

# **RECIPROCITY**

**For John Rowland  
In Memoriam**

## **THE KELVER HARTLEY FELLOWSHIP ADDRESS - 1997**

by

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Among the activities undertaken by the Hartley Bequest Program is the appointment from time to time of a distinguished native-speaker of French as Kelper Hartley Fellow.

The Kelper Hartley Fellowship is intended to honour persons who have made a distinguished contribution to French cultural life. It enables recipients to make a major statement relating to their field of expertise by delivering the Fellowship address which is subsequently published and widely disseminated in both France and Australia.

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To enable this address to be heard by as wide an audience as possible, it was delivered (in slightly varying form) at two venues, the Customs House in Newcastle and the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney. The text below is the combination of the Newcastle and Sydney versions into one address as prepared for publication by the University of Newcastle, with some subsequent abridgements, indicated thus: [...], for publication in this journal.

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Thank you, Professor Hartley!

As a former migrant to Australia and a Frenchman I am deeply aware that I come from the country which owes so much to your lifetime of francophile dedication: as a writer, I am a minor but genuine product of the culture that your work and your generosity have served so well. Although I shall always feel an immature student of literature, here is my paper, dear Professor: I shall attempt to reflect a little and say a few things on matters of common interest. Mine is an emotional approach, not a scholarly one, but I nonetheless hope, under your patronage, to pass this examination.

Dean Ramsland,  
Professor Dutton,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

[...]

*Reciprocity* is the keyword of these remarks, which will attempt to pay tribute, first to the contribution made to French culture by so many Australian scholars, writers and artists; and second, to the emergence in France of a serious interest in Australian culture, often amounting to love and fascination. I shall then conclude to a personal tribute to a few figures I admire, such as John Rowland and the French (as well as Australian) writer, Paul Wenz.

First comes to mind the involvement of academics, whether native or adopted Australians. Not only renowned university professors but high school teachers as well! I cannot resist mentioning one or two I have met, which is of course unfair to so many others. But again, in such an approach as mine there is no pretence whatsoever of being encyclopaedic!

Charlie Goffet for instance... In his biographical sketch, not an easy job, Ken Dutton mentions the meeting towards the end of 1941 and the subsequent friendship of Kelter Hartley "with the outstanding teacher and 'character' Charles Goffet. A gregarious larrikin with a penchant for betting and losing large sums of money on horse-races." Both were teaching at Newcastle High, in the city dear to our hearts where my wife and I spent our first two years as migrants. We became acquainted with that irresistible old man. I remember him as a tall, lean fellow with a great sense of humour, so friendly when he passed by and knocked at the door of our small terrace house on the Hill. We knew *of course* about his passion for the *courses* (the French word for *races*): he had been slightly extravagant with his money, and there he was, so generous, always bringing some present - a bottle of wine, a gold ball-point pen engraved with my name, which I still have. And later on, how alert he was on a return visit he made to Paris, staying in a small hotel, walking around the town with his younger friend and successor Michael Taper, both wearing berets and sharing reminiscences and discoveries of people, bookshops and bistros... What always impressed me with such craftsmen, such artists of language, was their truly perfect way of speaking mine (which I could not dream of emulating in English), their complete lack of a foreign accent, which take as a sign of their adhesion, like my own, to a few good things my old country can offer.

In the highest sphere of academe and in a more remote past, the remarkable figure of A. R. Chisholm, who wrote a book of souvenirs entitled *Men were my Milestones*, stands for that matter as a milestone himself. In this beautiful book, he mentions for instance “the *Compliqués*’ lunch club in full swing, meeting every Friday at Paris House in Phillip Street...” Imagine the effect of such appellations on a Parisian aussiephile like me! The year was 1919. “Christopher Brennan came regularly and animated these gatherings...” The literary passion of this major poet (coupled as he was with an unlucky if unforgettable academic) for the work and character of the French Symbolist Mallarmé was not at all common. Professor Chisholm had this comment: “Vast as his other literary interests were, Brennan gave more attention to Mallarmé, I am sure, than to any other writer. He seemed to know him as intimately as if he had lived with him or conversed with him often; whereas we know that the two poets had never met and had only exchanged a couple of brief letters. This is the more surprising in that few people in Brennan’s time, even in Europe, knew much about Mallarmé’s life.”

May I add that I also admire Christopher Brennan because of his involvement in German literature, following his stay in Germany (thanks to a scholarship from the University of Sydney), which led to his ill-fated marriage with Elisabeth Werth.

Love of one’s native culture coupled with love of one’s chosen and adopted culture is a seductive and rewarding course to follow. Professor Chisholm shows us the way once more. Reminiscing about Sir Errol Knox, the well-known journalist, he wrote a few lines to which I feel encouraged to pay a modest but grateful tribute today: “Early in April 1940 a small group of Francophiles, including Maurice Belz and René Vanderkelen (the latter was then Consul for Belgium) decided to ask the *Argus* to give us a column every week to be written in French for the purpose of strengthening the morale of French people in Victoria and their pro-French friends [...] .”

A. R. Chisholm’s expertise was not limited to French language and literature: he spoke fluent German and kept very good memories of his stay when young in Berlin at the Institute founded by William Tilly - an expatriate Australian. He had also mastered Italian and studied both Hebrew and Arabic. No lack of intellectual gifts on his part!

But as Colin Thornton-Smith has said, “In the house of French teaching in Australia, there are many mansions...” Yes, there are many scholars, of more recent times, to whom I would like to pay tribute, starting with the University of Sydney: a few years ago, Ross Chambers; then Ivan Barko;

now Angus Martin - and of course Ross Steele, the expert analyst of French society, my guide, often my patron, amongst the intricacies of Sydney's society today.

At the University of New South Wales, Maurice Blackman, who shares my passion for Paul Wenz. And who organised, in September 1983, a symposium on *The French-Australian Cultural Connection*, which is essential to my subject.

At Macquarie, Keith Goesch, who brings his major contribution to the international dimension of François Mauriac...

I shall inevitably be unfair to others I have not had the privilege of knowing. Perhaps I may be excused if I limit myself to some members of our Association: I am thinking of the late Michael Spencer (University of Queensland), one of our early guests in the *Petite Maison* across the garden of our home, who invited Michel Butor to Australia and, in 1986, devoted an interesting volume to the *livres de voyage*, the travel books of this outstanding author... Sandy Newman follows the same pattern with Claude Ollier... John West-Sooby writes his PhD thesis on Stendhal... Patricia Clancy translates into English *La Mort de Napoléon* of Pierre Ryckmans... (alias Simon Leys, who of course is Belgian-born)...

I trust - I hope so much - they would all agree that "all in all, it hasn't been a mistake to teach French", as Ross Chambers concluded at the end of his Sonia Marks Memorial Lecture *On Teaching French*, delivered at the University of Sydney in 1992.

Finally, although such a short list is so far from being final, there is our mentor in 1974, when my wife and I came to Australia as migrants and joined the Department of French at the University of Newcastle. Such a beautiful and innovative university I had never seen in the course of my studies in France and three years spent in the United States.

The initiator who brought us there, Ken Dutton, has devoted many essays, monographs and articles to diverse aspects of our literature. Here, may I just pay tribute to his bilingual anthology *French Poetry Now*, which *Poetry Australia* published in 1984: launched in Paris by none other than Gough and Margaret Whitlam at their residence in the Australian Embassy, with the Eiffel Tower looking through the bay-window and Parisian literati discovering a new dimension of Australia...

How much time, how much work has he, Ken Dutton, passionately devoted to the shaping of the most original and generous project I have been acquainted with in the course of my life since I was a Fulbright student in the '50s: this Foundation.

*Kelver Hartley: A Memoir*, the book edited by Ken Dutton, with his exhaustive biographical sketch and the first-hand and first-class reminiscences of its contributors, reads like a Marcus Clarke novel of our age and is a convincing tribute to this lonely figure. The twenty pages of his own writing included under the provocative title he gave them - *Optimism* - gave me a shock: such heartfelt pessimism, a world divided between the Happy People and the Defeated. "Let a French boy seek with a lantern for *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, he will find they mean *bagne* [deportation]." What a fascination with independence, in this Balzacian character: "Reject all authority! See for yourself! Measure!" Tempered by a sort of indulgence, still of course set against the prevailing views, such as: "The bourgeoisie - perceived as 'knowers' rather than 'havers' - has most to give, and, believe it or not, is most unselfish."

Unselfish he certainly was, and the negationist appearance of this lonely did turn into a very constructive approach. What a striking illustration of the old saying "where there's a will there's a way".

There was a will indeed, but the way had to be cleared. It was not easy and took a long time. The memoir mentions some obstacles along the road. I was particularly interested in the suggestion made "by one of the lay members of Council enquiring whether it was absolutely necessary for the money to be spent on the study of French or whether it might not be expended instead for 'some useful purpose'." Such an attitude is fascinating, isn't it? Because we understand its motive - genuine and hopefully honest, if short-sighted: a common attitude which we may see as a challenge, summing up the civil war, the fratricidal, senseless war, between culture and the economy.

It would be an absorbing task to survey the innumerable connections between Australian writers and France: I have already mentioned Marcus Clarke and I come back to him, because I have a great admiration for his novel *For the Term of his Natural Life*, which I translated and was able to have published in French, at last - 110 years after it had become available in German!

This is another case of francophilia which I find very moving. Michael Wilding, who is an authority on the subject, tells us in his UQP edition:

“Throughout his life he regularly read new French writing.” Is it not wonderful to think that Marcus Clarke loved Balzac! “One of the earliest pieces he wrote for the *Australasian* [I am still quoting Michael Wilding] was the essay ‘Balzac and Modern Literature’ in which he proclaimed his enthusiasm for this favourite author of his, whose influence lies behind so much of his journalism and fiction. [...] In the *Argus*, 2 February 1872, he wrote: ‘Immortal Balzac. Balzac, the prince of novel writers.’ ” And Michael Wilding comments: “It was the pioneering, revolutionary aspect of Balzac that appealed to Clarke, the way Balzac had created a new literature, something Clarke was to do for Australia. And the strong element of self-identification Clarke had with Balzac led to an uncanny foreshadowing of Clarke’s own fate - the prodigious energy, the prolific output, the abortive editorial schemes, the one long struggle with debt and difficulty.” Here, are we not also reminded of Kelper Hartley, sentencing himself to a sort of banishment? Did life at times look like a kind of deportation to both of them?

To the French, deportation from 1864 to 1897 meant, in this part of the world, New Caledonia and in 1878 a tragedy occurred: the Kanaks started a revolt which was to cost them many lives. A Melbourne journalist covered the scene in a series of articles which provide a very honest view of the situation at the time. I am certain anyone currently involved in discussing, preparing and shaping the future of this archipelago would greatly benefit from reading what *The Vagabond* reported. He was not a novelist, but a gifted writer of non-fiction, born in 1843 in Staffordshire, who after many adventurous episodes in England and the US arrived in Sydney late 1875 and settled (which is a very appropriate word for him!) in Melbourne. This is where, one day in June 1976 in the old cemetery close to Parkville where we lived, I suddenly stopped in front of a grave, with a simple column where a hand holding a pen and writing on a scroll was sculpted. The inscription said: *Erected by a few friends to the memory of Julian Thomas, The Vagabond*. Actually, this is a grave which does not bear the real name of its tenant: Julian Thomas was another pen-name of John Stanley James.

Unfortunately, as far as I know, *The Vagabond Papers* are not easily accessible for reading. A valuable was put out by Melbourne University Press in 1969 but the New Caledonia episodes were not included and had to be dug out of the original newspapers when *La Petite Maison*, our small press, and Geraldine Pons-Ribot our translator, embarked upon the task of publishing them. It would nice to do something similar with the “Parisian Sketches” he sent in 1888. He liked Paris, “his favourite city after Melbourne”.

Another hero of mine is J. F. Archibald, the founder of the *Bulletin*. I know one might object: "You are telling your enlightened audience what they already know!" Certainly, but they should also know that I know and, what's more, want my fellow citizens in the enlightened circles of Paris to know! So with this forethought in mind, I now turn to Patricia Rolfe, who wrote in her beautiful *Illustrated History of the 'Bulletin'*: "He [John Feltham Archibald] developed his enthusiasm for everything French to the extent of restyling himself Jules François. [...] He loved French things all his life. He loved French food and wrote of having dinner as a young man, with a Frenchman and his Seychelloise wife, after which he went to the kitchen to see how the meal had been prepared. His memoir in *The Lone Hand* is strewn with French phrases, used with such enjoyment you have to forgive him."

I hope you do...?

After his death, the fountain his pre-Hartleyan will initiated was commissioned from the Parisian sculptor Pierre Sicard, born in Tours where a few years ago, in the local Museum of Fine Arts, I came by chance across his sketches, which were on exhibition there. Even if most people who walk around it in Hyde Park are not often aware of its meaning, I always see it as a great landmark of Franco-Australian friendship.

If Jules François died long before I was born, my wife Monique and I have known our dear Nancy very well. How could I refrain from saluting the vision and generosity, in her lifetime, of Nancy Keesing and her husband Mark Hertzberg? Even if everyone here knows... And because everyone here knows of her: the writer, the poet, the former Chairperson of the Literature Board and the donor of a lease on the studio now famous under her name at the *Cité Internationale des Arts* in Paris, just opposite the Ile Saint-Louis, where a long list of Australian writers have thanks to her, been able to stay... and write!

Yes, I must proceed. Barely mentioning the expatriate writer and radio producer Alistair Kershaw, his house at Maison Sallé near Sancerre, so pleasant in summer-time with all those books and all that good local wine from his own vineyard, *Domaine Kershaw... Appellation incontrôlable...*

Just a brief salute to artists and musicians! John Peter Russell for instance, who studied in Paris at the Studio Cormon, became a friend of Van Gogh, and moved to Belle-Ile, where he had met Claude Monet (who thought he was an American) in 1888. He returned to Australia in 1921, to die in his

house at Watson's Bay in 1930. Twenty-one paintings of his are housed in the Musée Rodin, in Paris.<sup>1</sup>

Lloyd Rees and his *Tribute to France*, a painting he did after a visit to Béziers in 1969... Lloyd Rees and Chartres in 1975... "Four and a half days I worked within the cathedral in pen and water-colour and was never questioned for doing so. The staff accepted me; I had a chair and I could even use the base of the columns as a place to put my equipment. It was a memorable experience especially when the great organ was at full volume and the whole building seemed to tremble with it."<sup>2</sup>

We had the everlasting joy of welcoming Lloyd Rees with members of his family, all ages including the recent great-grandchild, in May 1987. The master - a real one, but so simple, so warm and friendly - had an exhibition in which he opened and received an honour from our City, the *Médaille de Vermeil de la Ville de Paris*. Admiring his work as a painter is general now, but while I stand here stammering I can't help admiring equally his talent as a speaker: the Thank You speech he delivered that day, improvised, without such vulgar support as notes, was sheer delight. I sincerely wonder how one can reach such mastery...

And Australian musicians? I shall not go back to Melba and her early days in Paris, Marjorie Lawrence, Percy Grainger and his love of Ravel... but when on June 17 1989 Dame Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngne had their farewell performance at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*, our close friend and the Association Vice-President John McManus, a confirmed *mélomane*, had drawn up a long list of works from the French repertoire which they had resurrected and performed. They in turn received a high honour from the French Government, both being appointed *Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres*.

Simone Young's international career was beginning when she spent a few days in Boulogne with her husband Greg and their little girl (as she was at the time). What better example of cultural reciprocity than a conductor who brings a new Australian to the Paris scene and often performs works by French composers in Australia?

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By referring to such famous Australian visitors because they had by choice a link with French culture, we have already moved into what my dear friend and adviser Arabelle Perkins calls “the other half of the equation”.

As Lloyd Rees discovered about the French perception of Australia in 1969, while in Béziers: “All they know is *ze rugby*.” Nothing wrong with rugby: such an attitude on my part would be unwise. As a matter of fact a famous name in Australian rugby was appointed some time ago to a high position with a major French bank in France (with beautiful quarters here in Sydney’s George Street), and Arabelle was planning to contact him and get him on the Board of our Cultural Association which would surely have given us a much-needed impulse. In the 1920s Sir Hubert Opperman had won the Paris-Brest bicycle race... But what about other aspects of Australian creativity reaching, if not Béziers, perhaps other parts of France?

While they were first emerging and then flourishing, we have (generally speaking) long been cut off from them as far as France is concerned, and are still waiting for things to start moving in the right direction: a direction which I refer to as *reciprocity*.

There always was of course some real interest on our part within the area of voyages, travels, exploration then popular fiction whose great champion was Jules Verne, a writer who never set foot in this country but who used its setting for two novels, *Captain Grant’s Children*, which was extremely popular, and *Mistress Branican*. In the background, as it were, the *Bibliography of French Literature on Australia (1595-1946)* compiled in Melbourne by Politzer in 1952 remains a precious tool for any research along these lines. Moving in the right direction, as Arabelle says, a very interesting conference took place in Nanterre, at the university, in December 1987, entitled *The French and Australia from 1756 to the Present Day*, with expert contributors from both our countries.<sup>3</sup> The essays were collected and published in June 1989. It’s a great pity such a good book should be out of print as it provides an essential corpus of information for any serious bilateral involvement.

But that was a one-way track: there was no “input” from Australia. Apart from barely two stories by Henry Lawson, which were published in Paris at the beginning of the century, nothing of his work, nothing of his re-creation of Australia, nothing of that exceptional relationship between the imaginary and the real, between a country in shaping and shaping the country, nothing has yet been translated into French - and nobody but Arabelle and some of our friends care. One of the main reasons for such shortcomings is of course

that few people do care, because it is not their business. Whose business is it, then? Publishers', perhaps? But here we touch on a very tender theme...

Literature is often seen vaguely as an ideal world of creation, talent and illusion. It may have been and may still be, but in fact as you well know it is basically related to a market and, what is more, a mass market where television pulls the strings.

Jules Renard, a French writer of the late 19th century, a playwright and novelist whose diary, although edited by his widow, remains a monument - and a well visited one as well - used to proclaim that the real author of a book is the publisher.

For a long time and even to a large extent today, the world of publishing (in the English language) has been divided by law and/or regulation into two spheres of influence, two markets: the British and the American.

I would very much like to have the views of experts on this subject, but I'll venture that such a situation has had its good and its bad side. The good seems to me that far from preventing the growth of an Australian culture it served it for the simple reason that international companies implanted here needed "local products".

In the same fashion, for instance, French films at least since the '60s have greatly benefited from the involvement of major US companies such as United Artists, Fox or Paramount. Most of our renowned directors such as Truffaut, Louis Malle, Resnais, Claude Lelouch, Costa-Gavras and so on are cases in point. Although I am always shy of making sweeping statements, when talking about Australia (as you can see), I trust everyone would agree that, in addition to such insiders' achievements as the *Bulletin* and, say, the magic kingdom of Angus & Robertson, outsiders reasoned they could only benefit from the growth of indigenous talent...?

It was not so for "export". No opening there.

Let me hasten to confess that I see things from my limited and somewhat underprivileged position as a member of the non-Anglophone world... An even worse handicap, that of a Frenchman, as there are so few of us who have migrated to Australia - especially from the *métropole* (continental France itself as opposed to North Africa or New Caledonia) - while Italy or Greece or Eastern Europe are well represented.

In and outside the English-speaking world, for a long period, Patrick White has long remained the exception - but was not everything about him exceptional? Now his *rayonnement* is equalled by other major figures, in literature, film or other areas of the Arts - but they remain exceptions as well and a culture cannot be limited to exceptions.

Fortunately, between our two zones of language, slowly, painfully but also in a very pleasant way at times, encouraging signs are increasing.

Progress has occurred over the last few years. Amongst French gestures of reciprocity, for the sake of illustration, two main events may be fairly singled out in the '90s: a literary exploit, *les Belles Étrangères*, in 1990; and the Retrospective of Australian Cinema at the Pompidou Centre in 1991.

*Les Belles Étrangères* offered an opportunity to invite eleven Australian writers to France. All went to Paris and Montreuil, a close left-wing suburb receptive to culture, then the group split up to visit seven cities: Aix-en-Provence, Clermont-Ferrand, Grenoble, Montpellier, Strasbourg, St Nazaire and Toulouse. Not huge crowds perhaps, but we the Happy Few and often enchanted students of English welcomed such diverse talents as Peter Carey, Rosemary Dobson, Rodney Hall and David Malouf.<sup>4</sup>

All this had been initiated at a meeting between Tom Shapcott, at the time Director of the Literature Board, and Jean Gattegno, head of both the Centre National des Lettres and the Division du Livre (the Book Section as it is called) of the Ministry of Culture. Jack Lang - no relation to your legendary politician - was then the Minister and hosted a function in his *salons* in the Palais Royal. He was kind enough in his speech, prepared by his receptive and dynamic adviser Bernard Genton, to pay tribute to the work of a few obscure people. How unusual!

To tell you the honest and probably silly truth, I was disappointed to see a protégé of our Minister, a pop-singer, hop on the bandwagon and appear as the national literary patron of the whole exercise. At the time, in lieu of such entertainment I was hoping a tribute could be paid to Paul Wenz (1869-1939), the only significant French writer turned Australian - but it was too early. I am still waiting. I may be too early even today to call for such a tribute to my old mate, but I hope you will allow me to do it right here in a few minutes, when it's time to conclude...

In perspective, the *Belles Étrangères* was at least a kind gesture, perhaps more a sort of PR exercise (greatly helped by Qantas) than the right step

towards building up a workable connection, let alone a working one. However, all in all, a true indication of progress.

Another major operation was the Pompidou Centre Film Festival, which extended from May to October 1991 and included 108 Australian films, screened on average three times each. Its catalogue remains an outstanding reference work. Claudine Thoridnet, whom we had met at a screening of Fred Schepisi's *The Devil's Playground* in Melbourne in 1976, when her husband was Head of Renault Australia, did a splendid job, with the backing of the Centre and the Australian Film Commission. That sort of performance illustrated one of my favourite ideas: that Paris can also be a display window for Australia's genius.

A long list of initiatives inspired by reciprocity could be added, ranging from the involvement of some prestigious companies such as Louis Vuitton and Moët et Chandon to the coming exhibition of Australian Art which will balance the Palais d'Orsay one in Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane. On a more modest scale, in the Marais, the Galerie Baudoin-Lebon has been a pioneer in exhibiting Aboriginal art.

In journalism, two young women have started a bi-monthly called *Australie*, which fills a big gap in information business-wise mainly, but with a large degree of cultural awareness.

In another area, reciprocal agreements have been signed between some Australian and French universities, thanks to the vision and dynamism of some remarkable academics, amongst whom I feel irresistibly drawn to salute at least Macquarie's Vice-Chancellor Di Yerbury.

Also, lest I forget, towards the end of 1980 my wife Monique, a few friends including expatriate Australians, and I, started the Franco-Australian Cultural Association, which along the years has been so fortunate in having as its patron Margaret Whitlam, and being joined and trusted by a prestigious list of members including Australian Ambassadors, such as the late John Rowland, Peter Curtis, Kim Jones and currently John Spender as well as Dominique Girard, the current French Ambassador to Australia. I feel we should have accomplished more to deserve such a manifestation of confidence and appreciation on their part. All I can say is that within our means we have been tenaciously active: lobbying, *reciprocating*, if I may say so, offering two studios to help with short stays in Paris. David Foster last year came to one, thanks to the James Joyce Foundation.

Our small press, *La Petite Maison*, is now autonomous under the auspices of the ACFA.

I certainly wish a good-will expert would devote a little time to some sort of audit of our activity over the last decade: not so good at PR demonstrations perhaps, but on the alert nonetheless.

Time is the secret. Daily involvement matters more to us than a fireworks illumination. This is why we have greeted with relief and joy the arrival on the Left Bank of the Seine of a new Chum, Madame Elaine Lewis, originally from Melbourne, then a music teacher in Sydney, and now for a long time, we hope, based in Paris. The Australian Bookshop which she has founded was inaugurated in August and September last year. It's ideally located, at the foot of the Latin Quarter, in the Quai des Grands Augustins. It's the most important step forward along the road leading to a normal-balanced-reciprocal relationship, because what we have here is simultaneously a tool, a workshop, a meeting place, a window - in an attractive place open six days a week including Sunday until late in the evening, offering a venue for readings and talks. Yes, Elaine Lewis is doing a good job, at her own risk, financial and otherwise, without much help except from her son David ( a musician who lives in Paris) and a few close friends. She shows us the way, having provided us antipodeans at last with a direct line, a cultural connection with Australia.

So, logically, a difficult question arises: how can we help The Australian Bookshop in Paris? What else could be done? Where should we be looking? Who should we talk to? What obstacles are we confronted with? Question marks are good company and I have no ready-made answer, no categorical statement to make, no judgment to pass.

I ask myself whether there isn't perhaps an element of routine in the relationship between our two countries. I ask myself why Australia's image is so often the open spaces and endless beaches, with kangaroos jumping, koalas sleeping and native Australians as extras on a set. I suppose it could be much worse, but still...

I like asking questions. I asked the French director of a very attractive TV documentary special on Sydney youth (included in a series called *Being 20* shown at prime time on *France 2*, our main national channel) why amongst all these nice young Sydneysiders he had filmed, there seemed to be no students and why in addition to the pubs, night clubs and miscellaneous

parades I had not seen a single university campus. The reason was that universities were closed at the time of shooting.

I asked myself if that was a good answer, because naturally we are so dependent on the media for progress. Strangely, as a former production manager, I would have thought any recess period was the best time to film, when the crew does not interfere with the teaching and other activities going on.

I ask myself whether things will change a little when we have access to Australian television via our satellites, which for the time being seem to limit us to the Northern Hemisphere. Already some channels are starting to look for hidden treasures - at leisure - and not just reacting to a crisis at the hectic tempo of the news.

Turning to Government, I ask myself - shyly - whether some sort of balance in our centralised relationship with Canberra is to be wished for. Of course, I shall never dare suggest that our French Cultural services might be transferred to Sydney and/or Melbourne! In view of such discretion on my part, allow me to indulge in a little anecdote here: it happened a few years ago when our then President invited the American Professor Tom Bishop to lunch at the Élysée. Tom Bishop has been for years Head of the French Department at NYU, the University of New York - a fascinating personality, extremely dynamic and influential. Towards the end of the meal, Mr Mitterrand asked him if he had any special request. "Yes, Monsieur le Président, I have. There is talk of moving the French Cultural Services (in the US) to Washington. They have always been in New York, close to where the action is. Please have them stay in New York!"

And in New York they stayed: the move was cancelled.

Regarding cultural matters, I am not going to say that we in Paris only relate to the Cultural Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra while we remain unaware of the Australia Council. I am not going to ask for a hearing in front of the combined Australia-New Zealand-France Cultural Commission which is said to meet at regular intervals. I am not going to suggest that the Alliance Française could embark on a more bilateral approach. I shall just keep quiet... But what about dreaming of a greatly strengthened Sydney presence in Paris?

In Paris, relations with Australia are handled by a subdivision of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Affaires Étrangères*). The Head of this

subdivision is usually fluent in Chinese or Japanese and he or she only has a very small staff to help him or her. His or her (my efforts are hereby dedicated to Helen Garner) personal acquaintance with Australia may well be minimal. I hasten to say, thinking of Henry Jacolin and Jacques Manant for instance, that such is not always the case. But as a former student at Harvard, where as you know an Australian Chair has been established, inaugurated by Gough Whitlam, I can't help looking sideways.

It seems to be a well established rule in Foreign Affairs that one must not become too close to the country where you are positioned. Senior appointments are usually made for a period of three years or so. This seems to be as true in the Public Service as it is most of the time in business. How much do I long for some well qualified view on the subject!

In Paris, the staff of the Australian Embassy live on the premises, which is practical and financially sensible - things are surely not going to change but it would be interesting to know whether or not one feels a little cut off from the locals. And whether or not one wishes to feel close or closer to the locals...

Progress is often considered in terms of power, meaning money - whether government or corporate money. Expertise, imagination and sociability are often underrated. Could practitioners be taken more into account, i.e. teachers, publishers, media people, agents...? In Tertiary Education, could co-operation increase between English and other Departments? Clare O'Farrell, who wrote a book and set up a major international seminar on Michel Foucault, does not teach French. Neither does Stephen Alomes for instance, who initiated a collection of essays on modern France.<sup>5</sup>

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At this point, quietly but firmly, Monique my wife suggested it was time to come down to earth. Even at the cost of my indulging in short tales about moments, places, people we love and cannot forget in our Franco-Australian experience. In confidence, of course!

Thanks to our visitors, Paris (or rather Boulogne where we live, very close by) has provided us, within our limited range needless to say, with both a foretaste and an aftertaste of Australia culturally speaking Monique and I would probably never have met on friendly terms so many talented

Australians if we had remained in our own little niche in Australia, where so many instances of doing much better than us can be found, both on the Australian and the French sides. At home, we have had a great (Aussie) life. Limiting myself to one memory, on one (a painful exercise), I treasure the evening when Bob Brissenden came to dinner, bringing instead of flowers or wine his poem *Verandahs*, dedicated to Monique...

*They don't build houses like that anymore - not  
With verandahs the way they used to: wide verandahs  
Running round three sides of the place, with vines  
Growing up the posts and along the eaves...*

Bob Brissenden died in Canberra on 7 April 1991.<sup>6</sup>

From the Federal capital we have a fragmentary or kaleidoscopic view which we cherish. Yes, we are aware that Canberra is the seat of Government, the Ministries and Parliament, but for us it is felt most of all when you drive from the peaceful airport to University House. We are in love with the quadrangle, its pool, its trees, the *Boffins* restaurant where you have breakfast or meals, the lawn where you eat outdoors when the weather cares... but also the reception desk, the shop - and the Library. Indeed one of the major mornings of my whole life was when I entered the reading room and unexpectedly found Margaret Whitlam browsing through the *Canberra Times*. She had come from Sydney to join us, so Monique and I joined *her* in a Government car which took us to the Lodge where Mr Hayden honoured me with an Order of Australia.

The French ambassador, Philippe Baude, was there too and that same evening we had dinner at his Residence: a place in Canberra of special meaning to us, thanks to our hosts, their guests, and the warm and fortunate moments we spent there on a number of occasions (including our most recent visit in November '96, at the invitation of Dominique and Maud Girard).

Sadness also lingers... When we arrived at University House, with Laurent de Gaulle, we found a note waiting for us: Alec Bolton died yesterday. We were to have dinner with him and Rosemary Dobson his wife the next evening. We went to his funeral instead, two days later. We admired him as we admire his work: the rare books he printed with his *Brindabella* Press. They will remain as works of art on bookshelves and in bibliophiles' cabinets.



Amongst them will survive *Granite Country*, a collection of poems by John Rowland: one of the major figures in my life, because of his outstanding mind and his kind heart. Also the first Australian ambassador who welcomed us in what was then the official Residence, in the rue Las Cases. You entered this 18<sup>th</sup>-century mansion after having crossed the paved courtyard and walked up the steps of the *perron*. On the other side was a tiny garden overlooking the playground of a girls' private school... as see in *Paris-Canberra 1982*:

*...Sainte Marie des Invalides, a school  
For daughters of the well-born and the rich:  
Shrill in pinafores and pig-tails  
They toss balls chase each other  
Across a square of mud under the chestnuts  
Round a fenced lozenge of Parisian flowerbed.*

What a seductive, simple entry to Australia this was, in the midst of Proust's Faubourg St Germain, close to the National Assembly, the Hôtel Matignon (the Prime Minister's base, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century mansion with the biggest private park in Paris), the Quai d'Orsay (Foreign Affairs), other ministries - and, let me say, in the heart of the quarter inhabited by publishers, literati and film people, who gladly answered invitations from John Rowland (or Peter Curtis who succeeded him before this enchanting place was put on the market and sold) to meet Colleen Mc Cullough, Paul Cox or Frank Moorhouse...

*The house we live in, Hotel de Mortemart,  
The family which according to Michelin  
Provided Madame de Montespan to Louis XIV,  
Only vestiges of the chateau remaining  
In the village of that name, south of Limoges.*

A parallel to Australia, in the same poem:

*Burst free!  
Blue brilliant days  
Glitter in a wide air, over plains  
And furthest ranges folded blue and white  
On a horizon glowing like a furnace.  
That shallow soil is mine: my roots are there  
And only there  
Am I attuned, have I same right to speak.  
Its chaos of voices are mine, its unshaped future:  
A breadth of air in which I can breathe free.*

John Rowland died on the last day of 1996. Not in the memory of many amongst us.

Regarding Sydney I need a whole speech (to be delivered at The Australian Bookshop in Paris, of course). The best I can do otherwise is to refer you to my diaries which should be published complete (a rather exhausting job) in a limited edition of 200 copies around the year 2031.

Between the ferries, the parks, the libraries - ô Mitchell, ô Fisher! - the universities, the Opera House, the State Theatre, all our friends' houses, all the suburbs we love, all the pubs and restaurants we have enjoyed...My God, the restaurants...

I can hear my faithful adviser: *quiet please!* So here is a compromise, restaurant-wise: not *EJ's*, the *Riverview*, the *Bellevue*, the *Mixing Pot*, the *Royal* at Fiveways, the *Orient* in the Rocks, *Doyle's* at the fishmarket... No! Let's go to the *NSW Art Gallery*. Each time I enter, I must confess I do not rush to see my favourite paintings, I do not silently pay tribute to McCubbin, Tom Roberts, Lloyd Rees or Brett Whiteley: I look up towards the glass panel on the floor above, and the table where I met Frank Moorhouse for the first time, on 3 October 1975.

Later on, Frank visited us in Melbourne, the following year, when we were living in Parkville, close to the Baillieu Library where for the first time, sightseeing along the stacks and feeling as much at home as Henry Miller in the Villa Seurat, I came across *L'Écharde* - "The Splinter" - my fatal encounter with a Paul Wenz novel...

At the time, 1976, La Trobe University Media Centre provided me with a rare opportunity to screen many old Australian films, and I have been waiting all these years to say publicly how fortunate I was to be some sort of Senior Tutor with a Chairperson such as Patricia Edgar.

But in addition to our ties with many dear friends, and in addition to Chloe - whose portrait is a great symbol of what Melbourne has also offered us - we treasure a certain link with a very special place, the Windsor. You know, sometimes, as a migrant you feel like getting closer to the country which has been hospitable to you; sometimes also you are conscious of the years which have gone by and you want to relate to a past which you have not known but feel to be still alive. Perhaps in Australia even more than in France, we have been made aware of the dimension and presence of time.

The Windsor is for me a fascinating place and I have written a whole novel set there, which even Arabelle has not read.<sup>7</sup> When we were living in the neighbourhood, we only went there once, for brunch on a Sunday. Since those glorious days, I have stayed there three or four times, even one weekend in the *Duke of Windsor Suite*, imagine that! But always with a special feeling of naturalisation.

[. . .]

Yes, I should stop here... but please allow me to mention Forbes, for a special reason! Forbes (NSW) is special indeed, because of its own charm as a country town, with the Lachlan River flowing by, the feeling of space, the charm of some old hotel...But also to us, because it is the heart of Paul Wenz country: his memory lingers around the hospital where he died and in the cemetery where he is buried (no offence to Ben Hall who stars there). A Paul Wenz Park now pays tribute to him. And *Nanima*, his homestead is nearby, halfway along the road to Cowra.

Such an honestly beautiful place, *Nanima*!

Paul Wenz, formerly the Master of *Nanima*, is in our eyes the perfect symbol of cultural links between Australia and France. Our friends and by now a few hundred readers all know that he was born in Reims in 1869. He first came to Australia in 1892, liked it, worked as a jackaroo, and settled in 1898 when he married Harriet Dunne, whose father owned the *Netley* station - one million acres or so around Broken Hill. The young couple had the new house at *Nanima* built, it is still there, as beautiful as it was, and I remain forever grateful to the Bruce family who have so often welcomed us there.

Thanks to him, we have direct access to your country: to you.

Although there are no limits to the audience they could gain and deserve, some of his stories would provide an ideal approach to the French language for Australian students. Maurice Blackman, the Wenzian scholar par excellence is, I think, involved in such a project and I hope the proper publisher will be found for it.

In English, *Diary of a New Chum* - the only book Wenz wrote and had published in English (Melbourne, Book Lovers' Library, 1908) was reprinted in 1990 thanks to Tom Thompson under his Imprint at Angus & Robertson, now his own. For the first time some stories appeared in English translation,

as well as Wenz's encounter with Jack London in Sydney and his correspondence with his friend André Gide.

I hope I won't seem presumptuous if I say of Paul Wenz what he himself said of Jack London: "I admire the man and his work with all sincerity."

Thanks to the Hartley Bequest Program, thanks to individual effort such as those I have mentioned, there is room for hope and progress. At a time when so much emphasis is put on Fear, we see moves in the right direction, an awareness of the potential for progress: for instance, a closer relationship between Sydney and Paris.

*Vive la Réciprocité culturelle!*

Long live Reciprocity!

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Ann Galbally, *The Art of John Peter Russell*, Melbourne: Sun Books, 1977

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd Rees (with Renée Free), *An Artist Remembers*, Craftsman House, 1987

<sup>3</sup> *Les Français et l'Australie - Voyages de découvertes et missions scientifiques de 1756 à nos jours*, textes colligés par André Dommergues et Maryvonne Nedeljkovic, Université de Paris X - Nanterre, 1989

<sup>4</sup> In addition to Glenda Adams, Mark Henshaw, John A. Scott (who was then living in Paris at the Keesing Studio), David Williamson, Tim Winton, Roberta Sykes.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Alomes & Michael Provis, *A Changing France in a Changing World*, Melbourne: ISFAR, 1994

<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. F. Brissenden, *Quelques poèmes*, (bilingual edition, French translations by Louise Herlin), La Petite Maison, 1995

<sup>7</sup> See below (p. 38), review by Patricia Clancy of Jean-Paul Delamotte, *Un dimanche à Melbourne - Conte franco-australien*, La Petite Maison, 1998