadeur de France en Australie.

Among journalists are Phillip Adams, Alan Brissenden, Michèle Field and Jean-Pierre Langellier while in a related field are Jacques and Betty Villeminot, producers of so many documentaries on Australia, and Robert Laffont, the publisher of their *Australie - terre de fortune* (1971).

Some very special title needs to be created for Jean-Paul and Monique, such as "Reciprocal French-Australian Cultural Ambassadors".

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 below: **Publications of ALFA**

<sup>2</sup> For some of Coste's poetry inspired by his stay in Australia, see: Didier Coste, *Vita Australis*, Paris: Flammarion, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 2 below: 'Les jardiniers de l'Université'

<sup>4</sup> In happy continuation of the first love story, their daughter Guibourg was born at Newcastle in May 1975, so that they even have an Australian in the family. She now has a 'maîtrise' (Master's degree) from the Faculté de Droit, Paris III (Assas), the analagous 'Magister Juris' from Oxford, a 'licence' in Japanese from the Paris Ecole des Langues Orientales (now known as INALCO). She is currently studying at the Paris Institut des Sciences Politiques and is looking forward to her next three months' visit to her native land, where she hopes to work as a trainee in the media, perhaps film, radio or television.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 3 below: 'Le Festival de Sydney'

<sup>6</sup> Valery Larbaud (1881-1957), best known as a novelist in the early years of the century, was later to gain distinction as a sympathetic interpreter to a French readership of mainly English literature in two collections of essays and critical studies, *Ce vice impuni, la lecture* (1925) and *Jaune, bleu, blanc* (1927).

### Appendix 1

## Publications of ALFA

### Collection *Ici AussiE*

- Paul Wenz, *L'Echarde*, roman (avant-propos d'André Gide) 240 p. 90F  
*L'Homme du Soleil Couchant*, roman (suivi des *Lettres à Joseph Krug*) 212 p. 120F  
*Le Pays de leurs pères*, roman (+ *Lettres retrouvées*, de l'auteur & André Gide) 200 p. 120F  
*Un Australien tout neuf* (1908) (*Diary of a New Chum* traduit en français) 69 p. 65F  
*Récits du Bush*, trois nouvelles australiennes 60 p. 150F  
*Paul Wenz (1869-1939), sa vie, son oeuvre*, notice bio/bibliographique + 2 textes 56 p. 100F
- Frank Moorhouse, *Un Australien garanti d'époque*, trois récits 96 p. 90F
- Katharine S. Prichard, *Coonardoo* ou *Le Puits dans l'ombre*, roman 320 p. 150F
- "Le Vagabond", *La Guerre en Nouvelle-Calédonie (1878)*, reportage 176 p. 100F

Jean-Paul Delamotte, *Amours de rencontre/papiers australiens*, recueil d'articles parus dans le *Monde* et le *magazine littéraire* (entre autres) 2 vol. 165/137 p. Photos 200F

**Collection Cartes de visite**

R. F. Brissenden, *Quelques poèmes*, édition bilingue, 200 ex. 32 p. 100F

Geoffrey Dutton, *Et voilà! Souvenirs d'enfance*, 500ex. 84 p. 150F

W. La Ganza, *Meeting her in Paris/Rendez-vous à Paris*, Poèmes, éd. Bil. 500 ex. 32 p. 60F

Maurilia Meehan, *Ah Simone ...*, nouvelle, 200 ex. 32 p. 60F

John Rowland, *Paris-Canberra 1982*, Poème, éd. bil. 500 ex. 32 p. 100F

Tom Thompson, *Hors-texte, confidences d'un éditeur* [de Sydney], 200 ex. 56 p. 100F

**Collection A l'issue  
(Trouvailles, découvertes et redécouvertes)**

Jean-Paul Delamotte, *Le Vol du temps*, novella, 500 ex. 80 p. 100F

*Allumettes ou broutilles*, 10 nouvelles, 500 ex. 92 p. 100F

*La Bourrelle*, trois récits, (couverture de Topor, publié chez Plon, 1973, sauvé du pilon) une oeuvre sans prix!

*La Place de la Concorde*, conte parisien, (vient de paraître) 6000 ex. 240 p. 120F

*Un dimanche à Melbourne*, conte franco-australien (vient de paraître) 600 ex. 240 p. 120F

Frédéric Moreau, *Un bienfait des dieux*, facétie, 200 ex. 72 p. 150F

Henri Rochefort, *De Nouméa à Newcastle (Australie)*, récit de son évasion (1874) 200 ex. 72 p. 200F



L’Université de Newcastle a été construite en forêt. Elle recouvre une centaine d’hectares dont les deux-tiers demeurent plantés. Les arbres sont, en majorité, des variétés d’eucalyptus et les arbustes appartiennent à la famille ultra-nombreuse des mimosas.

Une route circulaire entoure la partie centrale du campus. Les bâtiments de briques, largement espacés, n’abîment pas le paysage. De grands troncs s’élançant à une vingtaine de mètres des pelouses. Tantôt leur écorce est tombée, laissant le fût lisse et clair. Tantôt elle persiste et les traces d’incendies passés s’y voient encore. Parfois elle est fibreuse et comme velue. Souvent, des dédoublements, des fourches, des écarts de conduite sylvestres trahissent les origines modestes d’anciens rejetons qui ont poussé après les coupes destinées au boisage des galeries minières. Des galas blancs, des roselles multicolores ont leur nid dans les parages.

Quand on s’enfonce vers l’extérieur des terres, on franchit un pont qui enjambe la route circulaire et surplombe un ruisseau. Certains coins donnent une petite idée de la *rain forest*, la forêt tropicale, et nul s’y aventure. Les térébinthes imputrescibles dont le bois servait aux pilotis des appontements, tordent leurs branches. Les opossums strient de leurs griffes les eucalyptus au sommet desquels, pendant la nuit, ils grimpent dévorer les feuilles.

A Paris, j’aimais beaucoup Bagatelle ou, dans un autre genre, le Père-Lachaise. Lorsque l’idée de me promener sous les frondaisons de Nanterre m’est venue, je l’ai écartée, comme déraisonnable. Ici, nous explorons le parc. Flamboyants, figuiers, chênes de marais, magnolias, fougères, acanthes se succèdent. De curieuses fleurs rouges, des liliacées, poussent au bout de leur pique, à quatre mètres de haut. Le sentier goudronné s’incurve par pure courtoisie autout d’un gommier gris. Nous dépassons le domaine des ingénieurs, qui se sont installés à l’écart, en pleine nature, et se sont offert une jolie fontaine, entourée de gazon et de *Westringia*, buisson aux ombelles blanches. Nous atteignons la clairière où le bétail venait paître autrefois et les

hommes s’assemblaient en cachette, postant des guetteurs dans les branches, (les “cacatoès” parce que le signal d’alerte était leur cri), pour pratiquer un jeu de hasard et d’argent interdit par la loi, le *Two Up*, que je rattache, sans m’embarrasser de nuances, à l’antique pile ou face. Plus loin, dans le vallon, jaunissent les roseaux de l’étang. Sur l’autre versant, commence le golf des aciéries. Nous sommes au vert.

Deux grues grises s'envolent, de la droite vers la gauche, et se posent paisiblement dans les plantes aquatiques. Vision ... visionnaire, dans un contexte universitaire!

Je lisais récemment les Petites Annonces pour me délasser de Barthes et Foucault n'est-ce pas, et j'ai remarqué aux offres d'emploi: *Jardinier de l'Université*. A Newcastle, c'est un métier d'avenir.

(From *Signe de vie* 2, pp. 47-49)

### Appendix 3

## ' Le festival de Sydney'

(Pour *Le Monde*)

Le vingt-deuxième festival cinématographique de Sydney s'est déroulé du 1er au 16 juin, dans une ambiance de fête mêlée nostalgie et surtout d'enthousiasme. Il constitue une réussite éclatante, au niveau des plus vivantes manifestations internationales. Sans compétition ni palmarès, pour le plaisir des spectateurs, en signe d'ouverture sur le monde, soixante-dix films de vingt-deux pays ont été présentés.

Le cinéma français a la bonne fortune d'avoir eu huit films invités. L'Allemagne en a compté six, la Hongrie cinq, l'Italie quatre, La Grande-Bretagne et les U.S.A., déjà fortement soutenus par les circuits traditionnels de distribution, trois chacun. Notre sélection comprenait en particulier *Le Fantôme de la Liberté* (Bunuel), *La Femme de Jean* (Yannick Belon) et *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (Jacques Rivette), qui ont été très favorablement accueillis.

Mais l'évènement qu'il convient de saluer et dont l'écho lointain doit parvenir au diaspora des cinéphiles, c'est la rétrospective du cinéma australien dont nous avons eu la primeur. L'excellent critique du *National Times*, Peter McGuinness, a jugé que cette initiative était "une idée de génie"; il a parfaitement raison. Soixante-six oeuvres réparties sur soixante années, de 1911 à 1971, ont resurgi en force! L'isolement, la prépondérance américaine, l'indifférence du public ou de ses manipulateurs, les avaient pour la plupart reléguées au fin fond de l'oubli. D'irréparables destructions ont même été commises autrefois. La cinéaste Joan Long raconte qu'en 1926, pour les besoins du tournage de *For the term of his natural life* (qui coûta soixante mille livres, somme énorme à l'époque), un incendie de navire spectaculaire fut réalisé en bourrant un vieux raffiot de toute la pellicule impressionnée qui tombait sous la main et en y mettant le feu. Les efforts tentés aujourd'hui pour sauver ce qui peut l'être méritent un

hommage fervent. Grâce à eux, *The Sentimental Bloke* s'inscrit parmi les classiques du muet; un chef d'oeuvre du reportage, *Mike and Stefani*, qui depuis vingt-cinq ans attendait d'être projeté, est enfin acclamé; il retrace la vie dans les camps de personnes déplacées après la dernière guerre et décrit sans complaisance les formalités auxquelles devaient se plier à l'époque les candidats émigrants.

Pareil florilège vient à son heure. Le cinéma australien fait preuve de vitalité, nous avons pu le constater dernièrement à Cannes. Il ne manque pas de réalisateurs remarquables dont les noms devraient être mieux connus en France: Tim Burstall (*Petersen*), Michael Thornhill (*Between Wars*) et Peter Weir (*The cars that ate Paris* et *Picnic at Hanging Rock*) ... Sans oublier Ken Hannam, qui a eu les honneurs de la soirée inaugurale du Festival avec *Sunday too far away* où il évoque un groupe de "shearers", les tondeurs de moutons, des héros que rien ne fatigue, lors de leur mémorable grève (1956).

L'acteur Jack Thompson s'y montre excellent, à son habitude.

Cette faste quinzaine a eu pour cadre un cinéma des années 20, le State Theatre, dont le hall en marbre a des reflets topaze. Le monumental escalier en fer à cheval est orné de statues séductrices. Les couloirs sont parsemés de tableaux qui ménagent d'agréables surprises.

Le principal organisateur, David Stratton, qui dirige le Festival depuis tantôt dix ans, sera de passage à Paris en septembre prochain: ce serait un juste retour des choses qu'on lui fit un peu fête.

(From *Signe de vie* 2, pp. 41-43)