

BOOK REVIEWS

Wilga M. Rivers, *Down Under/Up Top: Creating a Life*, Bloomington, IN, AuthorHouse, 2004, viii + 657 pp., ISBN 1-4140-2485-1 (paperback), Aust. \$69.95.

Wilga Rivers died in mid-2007 at the age of 88. Almost two years before, she suffered a serious stroke, and, after a further setback, was quite incapacitated for a long period prior to her death. The present volume, with a preface dated 2003, was to have had at least one sequel, but the chapters already drafted and left on her computer will now go to the archives of Harvard University with her other papers. The circumstances of the volume's publication explain that it has not circulated widely outside the network of Wilga's friends, several of whom had the opportunity to read and comment on chapters in manuscript. For a number of reasons the public neglect is to be regretted, and it is a duty for *Explorations* to notice a partial record of the career of one of the most remarkable contributors to the teaching of French that this country has seen.

The brief preface entitled "Experiences and Memories" (pp. v-vii) discusses some of the problems of autobiographical writing, with references to Ruth Park and Janet Frame amongst others, before stating clearly and categorically:

In this book I have consciously restricted myself to memories and experiences that may interest and amuse my reader; the rest, more deeply personal, are for me to ponder. This book is not intended to be an autobiography, but, rather, selections from a personal journal
(p. vi).

Apart from correspondence, diaries and photographs held in abundance, the author was able, notably during her regular return visits to Australia (up till early 2005), to do documentary research and conduct interviews with friends, colleagues and former pupils. She invites responses from readers. This is—in the best sense of the word—a didactic volume, the last achievement of one who was, in a recent characterization by a North American friend, a "consummate teacher".

Some names are changed when frank comments could be interpreted as an invasion of privacy, but overall the book bears all the marks of verisimilitude. Wilga was a person of great generosity, but she was impatient with shoddy teaching and with unreflecting bureaucratic procedures. The secret of her empathy with students was a lifetime's reflection on the

business of education derived from happy and less happy experiences in Australia and other countries. The qualities of the extensive professional and academic writing she did from her mid-forties on—directness, clarity in exposition, mastery of organization—are visible here in what is only apparently a very different kind of work. To understand what drove her in a mere decade from a Lectureship in French at Monash University to a full Professorship in Romance Languages at Harvard one could do worse than read *Down Under/Up Top* attentively.

Paradoxically her book is served by the fact that it was not taken up (and boiled down) by a commercial publisher. In this case the wealth is precisely in the detail, in the profusion of information. The narrative ends at Christmas 1952, with more than half-a-century of crowded professional life still to come in Australia and North America. In recent decades we have had numerous memoirs by Australian women of their years of study at the tertiary level. Many of them have just been of chapter length, so that a discursive account of an education achieved against the deprivations of the 1930s Depression is particularly useful, and not least for the social historian. In situating her family background Wilga begins with the astonishing fact that she was the twenty-fourth and last child of a blended family (due to a complicated process of widowhood) where the oldest siblings were born in the early 1870s. Inevitably there is much about the realities of life in this country in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth. The flavour of regional Victoria, including the orchard areas on the fringe of the city, and of suburban Melbourne is rendered with an articulate power that is not found in many participants. The sympathetic but proudly Australian scrutiny given to provincial England and France in the period after the Second World War offers much perceptive commentary on cultural differences. One should not forget, of course, that Wilga was the colleague at Harvard of Laurence Wylie and that an essential part of her professional orientation was towards the social sciences. Anyone who reads, say, the chapter on “Cultural Understanding” in her *Teaching Foreign-Language Skills* (Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp. 261–285) will quickly comprehend that the rich detail provided so straightforwardly in *Down Under/Up Top* is far from artless.

It is a pity that the politicians who have been prattling so cynically and so ignorantly in recent years about the lack of “values” in Australian public education have not troubled themselves with accounts of educational experience like those of Wilga Rivers and, by extension, of her sixteen-month-older sister Linda, who was later to spend years in missionary work

in India. The minute evocations of childhood, of the time in primary schools in the Ascot Vale area, of studies at Essendon High School and MacRobertson Girls' High School in the 1930s and finally of the programmes and personalities of the University of Melbourne, not least of its Department of French, all deserve to be mulled over. A strong tradition of teaching in Wilga's maternal family no doubt fuelled ambitions in this direction, but nothing would have been realized without the support of a mother who believed in educational opportunities for girls and who was prepared to make sacrifices and seek expedients in her Depression-era widowhood. Wilga's energy and determination in the face of adversity were her own and enabled her to triumph over the notorious social elitism of the University of Melbourne before 1939.

Learning did not stop with the achievement of an Honours degree. During the Second World War and in the years immediately following, Wilga taught at state secondary schools in Kerang and Yarram before moving to St Anne's in Sale, in line with her lifelong commitment to Anglicanism. Finally, after a period working at Taylor's Coaching College, she set off for four years abroad, teaching at various locations in provincial England as well as in Douai and Montpellier, where she completed a *licence-ès-lettres* begun in Lille. In between, as a result of pleurisy, she had six months apportioned between the Hertford British Hospital in Paris and a *préventorium* near Tours. In addition there was tourism—on a tight budget—and even hitch-hiking. The detailed narrative leaves no doubt that, on top of the Melbourne M.A. she obtained in 1948 after toiling at night during her school appointments and of her French degree, she had absorbed a great deal about the niceties of teaching languages in highly varied situations. Unremitting curiosity about people and places helped, too, to prepare her for what she sensed on her return to Melbourne at the end of 1952 as a “vocation to help build up Australian education” (p. 641).

Colleagues who knew Wilga Rivers in the 1960s and later as a strong and confident personality with an air of authority may be surprised to learn of the shyness, hesitations and uncertainties she freely admits to having in her apprentice years. Eager to press home the lesson of cultural sensitivity as an essential part of the effective practice of communication in foreign languages she does not gloss over her own errors and *faux pas*. Alongside a sharp eye for the foibles of the many people with whom she came into contact and a marked dislike for laziness and incompetence, there was genuine and active charity. Like most of us she resented the absurdities of English condescension vis-à-vis “colonials”, but she could also appreciate

the qualities of the culture that was so dominant in the old Australia. However, with her part-German background, she did understand that there was more than Britishness in our heritage. The reaching out to France from childhood on was part of that.

Down Under/Up Top should not be underestimated. The temptation to dwell on memories—and sometimes to write them down—is strong for all of us who reach the once fabled three-score-and-ten. To channel them into a last and extended lesson on the substance of one's life's work is less common. At the same time, scholars seeking to grasp the reality of twentieth-century Australia will not be able to disregard an exceptionally rich document. Some people, too, may begin to recognize why the Monash University Department of French was such an interesting place in the 1960s.

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Katherine Barnes, *The Higher Self in Christopher Brennan's Poems: Esotericism, Romanticism, Symbolism*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2006, xii, 317 pp., ISBN 9789004152212, 130 euros or US\$194.

Katherine Barnes's important book, the first major study of Brennan to appear since Axel Clark's *Christopher Brennan: a critical biography* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1980), deserves to be noticed in *Explorations* even though its subject lies somewhat outside our preoccupations. There are two reasons for this. First, like many academic monographs of the new millennium, it is priced for research libraries rather than individual readers and therefore likely to escape notice. Second, Brennan was effectively the originator of the longest-lasting and most fruitful of our traditions of study of French literature. If, as Bertrand Marchal claimed in 1991, Australia is the "deuxième patrie de Mallarmé", we owe this first and foremost to Brennan's discovery of the Symbolists in Berlin in 1893. It was, and in many ways still is, a momentous French–Australian connection.

Although the volume, based on a PhD thesis for the Australian National University, is essentially a long critical analysis of *Poems*, sometimes known as *Poems [1913]* from the misleading imprint that antedates the original publication by a year, it is an exegesis grounded in meticulous study of the work's background and context. In particular extensive use has been made of the available evidence of Brennan's reading, especially in heavily annotated books held in the major collections in Canberra and

Sydney to which they were dispersed at various times in the scholar/poet's lifetime and after his death. As the title suggests, it is not just a matter of Brennan's interest in and embrace of the Symbolist aesthetic. He was thoroughly exposed to the Romantic tradition in English and other modern languages as well as being drawn to the writings on the esoteric that were current in his crucial formative and creative years from the late 1880s through to 1910 or thereabouts. The point is emphasized in two appendices that list "relevant works from Brennan's library" and "relevant works held by the Public Library of NSW 1895–1909" (pp. 281–286).

Given the philological rigour with which Brennan pursued all possible texts and versions of Mallarmé, it is a little surprising to see him apparently content with the unscholarly amateurism of many "occultists" of the late nineteenth century. There is some irony—as Axel Clark noted (op. cit., p. 25)—in the fact that the major post-Sydney research of Walter Scott, Brennan's disliked Professor of Greek, was on the *Hermetica* (cf. his four-volume edition published—partly posthumously—between 1924 and 1936). But Brennan, an adept of a stern school of textual criticism, as that term was once understood, would no doubt have savoured the modern consensus that Scott had produced an "idiosyncratic text" (see Brian P. Copenhaver's *Hermetica: the Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation, with notes and introduction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. lix). None the less, it would be quite anachronistic to expect in 1900 the sort of historical understanding and precision that have come to investigations of Hermeticism in recent generations.

Poems is, in the end, of its time, something that Dr Barnes demonstrates with great care and sensitivity. Her list of works consulted is very wide-ranging. The present reviewer hesitates, therefore, to point to the omission of his short article "Brennan and Huysmans" (*Australian Journal of French Studies*, XXXII, 1995, pp. 406–410) and of the piece he wrote with Robin Marsden on "C. J. Brennan, J. J. Quinn and the library of St Patrick's College, Manly" (*BSANZ Bulletin*, 18, 1994, pp. 173–178). The sad fact is that Brennan's heritage is so scattered that bits of it escape notice. The long-standing current bibliography produced by *Australian Literary Studies* has consistently missed Brennan contributions in *AJFS*. We are not good at looking over our neighbours' fences, an act of inquisitiveness that is essential for the progress of scholarship.

The good news is, as Katherine Barnes's book shows, that work on Brennan is far from being in the doldrums. A conference organized by David Brooks at the University of Sydney in July 2007 reinforced the

lesson. There now seems to be a good chance that long-stalled documentary tasks will begin again with renewed vigour. Apart from an edition of Brennan's correspondence we can expect—as a collaborative effort in which Katherine Barnes will have a major and welcome part—a catalogue of the books known to have been owned and annotated by Brennan. Research going back more than half a century and performed by several people needs to be brought to fruition, not least because it establishes that the preoccupation with marginalia now so fashionable in the Northern Hemisphere held no secrets for Australians a couple of generations ago. But Brennan, too, was a precursor... To read again his obituary of Mallarmé from the *Bulletin* of 5 November 1898 (*The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, edited by A. R. Chisholm and J. J. Quinn, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1962, pp. 281–284) can give us all pause in our glib assumptions about local journalism and culture.

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Christine Morrow, *Une abominable époque: journal d'une Australienne en France 1940–1941*, préface de Robin Adamson, Toulouse, Éditions Privat, 2008, 224 pp., ISBN 978-2-7089-6891-2, 17 euros.

By chance, insofar as book collectors, inveterate loiterers with intent, can ever be said to discover things accidentally, I caught sight of Christine Morrow's autobiographical volume in a shop window in the rue des Écoles in Paris in May this year. I had it added to the pile of recent historical works I was arranging to have posted to Melbourne. After its prompt arrival in June I set about finding out something about its genesis, since it seemed to me appropriate to draw the attention of readers of *Explorations* to this account of a Franco–Australian interaction.

I am not now aware of ever having met Christine Morrow (1902–1971), although her name was familiar as that of a colleague working at the other end of the continent at the University of Western Australia when I was younger. Having soon learnt that the English-language text *Abominable Epoch* was not to be had in any Victorian library, I was able—with the help of Robin Adamson—to acquire copies not only for myself, but also for Monash University Library and for the State Library of Victoria from the Western Australian chapter of the Australian Federation of University Women, the effective publishers and distributors. A very interesting document is now available to a few more of the people who should read it. The

original bears no printer's name or date, although the introduction by Walter Murdoch's widow signed on 16 October 1972 leads one to suppose that 1972, or at the latest 1973, must be the time of first release. Semi-confidential publication combined with the very real separation of Perth from the rest of the country can easily explain our regrettable ignorance of the existence of *Abominable Epoch*.

The French translation by Sylvie Pomiès-Maréchal appears in the series "Témoignages pour l'histoire" directed by Rémy Cazals, who discovered Christine Morrow through his work on the archives of Marie-Louise Puech, a notable protector of foreign women graduate students caught in France after the Armistice of 1940. It is a thoroughly professional effort by a major regional publisher, with Robin Adamson's preface in the place of Lady Murdoch's, and an annex of extracts of letters sent to Mme Puech by Christine Morrow in 1955. A few footnotes—not numerous enough, it must be said—identify some of the people referred to in the text. Due notice has been taken of the book in Toulouse, to whose history in the period 1940–1941 it makes a genuine but quite personal contribution. The word *journal* has to be taken literally. This is not a rounded narrative, despite a clear enough progression, but a series of diary entries and impressions. Their sharpness and their perceptiveness make the value of this testimony of life under Occupation. Would that our political leaders understood that their participation in certain foreign adventures involved them (and us) in similar fiercely resented abominations!

I hope to return to Christine Morrow and her "only thesis to be published and defended by a British subject in France, between the Armistice and Liberation" (*Abominable Epoch*, p. 83) in a study on graduate students abroad for the series "Immigrant Communities of Readers and Writers in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" published by Monash University's Centre for the Book.

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Laurel Clark, *F. F. Baillière, Publisher in Ordinary, Publisher Extraordinary*, Canberra, Mulini Press, 2004, [x] + 60 pp. + 55 pp. of appendices + 6 pp. of index, ISBN 0975 1784 2 3 (Bibliographica Historica Australiæ n° 14).

Ferdinand François Baillière was one of a number of significant figures in the nineteenth-century Australian book trade for whom substantial private or

business records were not preserved. In his case the reason may well lie in the facts that he was killed in the Jolimont railway accident in August 1881 and that the business he founded after his arrival in Melbourne in 1860 was not continued. Anybody writing about his life and his career in the trade is faced, therefore, with considerable handicaps. By close attention to available public documents and to the secondary literature on the Australian book world in the nineteenth century Laurel Clark has succeeded in filling out what we know about Baillière's bookselling and publishing activities. In this she has gone considerably further than the late Jean Rosemberg was able to do in one of the chapters of his Monash M.A. minor thesis in French of 1985 (appropriately acknowledged here on p. 50). Indeed the starting point for Laurel Clark's research was her own M.A. thesis in Bibliographical and Textual Studies at Monash. However, the present monograph extends and systematizes her earlier work and provides in this way a conspectus of Baillière's efforts in publishing in particular. The 55 unpaginated appendices listed on pages 58–60 include many title-pages of works issued by Baillière during his two decades in Melbourne. A foreword (p. [vii]) by Edouard Prévost-Marcilhacy, a great-great-grandson of Jean-Baptiste Baillière, founder in Paris of the great family firm with exceptional international ramifications, underlines the significance of this Melbourne link in a chain of medical publishing and bookselling. It is clear that F. F. Baillière's business was much diminished by the time of his death, but whether his unfortunate involvement with J. G. Beaney, the notorious surgeon, was the sole cause is hard to establish from the sources available.

A nice tribute to Laurel Clark's achievement came in the form of an invitation to contribute a paper ("Le Baillière des antipodes", pp. 157–174) to the volume *J.-B. Baillière et fils, éditeurs de médecine: actes du Colloque international de Paris (29 janvier 2005)* edited by Danielle Gourevitch and Jean-François Vincent (Paris, Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de Médecine et d'Odontologie, 2006). Despite literals in the textual transmission, it is good to see a Franco–Australian link recognized on both sides of the world.

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