

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Nicole Starbuck, *Baudin, Napoleon and the Exploration of Australia, Empires in Perspective*, 21, London, Pickering and Chatto, May 2013, 208 p., rrp £ 60 /US\$99, ISBN 978-1-84893-210-4.**

Nicole Starbuck's book focuses on the stay in Port Jackson in 1802 of the Baudin scientific expedition and provides valuable new insights concerning the historical significance and shape of the expedition.

Commissioned by Napoleon, then First Consul, the expedition visited the shores of New Holland between 1801 and 1803. Nicolas Baudin captained the *Géographe* and his second-in-command, Emmanuel Hamelin, the *Naturaliste*. As well as the full complement of officers and midshipmen, there were twenty-two naturalists on board. The expedition had received detailed instructions from the geographer Claret de Fleurieu, from the Institut national de France, as well as a precise timetable for carrying out the exploration.

The stated aims were to chart unknown parts of the New Holland coastline, to carry out scientific investigations and to collect natural history specimens. The expedition left Le Havre in October 1800 and called first at Tenerife and then at Mauritius to renew supplies, which were acquired with various delays and difficulties. The problems encountered meant that the travellers arrived at the approach of winter, in late May 1801, at a point in the vicinity of Cape Leeuwin on the west coast of New Holland. This was more than two months later than had been proposed in the initial plan, according to which the expedition was to carry out its southernmost explorations on the coast of Van Diemen's Land during the summer. Thus, instead of following Fleurieu's instructions, Baudin decided to proceed northwards, exploring the west coast and visiting Timor, before turning south.

After a stay of almost three months in Timor, the voyagers headed south in November 1801 for the Tasmanian coast. It was a depleted expedition that left Timor: many of the voyagers contracted dysentery and other diseases, and six men died. The expedition arrived on the east coast of Van Diemen's Land in January 1802 and spent more than two months exploring and mapping the coast and collecting natural history specimens. They then turned west into Bass Strait to follow the instructions they had received to map the southern coast of New Holland. The *Géographe* and the *Naturaliste* became separated during this time and on 9 April the *Géographe* encountered Flinders, travelling

east, in Encounter Bay. After further reconnaissance of the southern coast and of the east coast of Van Diemen's Land the *Géographe* sailed for Port Jackson.

In Baudin's instructions there had been no suggestion that the expedition would in fact visit the English colony. However, the general condition of the voyagers and the need to renew supplies and carry out repairs on the ships made this option at this point as necessary as it was attractive. The *Naturaliste* had arrived in Port Jackson towards the end of April, leaving after three weeks to return to Mauritius. However, because it had taken on insufficient supplies, it returned to the English colony, arriving back at the end of June. Meanwhile the *Géographe* had reached Port Jackson on 20 June. The French ships spent approximately five months in the colony, leaving on 18 November. During this time the voyagers, as well as preparing for the next stage of the journey, continued their scientific work. This crucial period was the longest spent in any port by the expedition.

The Port Jackson period is the main focus of Nicole Starbuck's rich and informative book. She introduces her study by contextualising the French voyage to Australia in the light of Enlightenment and Revolutionary ideals, as well as imperialistic ambitions. Starbuck points out the exceptional nature of the Baudin voyage. It was the only scientific expedition to have taken place during the Napoleonic era and the author describes how it exemplifies the transition from the Enlightenment model of encyclopædic knowledge to a concern with specialisation and accuracy. Her aim is to demonstrate how 'post-Revolutionary, end-of-Enlightenment France [was] played out on the shores of Sydney Town'.

In the first chapter, 'Between Revolution and Empire: France and its Australian voyage in 1800', the author places the voyage in the context of the social and economic changes which were taking shape in France, and the burgeoning educational and scientific agenda for which Bonaparte was responsible. In this framework, the scientific voyage to Australia was to exemplify the seriousness and excellence of French science. Starbuck sees the five-month period spent in Port Jackson as being a pivotal moment in the unfolding of the expedition, enabling Baudin to reconfigure the second part of the voyage in order the better to carry out 'French scientific aspirations in the global theatre'.

The second chapter, "I should wish... to establish a few tents on shore": the Port Jackson stay', sets the context for the following chapters. It provides a

synopsis of the Baudin expedition's stay in Port Jackson, the chronology of the arrivals and departures of the *Naturaliste* and the *Géographe*, and details of the reception of the French travellers in the English colony, as well as the activities they were engaged in during their stay.

The following three chapters are centred on different areas of social interaction during the sojourn in Port Jackson. In the third chapter, 'Disciplining Passions: French naval voyagers at anchor', Starbuck sees the documentation of the expedition's stay in Port Jackson as providing a snapshot of the relationships between the members of the expedition, as well as offering an understanding of post-Revolutionary naval procedures. In her lively description, she shows how class plays an important role in the unfolding of events and how Baudin demonstrates clearly his style of leadership and his humanitarian and egalitarian attitudes during this time. After an African slave is disciplined by officers for misconduct and is tied on the shrouds of the ship for two hours, Baudin, disapproving of such treatment, forbids the infliction of punishment on board, except by his express order.

The fourth chapter, 'The French and the British: a diplomatic relationship', is concerned with the relationships between the French and their English hosts. At a time when the English and French were at war, Governor King provided the support necessary for the French expedition. Relations between the French and English were mostly cordial, and misunderstandings and conflicts were swiftly damped down because of the good relationship that had been established between Governor King and Captain Baudin.

The Baudin expedition is renowned for its documentation, both pictorial and written, of the contact with the Australian Aborigines and much has been written in particular about the contact of the expedition with the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land. In the fifth chapter, 'Liberty, Equality and "Civilisation": Observations of Colonial Aborigines', Starbuck explores the less well-documented contacts that took place in Port Jackson. The study of man was to have been one of the major fields of enquiry of the expedition, and the newly-founded *Société des observateurs de l'homme* had commissioned the philosopher Jean-Marie Degérando to write instructions to guide the voyagers' observations of the natives they would encounter in the course of their journey. As well, Georges Cuvier, the professor of comparative anatomy at the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle* in Paris, had given instructions concerning the measurement of the skulls of the Aborigines and their physical strength.

Starbuck notes the scant observations of the Port Jackson Aborigines made by the members of the expedition who express their disappointment at the degraded state in which they find the Aborigines in the colony. She concludes that, because of their ideological presuppositions concerning the noble savage, a study of the Aborigines in the colonial context proved in the final event to be too much of a challenge for the Consulate-era scientific voyagers. The prevailing opinion was that the Aborigines had not been capable of responding to the civilising influence of the English. Captain Baudin alone, in his letter to Governor King on his departure from Port Jackson, points out that it is the colonisers who, by interrupting the traditional life of the Aborigines, are responsible for their sorry state.

The sixth chapter, 'Swans, Frogs and Rum: Natural History in an "Unnatural" Space', deals with the natural science investigations in the colony. Starbuck points out that the English were as keen as the French to further their knowledge of the natural environment and to this end they mainly encouraged the expedition's endeavours, hoping to benefit from the results. There being no geologists in the colony, the English were particularly interested in the geological researches of Joseph Bailly and Louis Depuch, who identified coal seams in the region.

Starbuck compares and contrasts the approaches adopted by the different scientific members of the expedition in the colonial field. Whereas the naturalist, François Péron, is intent on describing the improvements wrought by English civilisation on the natural landscape, the botanist Théodore Leschenault, in contrast, views Port Jackson as a 'botanical field rather than as a European colony' and considers the destruction by the English of the native forests in a negative light.

As well as making collections of animals and plants in Port Jackson, the members of the expedition demonstrated their curiosity in many other aspects of life in the colony. They made notations of Aboriginal music, in particular of the famous 'cooe' call, and drawings of Aboriginal rock carvings and artefacts. Starbuck points out that Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, with its ambitious scope and means, provided inferior results in comparison with the large natural history collections and reports assembled by Baudin and his scientists.

The seventh chapter, 'Baudin's New Expedition', deals with the Commander's construction of the second half of the voyage. Starbuck points out

that Baudin had, by the time he reached Port Jackson, virtually accomplished what the Admiralty had demanded of him. Baudin, however, taking account of what he had learned *sur le terrain*, considered that he had further hydrographic work to carry out. This new phase of the voyage was seen by him as fulfilling more completely the requirements of the French instructions. He thus decided to send the *Naturaliste* back to France with the natural history collections and purchased a locally constructed ship, the *Casuarina*, with a shallower draught, in order to explore and chart more fully and efficiently the coastlines. He appointed Louis Freycinet as the captain of the new vessel.

The book's epilogue, by way of conclusion, contextualises the Baudin expedition in relation to those that preceded it and those that followed in the first half of the nineteenth century. This voyage is unique in that, with its roots in the Enlightenment and its nostalgia for the 'noble savage', as well as its plethoric collecting, it sits on the cusp of the new scientific age and heralds a more systematic approach to knowledge. Starbuck considers that this change of direction is signalled by Baudin's reconstruction of the expedition during the stay in Port Jackson.

Starbuck's book is well-written and makes absorbing reading. She has made a careful study of both the primary and secondary source texts, both in French and English, and her central thesis concerning the uniqueness of this Consulate voyage is persuasive. She does, however, perhaps overplay Baudin's agency in the transition during the voyage from the Enlightenment paradigm to a more systematic scientific focus. Her delineation of the differences in approach of various participants, and the evolution of their ideas, demonstrates that the evolution was taking place equally at the individual level of the scientists and officers.

I have a minor quibble with the somewhat wooden title of the book, which reads like a list of key words. I expect a title to give some insight into the main focus of the book and to constitute an indication of the book's main argument. The title does not do this. Seeing that the focus of the study is Port Jackson, why not have made this the peg for a more informative title?

The book is well-produced, in an attractive format. It is to be regretted, however, that more attention was not paid to proof-reading. It is also a shame that the illustrations were not of better quality. In addition, it would have been helpful from a scholarly point of view if the original French or translated quotations had been included in the end-notes. At least once, in the interest

of understanding, this reader would like to have been also given the original French. The statement that Brittany is a land where ‘bad herbs and superstition proliferate’ (p. 89) is somewhat hermetic, unless one returns to the original French, ‘mauvaises herbes’, which is more idiomatically translated into English as ‘weeds’.

These few criticisms, however, in no way detract from the overall quality of Starbuck’s work and she synthesises impressively the many different elements of this important and relatively neglected French scientific journey. Her book is an excellent and informative study of the significance of the Port Jackson stay of the Baudin expedition in the context of the voyage as a whole, but it also sheds light on the role of knowledge creation in Napoleonic France and on evolving scientific practices. Her fine-grained analysis draws out the unique nature of this voyage, both in its conception and in its realisation, and her book is a valuable contribution to Baudin studies.

*Margaret Sankey*

*The University of Sydney*

**Jane Gilmour, *Colette’s France: her lives, her loves*, Melbourne, Hardie Grant, October 2013, 208 p., notes, select bibliography, chronology, illustrations, AU\$ 45, ISBN 978-1-74270-535-4.**

Modern biographies take many forms, and this is a particularly relaxed and personal one. Although Jane Gilmour is well qualified to write an academic book, having gained a doctorate from the Sorbonne in the early 1970s, she has chosen instead to involve us in her lifelong fascination with Colette as she goes back to France many years later to follow up her research. She obviously consulted museums, libraries and any remaining contacts, but it is principally as a knowledgeable and enthusiastic guide that Gilmour vividly evokes both the person and the myth by exploring the homes and landscapes where Colette lived, loved and wrote the novels that earned her election to the Académie Goncourt. Anyone wishing to follow the Colette trail will find an ample guide at the back of the book.

The physical aspect of Gilmour’s book contributes enormously to bringing Colette to life. In these days of e-books and what might be called the minimalist reading experience, this beautiful hardback is a joy to hold and read.

In addition to single and double page colour plates, there are illustrations on almost every page, with portraits set in embossed paper mounts against period wallpaper prints. Being able to see and compare so many studio portraits and photos of Colette shows us how she deliberately built up her image. She usually looks directly and unsmilingly at the camera through slightly lowered eyelids, full-face or side on, with chin lowered or tilted up. It is a gaze that seems to deliberately challenge the viewer. Many of the pages with small photographs also include reproduced admission tickets, handwritten notes, pressed flowers, giving the whole volume the feel of a *belle époque* photo album or scrapbook.

It was in the *belle époque* that Colette's adult life began, and it was a long one (1873–1954), spanning a period of enormous historical, social and literary change. Although the main focus of her novels remained the emotional complexities of human relationships seen mainly through a woman's sensibility, the version of herself created in them was also a critical observer of the phony and mediocre in society, especially during the Third Republic. A disastrous marriage at the age of twenty to Henri Gauthier-Villars, more or less forced on her by her family circumstances, led to her unshakeable belief in a woman's right to freedom, including sexual freedom. Gauthier-Villars was a journalist and novelist who wrote under the name of Willy, and whose output was fed by a group of hacks. Colette became one of them, writing her best-selling autobiographical *Claudine* novels under duress and under his name. By the time she escaped the marriage in 1906, she was a changed woman.

The sheer variety and audacity of Colette's career is of course a gift to any biographer. Gilmour sums her up as 'provincial ingénue, risqué performer, lesbian lover, prodigious journalist and writer, businesswoman, baroness and mother, lover and seducer, loyal friend and mentor and, finally, grand old lady of letters, revered and honoured with a state funeral'. Colette's achievements were extraordinary but the less admirable side to her lust for life is also revealed, especially through her correspondence. Like Charles Dickens, who cruelly discarded his wife and the mother of his many children, and who was extremely generous to others but critical and mean with his own family, Colette dumped her aristocratic lesbian lover Missy, who had been such a support to her, but kept the house in Brittany Missy had bought for them both. She also neglected her daughter almost from birth, finally disinheriting her in favour of her last husband.

Gilmour shows how Colette's lives and loves, both personal and geographical, are transformed into fiction. She also mentions the great charm of Colette's lively perceptive style—'the shapes, colours, perfumes and sounds of her prose'—which make her novels still such a pleasure to read. Although extracts from Colette's writing are provided, there could have been more from her novels to help illustrate the qualities of her style. Similarly, the sources of the illustrations are carefully listed, but they are not always provided for the written passages quoted in italics. However, these are minor details in a delightful book which makes you want to follow in Gilmour's footsteps and revisit Colette.

*Patricia Clancy*

*The University of Melbourne*

**Valérie Benghezal, Olivia Lau, Georges-Goulven Le Cam et al., *Jetlag Stories: Australie* (French Edition), Melbourne, Emue, May 2013, 50 p., rrp AU\$ 21.55, ISBN 978-1-92214-321-1.**

This anthology of short stories gathers a dozen pieces, the work of nine different authors. Four of the stories are winners of the 2012 Best Francophone Short Story Award, an annual prize awarded by Emue Books and selected partners.

All of the texts have some thematic connection with Australia, and there is another commonality in that most of them convey a sense of disorientation, albeit not always a direct reference to the 'jetlag' of the title. At the same time, the work is very eclectic, ranging from what one suspects in some instances to be barely transposed autobiography to more externalised slice-of-life narratives, and to more strongly developed imaginative writing.

Each of the prize-winning stories offers something fresh and challenging: Olivia Lau's *Si l'Australie n'existait pas* plays on the tensions between a complex romantic love affair and the impositions of family duty; in *Ce Soir*, Kévin Henocq provides a tightly written, stereotype-free set of insights into the constraining effects of a traditional French upbringing on a young traveller's ability to discover the new world of which he has dreamed; Georges-Goulven Le Cam's delightfully ironic fable about a three year-old boy who learns to love watermelon hovers mesmerisingly between the

ridiculous and the surreal; Valérie Benghezal's *Longue Distance* takes us into the uncomfortable territory of a loved parent's terminal illness...

But readers will find stimulation and pleasure in other stories as well, such as Antoine Läng's very engaging impressionist rendering of the dizzying effects of real jetlag, Sophie Marozeau's evocation of the trials of a French would-be stand-up comic who lives with a drug-dealing, drunken Australian lout, or Benghezal's other piece—an account of two young couples' battle with cockroaches in a King's Cross flop-house on New's Year's Eve in 1999...

The volume is a welcome contribution to the French-Australian field; some of the perspectives of the younger writers, in particular, are unexpected and illuminating. It's also good to know that another French-language anthology from Emue is on the way, this time centred on Great Britain.

*Colin Nettelbeck*

*The University of Melbourne*

## BOOK NOTE

### **EMUE, a French publishing house based in Melbourne: French books on the move <http://emue.fr/>**

EMUE (Éditions Multiculturelles Équitables) is a French publishing house based in Melbourne with offices in London and Paris. EMUE simultaneously publishes printed and electronic books and supports authors from culturally diverse backgrounds using French as their common language. At a recent meeting with *Explorations*, EMUE founder Sophie Marozeau explained that EMUE favours short and structured narratives and is keen to publish strong, lively, humorous and poetic texts that cast a critical eye on today's society.

Sophie Marozeau discovered electronic publishing in 2010 in Melbourne whilst working on Lonely Planet guides. Soon after, she met her first author, Ray Parnac, a librarian, who decided to represent EMUE in London. Almost simultaneously Emilio Sciarrino, a student at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure in Paris and a member of the recently formed C.D.L. (Comité de Lecture, <http://www.comite-de-lecture.com/>) joined the team. Graphic designer Sasufi has created a stylish corporate identity for EMUE and is also responsible for the distinctive book covers.

EMUE has published eleven paper books and fifty-six e-books; recently they introduced a series of 'microfictions' (single short stories produced as e-books) and an illustrated album, *Bagatelle Forever*, by Amélie Dillemann. E-books are available in three formats (PDF + Mobi + ePub) and can be read on those readers and tablets free of DRM (Digital Rights Management). Both books and e-books are well priced.

In 2012 EMUE partnered with *Le Petit Journal* Melbourne and Le Forum bookshop in Perth to create an annual short story competition, *Prix de la Nouvelle Francophone*. The four winners were: Valérie Benghezal, Kévin Henocq, Olivia Lau and Georges-Goulven Le Cam, and their texts are included in *Jetlag Stories* (see book review in this issue). The 2013 competition was held in the UK and winners were Imane Robelin, Benoit Baratas and Clélia-Elsa Froguel.

Sophie Marozeau indicated that, although her company's main purpose is the promotion of French language and culture, she is also interested in

translation and envisages the day when EMUE may also publish and distribute books in English. In the meantime French and francophone readers in Australia have easy access to books in French.

*Elaine Lewis*

*Melbourne*