

BOOK REVIEWS

Jean-François Vernay, *Panorama du roman australien des origines à nos jours*, Paris, Hermann, 2009, ISBN 978-2-7056-6803-7, 250p., rrp 25 €.

Born in New Caledonia of an Australian mother and a French father, Dr Jean-François Vernay is a very active young scholar specialising in Australian literature. He recently completed his doctorate at the Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail with Professor Xavier Pons, where he carried out research on the novelists Peter Carey and Christopher Koch, and his thesis on Koch was published in New York in 2007.¹ He has also published articles and book reviews on contemporary Australian fiction in journals such as *AUMLA* and *Antipodes* and serves as an international advisor and board member for the Australian Literary Compendium online project.² He is currently teaching at the Institut universitaire de formation des maîtres in Nouméa.

This new publication, the first survey of its kind to appear in Europe, is an ambitious attempt to give the French reader a thorough overview of the history and extent of the Australian novel. Though necessarily selective, the book is scholarly in its approach and does its best to avoid becoming merely a list of books and authors. In an interview published in *The Age* earlier this year,³ Dr Vernay says he did not want to establish a canon, but to put readers in a position where they can make their own choices: 'I thought it would be a novelty in Australia that the book is a continuous account of Australian fiction trying to break up the evolution of the novel into six different stages and also give a sense of unity and some explanation for the metamorphosis of the Australian novel over the years. I am trying to show the echoes in Australian literary history.'

Although the actual text is less than 230 pages long, Dr Vernay manages to achieve his ambitious aim, and avoids monotony by adopting a conversational tone with the reader and by applying a metaphorical approach derived from cinema, giving us the equivalent of a trailer ('*Bande-annonce*') in place of a foreword, a series of close-ups ('*Gros plan*') or low angle shots ('*Contre-plongée*') on selected authors or books, as well as more panoramic views of important themes or periods, and finally a 'documentary' on the history of publication in Australia. At the end of the book he includes a chronology of important events in the history of the Australian novel, a fairly complete list

of Australian novelists with dates of birth and death, and a good bibliography, including a list of relevant internet sites.

Dr Vernay's panorama strives for completeness, and he offers a number of interesting highlights along the way: the importance of women writers in the first growth phase of the novel at the end of the nineteenth century, and again in the second half of the twentieth century; the contribution of non-anglophone writers; the expression of aboriginality in the novel by both non-indigenous and indigenous writers; and a detailed analysis of the most recent trends, such as postmodernism and grunge fiction. Although giving priority to literary fiction, he is fairly scrupulous in covering popular fiction as well. This makes all the more surprising the complete absence from his study of certain writers who I would have thought deserved to be included, if only because of their high international profile. The absent writers who come most readily to mind are Morris West, Colleen McCullough—both of whom are mentioned in the blurb on the back cover but figure nowhere in the book—and Peter Corris, with his twenty-year saga of novels featuring the world-weary detective Cliff Hardy. This last omission is especially surprising, considering that Dr Vernay pays great attention to other voices of the gritty, urban, dystopian alienated novel.

If I may be permitted a final quibble, it would be wonderful if, in any future edition (which this book surely deserves), a few minor but unfortunate misprints could be corrected: I am thinking, for instance, of the name of a famous Australian prime minister, which is given as 'J. B. Chiefly' on page 53, or the date of Leichhardt's fatal expedition, given as 1948 on page 94.

But these errors and omissions aside, the *Panorama du roman australien* is a remarkable achievement which promises to raise awareness of the Australian novel in France and Europe, and I am sure Dr Vernay still has much to contribute to this task.

Maurice Blackman

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Notes

- 1 Jean-François Vernay, *Water From the Moon: Illusion and Reality in the Works of Australian Novelist Christopher Koch*, New York, Cambria Press, 2007.
- 2 For more information about this project, whose partners are the ABC, RMIT and UTS, see <http://www.australianliterarycompendium.com>.
- 3 'French take on the Australian novel', *The Age*, 14 February 2009.

Xavier Pons *Messengers of Eros: Representations of Sex in Australian Writing*, U.K., Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, ISBN 978-1-4438-0523-0, 360 p., rrp £ 29.99.

Any reader attracted by an investigation of the literary representations of sex, eroticism, obscenity, pleasure and desire (and, frankly, who isn't?) will be excited by this new book. As luck would have it, I started reading Xavier Pons' *Messengers of Eros: Representations of Sex in Australian Writing* after submitting myself to a dire regime of catching up with Georges Bataille's harrowing works, such as *Ma Mère* and *Le Bleu du ciel*. This coincidence prepared me to fully appreciate Pons' musings on eroticism and death, sex and abjection, and his reliance on Bataille's views about sex and literature. But being familiar with Bataille, Étiemble, Foucault, Kristeva or Roland Barthes is not a prerequisite for readers to enjoy *Messengers of Eros*, even though it undoubtedly spices it.

French academic Xavier Pons (not to be mistaken for the rally driver by the same name!) is a long-standing, astute observer and commentator of Australian society and literature. He brings his considerable knowledge and insight to bear into this book (written in English), a thorough, racy, well-informed, at times amusing, investigation of concepts such as sex and transgression, sex and ethnicity, sex and post-colonialism, not so much in their historical reality as in their literary representations. This is Pons' first full-length book of literary criticism since the 90s, and will be read with added interest as the culmination of a distinguished career devoted to Australian cultural and literary studies.

One of the most fascinating contributions this substantial book makes to Australian literature studies and literary sex studies (do 'literary sex studies' actually exist?) is its blend of French and Australian intellectual endeavours, making this essay quite unique. In short Pons speaks from the rare position of both an outsider and insider, a knowledgeable researcher of all things Australian. This time he covers a lot of terrain not only in terms of the range of Australian literature studied here, but also in terms of his forays into the manifold aspects of sex and literature, including Australian fantasies and masculinities,¹ homoeroticism, or gender and ethnicity in a postcolonial context. Australian literature of the last thirty or forty years illustrates and

supports the multitude of points Pons makes on the way. It will be hard, but all the more stimulating, for any one reader to be familiar with the numerous authors Pons examines as he ‘shine[s] some light on some perhaps neglected corners of that vast construction site that is Australian literature rather than explore[s] its full extent’.²

Xavier Pons rejects any naïve reading of literary works as a ‘mirror carried along the road, as Stendhal would have it’³ which would reflect sociological analyses: literature ‘is not the thing in itself, but a representation and thus a re-creation of it’, and is therefore ‘always ideologically loaded’.⁴ If his investigation isn’t meant to reveal anything about Australia, perhaps it will reveal a unique Australian way of representing eroticism.

The first five chapters (‘Reservoirs of Desire’, ‘Transgressions’, ‘Sex and Literature’, ‘Australian Fantasies’ and ‘Australian Masculinities’), ranging in truth from the pedestrian to the witty and enlightening, embark on a methodical synthesis of fundamental notions which form the groundwork for more original examinations of sex and literature in subsequent chapters. The author deals with issues pertaining to literary representation in general, with Australian culture and literature emerging slowly to become his main focus. Firstly he establishes that desire is always frustrated whichever way you look at it as a ‘mark of our incompleteness, of our imperfection’.⁵ Desire is necessarily tied to gender and power relations, often to a loss of freedom, particularly in post-colonial cultures such as the Australian one. Owing to the climate of censorship in Australia prevalent well into the 1960s⁶ literary representations have been at pains to extol eroticism’s ‘chief purpose, which is the pursuit of ecstasy’.⁷ At any rate representations of desire are always about the ambiguities and violations inherent to the subject of sex and literature, so that censorship, Pons contends, might have stimulated Australian authors’ inventiveness and ‘done a favour to Australian literature’.⁸ In his view, present day transgressive representations of sex have more to do with the fight against the commodification of sex⁹ than with ethics.

Yet a negative view of sex, confirming stereotypes of prevailing ockerism,¹⁰ misogyny and puritanism (of which Henry Lawson is a prime example) seems to infuse Australian writing. Xavier Pons relates this to the long-lasting effects of the convict origins of the country. In his description of the Australian context Xavier Pons duly avoids the pitfalls of confirming stereotypes under the guise of denouncing them. The author shows a laudable sensitivity to

ethnicity and the Aboriginal situation (see Chapter 16) whose literature treads the fine line 'between artistic and social responsibility'.¹¹ And again the range of citations and texts brought to bear on Pons' conjectures clearly demonstrates the array of imaginative strategies employed by Australian writers whether of Anglo-Celtic origins or not, in order to challenge and question stereotypes. For their part, non-Anglo-Celtic writers usually complicate the picture by 'superimposing another visible difference onto the visible difference of the sexes [...] with love hopefully taking over from imperialism'.¹²

Literary criticism of the treatment of sex and literature *per se* occupies subsequent chapters, with analyses of specific authors. As evidence of the wide scope and appeal of *Messengers of Eros* here is a list of the main authors analysed, bearing in mind that many other writers are also cited: Justine Ettler, Linda Jaivin and Andrew McGahan in Chapter 6; Norman Lindsay in Chapter 7; Katherine Pritchard and Xavier Herbert in Chapter 8; Beverley Farmer in Chapter 9; Thomas Keneally, Richard Flanagan and Philip McLaren in Chapter 10; Christos Tsiolkas in Chapter 11; A.D. Hope in Chapter 12; Christos Tsiolkas again and Peter Carey in Chapter 13; David Malouf in Chapter 14; Lilian Ng and Nikos Athanasou in Chapter 15; Faith Bandler, Mudrooroo [Colin Johnson], Archie Weller and Wesley Enoch in Chapter 16.

The concluding chapter asks whether the points made thus far, and the evolution of Australian literature with regard to the depiction of sex, are in any way typical of Australia. This requires of course an investigation of whether there is any identifiable Australian way of writing about sex, a universal topic, or, for that matter, any identifiable Australian way of writing about anything. (This discussion about Australianness is most welcome, and could possibly have taken place in the introductory chapters so as to clarify why the subject of sex and literature in Australian writing is of particular interest.) Confronted with the various responses to such a question and the diversity of Australian writing, Pons speculates that Australianness 'is bound to be a partial, relative and limited notion'.¹³ There is no Australian quintessence. Sure, Australian misogynist culture has been attributed to its 'regrettable ancestors'¹⁴ of the convict and Victorian ages. But even generalisations such as 'it could perhaps be argued that Australia's literary treatment of sex has been somewhat lacking in refinement, somewhat inclined to coarseness',¹⁵ are tempered by the realisation that there is a universal association between sex, abuse, dirt and offence. The common threat Pons foregrounds at the end of his examination is Australian

writers' tendency to 'emphasize the bitter at the expense of the sweet' as they interpret a culture and its discontent.¹⁶

So after all, there is no specific Australian way of tackling this immense subject, just a multitude of subjectivities. In this book Xavier Pons does ample justice to (almost) all of them.

Hélène Jaccomard

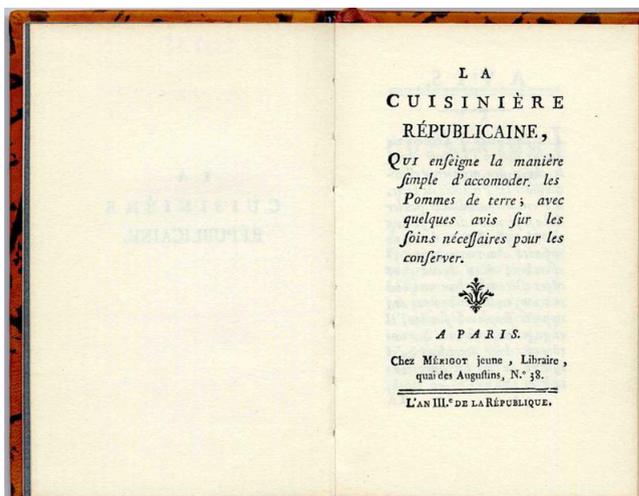
The University of Western Australia

Notes

- 1 See Chapters 4 and 5.
- 2 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 7.
- 3 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 2.
- 4 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 39.
- 5 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 35.
- 6 *Messengers of Eros*, pp. 75 sqq and 83 sqq.
- 7 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 41.
- 8 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 56.
- 9 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 53.
- 10 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 82.
- 11 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 337.
- 12 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 312.
- 13 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 343.
- 14 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 347.
- 15 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 344.
- 16 *Messengers of Eros*, p. 350.

***La cuisinière républicaine*, Paris, Mérigot jeune, An III [1794-1795]. Reprinted Luzarches, Morcrette, with a short historical essay by Daniel Morcrette, 1976.**

The Friends of the Baillieu Library have recently purchased a copy of *La cuisinière républicaine : qui enseigne la manière simple d'accomoder les pommes de terre ; avec quelques avis sur les soins nécessaires pour les conserver* for the University of Melbourne. This edition contains the text written by Madame Mérigot with preliminary and concluding pages by the publisher. It is a delightful volume for many reasons. It is tiny—at 15 x 10 cm, it is just the right size for slipping into the pocket of an apron—and consists of forty-two pages, to which the publisher has added nine of an *Éloge de la pomme de terre et de Madame Mérigot* and eighteen of *De quelques façons antérieures d'accommoder les 'truffles'*. The original text is reproduced in facsimile on white, while the introductory essay is on blue and the historical account on red paper, the whole forming a tricolour. The volume is as pleasing to the touch as to the eye. On the seductively soft brown leather cover a golden Phrygian cap surmounts a laurel wreath enclosing the words: '*Paix aux chaumières*'.



There are problems with the added material. The reference to Bauhin's *Prodromus theatri botanici*¹ provides a translation into presumably contemporary French whereas the edition referred to is in Latin; the name of the author of *École du jardin potager*² is misspelled. Overall, Morcrette's contributions are entertaining and instructive.

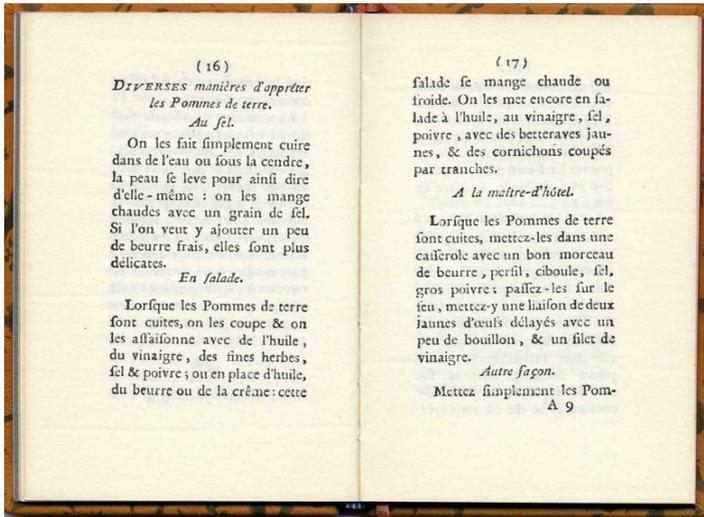
Two men are principally credited with popularising the potato in Revolutionary France: Antoine Auguste Parmentier (1737-1813) and Nicolas Alexandre Mustel 1736-1806). Both had encountered the tuber in Germany. Mustel published his *Mémoire sur les pommes de terres et sur le pain œconomique* in 1767. Parmentier, held prisoner of war for several years, maintained that he had been fed nothing else and drunk only gin, which would have left him dangerously low on calcium, but convinced him of the virtues of the potato. He produced many works on potatoes and their cultivation, including *Manière de faire le pain de pommes de terre, sans mélange de farine* in 1779 and his 450-page *Traité sur la culture et les usages des pommes de terre, de la patate, et du topinambour* ten years later. He also lent his name to several publications we can find reproduced in the 'French Revolution Research Collection' (*Archives de la Révolution française*), which is held by the University of Melbourne Library and now also available fully digitised on Gallica. They provide recipes for the preparation of '*soupes économiques*' for mass distribution to the poor. Most contain potatoes.

Potatoes needed popularising, because they had not had a good press. Since they are not mentioned in the Bible and are of the solanaceous family, they were suspect on manifold grounds. Tissot, for example, in his *Essai sur les maladies des gens du monde*³ accuses them of being especially bad for those suffering maladies of the spleen.

Daniel Morcrette is severe in his condemnation of Parmentier's attempts to encourage breadmaking from potato flour and his *Éloge* praises Madame Mériqot's focus on cooking the vegetable in various ways which do not involve turning it into something else.

Apart from being based on the use of a single ingredient, *La cuisinière républicaine* has another claim to fame as the first cookery book in French written by a woman. (*The Compleat Housewife, or Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion*, written by Eliza Smith, had been published in England in 1727 and in an American edition in 1742.) Madame Mériqot is, moreover, a mysterious figure. I am grateful to Annie Kambourian at the Bibliothèque nationale de

France for what little information I have about her. Her surname is misspelled in an astonishing array of sources and her given name is unknown. She was the wife of Jean-Gabriel Mériqot (1738?-1818), a bookseller/publisher in Paris. She died in 1820. In addition to *La cuisinière républicaine*, Madame Mériqot wrote two books on spelling, one of which is so rare it is not held even in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Madame Mériqot is enthusiastic about the potato's nutritional qualities: 'Le règne végétal n'offre aucune plante qui en fournisse de plus saine, plus commode & moins dispendieuse que les Pommes de terre. Cette nourriture est légère, facilite le sommeil & est un excellent Anti-scorbutique'.⁴ It is not clear how many of the recipes Madame Mériqot invented and how many came from others. 'French fries' certainly pre-dated *La cuisinière républicaine*, as Karen Hess has found from a document at Monticello. They were served by Thomas Jefferson (Ambassador to France from 1785 to 1789) during his time in the White House.⁵ Morcrette's short historical essay at the end of the volume provides evidence, though no recipes, for far earlier consumption, starting with Caspar Bauhin's note that people sometimes roast the tubers in the ashes, like truffles, skinning them afterwards and eating them with pepper, while others

roast them, clean them and fricassee them in a cream sauce with pepper.⁶ De Combles in his *École du jardin potager* provides a recipe in which the raw potato is thinly sliced and fried in oil or butter after having been lightly sprinkled with flour.⁷ He also gives a very tasty-sounding recipe for croquettes, as well as the information that the common people eat potatoes simply cooked in the ashes then seasoned with salt.

As Béatrice Fink has pointed out, the cook envisaged in the recipes and instructions of the *Cuisinière républicaine* is a housewife who does her own work.⁸ Fink also reports on the special place of the potato as food for the masses and the free, citing Barère's cry of 2 Ventôse Year II: '*La liberté et les pommes de terre ! La liberté et les patates !*'⁹

Madame Mérimot begins with several pages of general information and advice, including choosing potatoes,¹⁰ how to keep them¹¹ and how to cook them.¹² These last pages include such simple hints as the fact that potatoes are much harder to peel the day after they are boiled, and that it is best to cook potatoes of the same size together. Pages 13-14 contain a cautionary tale for readers addicted to potato wedges:

Les Pommes de terre cuites au four d'un poêle sont très agréables à manger ; mais la peau ne pouvant alors se détacher, la vertu somnifère qui s'y trouve agit d'une manière fâcheuse. On a vu à Besons une famille entière très-affectée de ce mauvais effet, après cet usage imprudent, continué tout un hiver.

This section is followed by some thirty recipes, many familiar to us today, including potatoes *En salade*, *En friture* (for which three versions are given, two of them for croquettes), *Sous un gigot*, and one for which this reviewer needed to consult a dictionary. *Pour faire des pets*, contrary to my first vulgar thought, tells the cook how to make small, sweet, fried doughnuts, sprinkled with sugar. They sound as delicious as Madame Mérimot's *Gâteau économe*, made from the mashed pulp of an unspecified weight of roasted potatoes, mixed with six egg yolks and four ounces of sugar. This mixture is combined with the zest and juice of one lemon and the beaten egg whites and cooked in a greased pan, so that the cake does not stick.

For this reviewer, the greatest surprise was to find the precise recipe for the potato salad that was regularly served at home—potatoes, a vinaigrette dressing and chives, combined with finely diced gherkins.

It is a shame that this book survives only in a reprint that is itself rare. Daniel Morcrette of Luzarches has published many facsimiles of books on gastronomy, several of which are held at the Monash University Library in the Alexandra Michell collection of rare cookery books. Now, thanks to the efforts of the Friends of the Baillieu Library, the University of Melbourne holds a copy of *La cuisinière républicaine*. It would be fun to take home and use.

Juliet Flesch

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Notes

- 1 *La cuisinière républicaine*, p. 4.
- 2 *La cuisinière républicaine*, pp. 6-7.
- 3 Lausanne, François Grasset, 1770, pp. 187-188.
- 4 *La cuisinière républicaine*, pp. 5-6.
- 5 Karen Hess, 'The Origin of French Fries', *Petits Propos Culinaires*, n° 68, November 2001, pp. 39-48.
- 6 Caspar Bauhin, *Prodomos theatri botanici Caspari Bauhini: in quo plantae supra sexcentae abipsoprimum descriptae cum plurimis figuris proponuntur*, Francfurti ad Moenum, typis P. Jacobi, 1620.
- 7 *École du jardin potager*, Paris, 1750, pp. 6-7.
- 8 Béatrice Fink, 'Cènes civiques, repas révolutionnaires', *The French Review*, vol. 62, n° 6, May 1989, pp. 957-966.
- 9 *Archives parlementaires*, Première série, Paris, CNRS, 1964, vol. 85, p. 312.
- 10 *La cuisinière républicaine*, pp. 8-9.
- 11 *La cuisinière républicaine*, pp. 9-11.
- 12 *La cuisinière républicaine*, pp. 11-16.

Colin Dyer, *The French Explorers and Sydney*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, March 2009, ISBN 978-0-7022-3703-4, 224 p., rrp AUS 39.95.

Colin Dyer's lively and accessible new book, *The French Explorers and Sydney*, follows on from his *French Explorers and The Aboriginal Australians: 1772-1839*, published in 2005. Dyer is tapping into a fertile historical vein, little exploited by mainstream historians of Australia, in exploring the role of the French in the early exploration of this continent. One of these roles is as observers of the new colony of Port Jackson.

The 'French Explorers' of the title are the members of several 'official' French expeditions to arrive at Port Jackson, beginning with that of Lapérouse, who arrived shortly after Captain Arthur Phillip in 1788 and spent several weeks in Botany Bay before leaving on his fateful voyage to Vanikoro. In chapters devoted to each of the six successive French voyagers who reached Sydney over the next forty-three years, Dyer plots the development of the colony from its beginnings, through its middle phase, until its maturity.

Lapérouse's voyage was commissioned by Louis XVI and was the first in a series of scientific voyages embodying Enlightenment principles. Captain Baudin's visit to Sydney in 1802, commissioned by Napoléon, was followed by that of Freycinet and his young wife Rose in the *Uranie* in 1819, then the visits of Duperrey, Bougainville, Dumont d'Urville during the 1820s, and that of Laplace in 1831. Altogether the French spent fourteen months in Sydney.

Painting with a broad brush Dyer gives snapshots of the social history of each of the periods exemplified. He dips into the French travellers' official accounts and journals, from which he quotes abundantly, to view the colony from the perspective of the French outsider. On almost all of the visits, the French officers and scientists were impressed at being feted and entertained lavishly by their English hosts. Details of numerous balls and dinners abound, sometimes amusing, but sometimes tedious in the telling. Some of the visitors remained longer than others and sustained relationships developed, such as the dalliance between Bougainville and a certain Mrs Ritchie. We learn also how the French judged their English hosts, of the cultural differences between the French and the English: for example, the French officers were astonished and challenged by the English practice whereby glasses were emptied for each toast proposed.

As well as the froth and bubble of the social life of the ruling classes, Dyer evokes other aspects of the social life of Sydney: the French interest in the native inhabitants, the life of convicts and the relationship of the emancipated convicts to the free settlers. The budding cultural life in Sydney finds expression in the play, based on Molière's *Médecin malgré lui*, performed at the Emu Plains Theatre for the French audience. The grimmer aspects of the penal colony are reflected in Bougainville's graphic description of the Parramatta treadmill. Running through the book is the thread of underlying French colonial ambitions: the Frenchmen's admiration for the flourishing English colony goes hand in hand with the sense that the French had missed their opportunity to gain a foothold on the Australian continent. In keeping with his demonstration of the growth of Sydney, Dyer's judicious choice of descriptions of the changing architecture and landscape around Port Jackson shows a small settlement expanding into a large metropolis, together with the development of the satellite and outlying towns of Parramatta, Camden and Bathurst.

Dyer's book is aimed at the general rather than the specialist reader but there is much to interest all those wishing to read about the early days of the colony. However, although we read much of interest about the colony and how it appeared to the French, we are left with a curiously lop-sided impression, as we learn little about the French themselves—why they came to Sydney, what they wished to accomplish there. Their work of exploration and science is hardly mentioned and we are left wondering why they had come so far, and also what the English thought of *them*.

Margaret Sankey

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Charles Sowerwine, *France since 1870: Culture, Society and the Making of the Republic*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, ISBN 978-0-23057-338-3 (HB), ISBN 978-0-23057-399-0 (PB), 576 p., rrp HB £ 55.00, rrp PB £ 19.99.

The country of *le gros rouge qui tache* and *le petit noir* is the France that we love to love, yet there are other sides. There is the France torn apart by fratricidal war and revolution; between 20,000 and 30,000 people were killed in the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871. There is the France of desperately poor peasants and workers in the nineteenth century and beyond; in 1954, just over half of homes had running water, and only a quarter had indoor toilets. Under France's flag over 75,000 Jews were deported 'with bureaucratic precision' (in Charles Sowerwine's words) to their deaths in concentration camps in the Second World War. For the glory of 'greater France', Algerian nationalists were tortured in the 1950s. Today there is the France of brutalist suburban architecture, the venue of social disturbances and violent racial confrontations.

France remains a paradox, and historically has always been so—a country that once prided itself on being the 'eldest daughter of the church' became the 'mother of revolutions'. Sowerwine, Professorial Fellow in History at the University of Melbourne, explores the paradoxes in *France since 1870* which has appeared in a second, updated edition, a work historiographically astute for a scholar and accessible for the general reader.

One of the book's merits is not only to address traditional questions: the legacy of the Revolution, social changes in city and countryside, France at war, quarrels between church and state, the roller-coaster ups-and-downs of socialism. Sowerwine also examines issues that traditionally received relatively little attention in surveys, such as the history of women. This indeed is one of his specialities, and among his earlier books is *Sisters or Citizens? Women and Socialism in France since 1876*, which has also just been reissued. In the 1870s, in the land of 'liberty, equality and fraternity', sisters were second-class citizens—women lacked the vote, their husbands legally controlled their property, they could not act as witnesses for baptisms, marriages or deaths, paternity suits were forbidden, and popular opinions relegated a woman to the role of adoring wife or libidinous mistress. Republicans in 1870 established a polity that was a real 'fraternity', a contract among males in a public life from

which women were largely excluded. Many socialists shared these views—‘Prostitute or housewife, no other choice’, said Proudhon—and generally opposed suffrage for women for fear that, influenced by parish priests, they would vote for the socialists’ opponents. In *Sisters and Citizens*, Sowerwine analysed the relationship between a feminism that numerous socialists in the 1800s and early 1900s castigated as bourgeois and a socialism that feminists felt was misogynist. His textbook brings us up to date, and shows the road still to be travelled. By the 1990s, French women enjoyed equal literacy to men, and pay that was almost two-thirds that of men. However, women held less than 10 percent of seats in parliament, and inequality has remained despite calls for ‘parity’. The candidacy of Ségolène Royal for the Élysée in the last presidential election marked a big step forward, though press reports including tittle-tattle and photos of Royal in a bikini revealed the different attitudes towards men and women in the public sphere

The history of women is a major subject in Sowerwine’s book, but his coverage is broad. *France since 1870* seamlessly integrates politics, economics, social and cultural developments, colonial conquests. A student finds engagement with the major interpretations of history. The book conjures up Zola and Dreyfus and all those other ‘great men’—and ‘great women’—but also peasants and proletarians, office-workers and migrants. The book resonates with the ‘Marseillaise’, the ‘Internationale’ and the ‘Chant des Partisans’. It echoes, too, the author’s own experiences: Sowerwine mentions that when he worked in a Peugeot warehouse in 1963, he discovered that the ‘eight-hour day’ was longer than the prescribed hours. He draws on his interviews with Yvette Roudy, a leading feminist (and future minister) in the 1970s, and his interpretations of the 2002 presidential elections are shaped by his conversations in Paris streets.

In the last decades the French have been confronting immense problems. Sowerwine cogently identifies three ‘icebergs’, as France confronts the record of Vichy and Algeria, works through issues relating to migration and multiculturalism, and struggles with a changing world economy and its crises. This work offers an excellent compass for navigating through the last century and a half of its history to chart the emergence and evolution of these contemporary challenges.

Ann Galbally, *A Remarkable Friendship: Vincent Van Gogh and John Peter Russell*, Melbourne, Miegunyah/MUP, 2008, ISBN 987-0-5228-5376-6, 327 p., rrp AU\$ 49.95.

It was indeed a remarkable and unlikely friendship: Van Gogh, the poor, intense, self-doubting Dutchman whose whole character and thinking had been shaped by religion, and John Peter Russell, the handsome, athletic, atheistic Australian adventurer of independent means.

Ann Galbally begins her fascinating study of their relationship in an intriguing way by imagining Russell's thoughts in November 1886 as he paints Van Gogh's portrait, which now hangs prominently in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. Here it is not the differences but their common total commitment to art, their disdain for what was fashionable, and the passionate natures that they instinctively recognised and found attractive in each other. Russell also wonders whether their plans will be realised, for example, Vincent's dream of setting up somewhere in the countryside with Russell and others in a kind of artists' brotherhood. The broad outline of the remarkable friendship is thus sketched in the opening pages, to be elaborated in the later, more traditionally biographical chapters, leading up to the meeting of the two men at Fernand Cormon's atelier in Montmartre.

Van Gogh's background is, of course, much better known than that of Russell, who was born in Sydney in 1858 into a Scottish engineering family. He was sent to England, to also become an engineer. Although his heart certainly was not in it, the practical skills he learned were to be very useful to him. While in England he did a few watercolours of no great merit, but when his father died suddenly in 1879 leaving him a considerable income and the freedom to do as he wished, he went back to England and enrolled in the relatively new Slade School under Legros (1881). After being a pupil there off and on for three years, he went to Paris to study under Cormon. There too, his seven years of study were broken with frequent holidays and painting trips. Van Gogh, who was self-taught, drew and painted furiously for the two years he spent there before leaving for Arles; after that, their only contact was by letter and exchanges of paintings and drawings.

At Cormon's, they were also drawn together by the fact that both were older than the other students and admired the work of Jean-François Millet,

who was out of fashion at that time. Both had to let go of more academic aspects of their previous training and open up to the new influences around them, especially in the treatment of light and colour. Professor Galbally's account of this period before Russell married Rodin's beautiful model Marianna Mattiocco and settled in Belle-Île off the Brittany coast contains some fascinating insights into the life of a Parisian atelier, especially at the beginnings of post-impressionism when the struggles and growth of factions are mirrored in microcosm in the students at Cormon's.

As hardly any of the more famous Australian painters of the period had first-hand contact with the French impressionists, Russell's meeting and friendship with Monet (a major influence) and Rodin, his acquaintance with Sisley and Matisse are especially important. During his earlier travels, Russell had collected examples of Chinese painting and Japanese woodcuts, but in Paris both he and Van Gogh were exposed to full-blown *japonisme*. It is very interesting to see their reactions, together with those of Monet and Seurat. The excellent illustrations allow us, for example, to compare Russell's and Vincent's painting of almond blossom in that style.

For different reasons, neither gained recognition or sold paintings in their lifetimes, but their friendship provided mutual encouragement and support at a crucial time in their development. It proved to be one of Vincent's few friendships that lasted. Russell later gathered a group of artists around him on Belle-Île although Van Gogh never could. In the epilogue, however, we see the emergence of Van Gogh's extraordinary posthumous fame while John Peter Russell remained in relative obscurity. It would have completed the picture to learn something of Russell's slow acceptance as a significant painter of the period and his present standing in the art world—both due in large part to the efforts of Ann Galbally.

Interest in the lives and works of Australian artists in France has increased significantly in recent years through exhibitions and publications such as Jean-Claude Lesage's *Australian Painters in Étapes*. Ann Galbally's book, including its photographs and illustrations (with provenance) and its extensive bibliography, is a very significant, readable contribution to this area of French-Australian studies.

BOOK NOTES

Aileen La Tourette, *Late Connections*, Melbourne, Ilura Press, June 2008, ISBN 978-1-9213-2505-2, 312 p., rrp AU\$ 26.95.

Late Connections is the story of Rose Kamper, a former patient of Gilles de la Tourette and his famous mentor Jean Martin Charcot at the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. Using Kamper's actual shooting of la Tourette in 1893 as a starting point, author Aileen La Tourette imagines the colourful and eventful world of Rose Kamper, her doctors and her friends, including celebrities such as Freud, Chanel and Colette. Linking documented events the author vividly portrays the characters involved, fleshes out their stories and brings to life a volatile period in the history of psychiatry.

E.L.

Pierre Grundmann, *L'instinct de la tueuse*, Paris, Hachette, April 2009, ISBN 978-2-0123-5954-3, 324 p., rrp 18 €.

Journalist at *Libération* for ten years, Pierre Grundmann lived and worked in Melbourne from 1996 to 2003 and his second novel is set in Melbourne during the Tennis Open. The setting is vividly portrayed with tennis coaches, stars and the world's best tennis journalist who manages to become involved with a blonde tennis idol and an unlikely band of gangsters planning a heist. This French/Australian view of the Melbourne tennis scene makes *L'instinct de la tueuse* an entertaining read.

E.L.