

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Jean Fornasiero and Colette Mrowa-Hopkins (eds), *Explorations and Encounters in French*, Adelaide, University of Adelaide Press, French Studies Collection, August 2010, 322 p., rrp AU\$ 39.95, CD-ROM included with book, ISBN 978-0-980-7233-6. (Electronic version in PDF format, free, ISBN 978-0-980-7233-6.)**

The foundation in 2003 of the Federation of Associations of Teachers of French in Australia, a massive project begun in 1996, has been marked by the publication of a series of studies and essays selected from a number given at the inaugural conference. This clearly required a considerable amount of planning, in order to present teachers and others with a fair and complete overview of the conference and the range of papers presented. This has been achieved by a detailed Appendix summarising the conference, its various sections and, an invaluable addition, a detailed listing of the various items on display at an associated exhibition entitled 'A French Australia? Almost'. These carefully planned displays are all too often evanescent features of a congress but in this instance, we have a permanent record.

The Federation embraces all aspects, linguistic, cultural, historical and literary, of French teaching in Australia, and the editors have been careful to include samples of each of these. They outline their approach in a detailed foreword and Editors' Note and in a lengthy appendix, 'Presenters and Abstracts'. The conference programme is also reprinted in this book.

However, readers will be drawn primarily to the essays reprinted in this volume, in some cases with quite fascinating illustrations. Sophie Moirand's survey of the French press during the street riots of November 2005 and March 2006 is a fine example of this. She has selected extracts from such diverse publications as *Le Parisien* and *Libération* to illustrate the journalists' treatment of the riots that occurred around Paris and in some of the provincial cities. Not surprisingly, the publications reflect their own political allegiances, but reporters and editors also need to inform their readers, and do so by using historical terms and images which draw on their audiences' likely recollections and education. Hence there were numerous references to May 1968 and even the Commune, but also vocabularies, informative or controversial, which she analyses and classifies, including terms such as *casseurs*, *voyous*, *manifestants*, *incendiaires*, *anarchistes*, *trotskyistes*. In so doing, she draws attention to the

usefulness of such reporting material to teachers who can draw on this vast stock of linguistic and cultural resources.

Françoise Grauby's contribution, 'Comment j'ai appris la littérature', is an interesting, at times humorous, overview of her development as a teacher and a writer. Her memories of the famous *Lagarde et Michard*, which she calls '*un guide touristique*' of French literature, will strike chords among her readers, who regarded it as a well-constructed and valuable asset in their own daily struggles to cope with the vast corpus of literary creation, preparing material for classes and guiding their students towards items of more specific interest.

At the heart of *Explorations and Encounters* lies the work of the late Frank Horner, who played a major role in restoring the reputation of the explorer Nicolas Baudin. The tributes paid to him are well earned, and his contributions to a wider and better knowledge of this hard-working but somewhat unfortunate French navigator are further developed in Margaret Sankey's inaugural lecture 'Writing and Rewriting the Baudin Scientific Expedition to the Southern Hemisphere, 1800–1804', and Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby's 'Doing it by the Book: Breaking the Reputation of Nicolas Baudin'.

Baudin's voyage was a major enterprise, both surprising and impressive in the middle of what was to prove a lengthy and bitter Anglo-French conflict. Organised and carried out in a period of relative peace, it included not only explorations and geographical surveys, but also numerous aspects of zoology, botany and geology, as well as the study of native societies. This meant that a number of scientists with differing interests and backgrounds joined the voyage, unaware or dismissive of the essential requirements of navigation and shipboard life. And it was not merely the problem of civilians faced with the demands of navigation, of shipboard discipline and the professional structure of the Navy, but the changing political and philosophical ideologies of these post-revolutionary and Napoleonic days. The scientists mostly wanted to land and work on shore, while the officers had to cope with a demanding itinerary and the threats posed by storms, currents and hidden rocks. This was a common problem on such voyages, but it was worsened by the social tensions of the times. Baudin, first and foremost had his instructions and needed to satisfy his naval superiors. Clashes were frequent and rapidly escalated. He died on

the journey home, and was thus unable to defend himself when the expedition returned to France and his reputation was all but destroyed by his enemies.

Margaret Sankey lists the various sources available to us, journals, shipboard logs, letters, illustrative material that, even after Horner's detailed work, still need to be studied and analysed in order to construct a true and fair description of the voyage. Fornasiero and West-Sooby provide us with a valuable analysis of the anti-Baudin campaign, which began during the voyage and became entrenched as time passed, culminating in a general critical viewpoint caused largely by the official account being published by the fiercely anti-Baudinist François Péron. This contribution is especially valuable in analysing and evaluating the difference between the younger officers (some of them in their teens) and the sense of superiority expressed by some of the scientists appointed to the expedition. In addition, they draw attention to the part played by novelists in undermining the role of Baudin, all too often depicted as a semi-educated authoritarian egotist.

The Baudin component of the conference leads smoothly into the sections dealing with the teaching of the French language and culture in the classroom, especially in our rapidly developing IT world. Today's teachers can lead students to explore the 'Other' by means of film extracts, as Colette Mrowa-Hopkins outlines in her contribution, or increasingly by the Internet, threading their way through an abundance of photographs of cities and countryside, detailed street maps and videos. Barbara Hanna and Alice Toohey in 'Visions and Revisions: Language Learning for Cultural Mediation' draw attention to a number of practical approaches and underline the importance of helping students to develop intercultural communications and understanding.

This is further developed in the section entitled 'Explorations in the Classroom', containing 'Les TICE : de nouveaux outils pédagogiques' by Béatrice Atherton and Iwona Czaplinski, 'Prompting Collaborative Learning with *IdeaNet*' by Bonnie Thomas, which contains a set of useful appendices, and 'Déliar la langue d'étudiants "captifs" : enjeux, écueils et fortunes d'un cours d'expression orale à l'université' by Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan.

Complex, detailed and well produced, this book will be welcomed by numerous members of the profession. It will strengthen the link between language and culture, with particular emphasis on Franco-Australian links. It should reinforce the position of French in this part of the world and be not merely read, but used as a work of reference, with the valuable addition of the

CD-ROM 'Classroom Explorations'. The Federation is off to a good start and *Explorations and Encounters* will ensure that it will continue to strengthen the teaching profession throughout Australia and beyond.

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**Anselme Ricard, *Lettres d'Australie*, edited by Peter Hambly, 'Xenographia' Series, Occasional Publication n° 1, Melbourne, Ancora Press, 2011, 90 p., rrp AUS\$ 20.00, ISBN 978-0-7326-2425-5. (Available from Wallace Kirsop, School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, Monash University, Vic., 3800, or telephone 03 9509 7570.)**

This is the first volume in the new 'Xenographia' series ('Writers and Readers from Elsewhere') launched by former editor of *Explorations*, Wallace Kirsop. Xenographia will feature writings by immigrants and travellers, generally but not exclusively on topics connected with Australia.

The reports in Anselme Ricard's *Lettres d'Australie* were originally published in the Paris newspaper *La Presse* between November 1853 and June 1856. Most of them were sent from Sydney and some from Melbourne. Ricard, a French academic with a doctorate from the University of Jena in Germany, was the first modern language appointee in any Australian university. After four terms at the University of Sydney he resigned from his poorly paid post and, having failed to find employment at the University of Melbourne, returned to Europe. He subsequently held academic posts in Prague and in America, and had a few publications to his name.

The letters eulogise British methods of colonisation, particularly the rehabilitation of convicts. Describing the social fabric of the colonies, he dwells on patterns of wildness, crime and violence, but admires the justice system and the basic fairness of the local population. Like most nineteenth century French visitors to Australia, Ricard was impressed with the rapid progress of urban civilisation in the two major cities, Sydney and Melbourne. He saw Sydney as the slower, more dignified, more elegant and more aristocratic of the two cities, contrasted with the brashness and the vitality of the Victorian capital—the very opposite of our modern stereotypes.

He admired a country which in sixty years had built mansions, churches, courthouses, ships, roads, schools, railways, banks and two universities, had

grown agricultural products, had bred livestock, had made wine and had opened coal, copper and iron mines before discovering it also had gold deposits : ‘Quel pays a jamais pu autant créer en soixante ans?’ (p. 31).

Ricard was highly sensitive to French-Australian relations, especially after the French takeover of New Caledonia, and he ridiculed the panic of the Australian press when the annexation was first announced. He was lyrical about the potential of New Caledonia but deplored the failure of the French Government to encourage its development. Another event that occurred during Ricard’s stay in Australia was the Crimean War, a conflict that brought France and Britain together. As its organising secretary, he described at length Consul Lionel de Chabrilan’s French Ball in Melbourne on 16 August 1855, a charity function to raise funds for the French troops in Crimea.

An unusually large proportion of his reports feature commercial statistics. The gold rush fascinated him but the low prices of imported manufactured goods prompted him to warn French tradesmen not to migrate to Australia, although he occasionally contradicted himself in this advice. Ricard was critical of the state of Australian agriculture, which he described as underdeveloped, and felt that this was one area in which French immigrants could make a valuable contribution, although he refrained from encouraging French farmers to come here. He was aware of the bankruptcies, the instabilities and fluctuations of the economy, largely due to the upheavals caused by the Gold Rush.

He greatly admired the Australian press (finding the *Sydney Morning Herald* a better produced newspaper than any daily in France) but his assessment of art, music and other forms of culture in Australia was less enthusiastic.

Ricard writes well, often with a touch of irony: the readers of *La Presse* must have enjoyed his vivid account of life in the antipodes. To extract these long-forgotten articles, buried in the pages of a mid-nineteenth century French daily, and to make them available to a twenty-first century readership was an outstanding initiative, for which our thanks must go to Peter Hambly, a distinguished Adelaide-based specialist of nineteenth century French poetry, who discovered them during a research trip to Paris. We are also in his debt for an excellent introduction and helpful footnotes, and in Wallace Kirsop’s, for inaugurating the ‘Xenographia’ series with these letters.