

COLIN BERNARD THORNTON-SMITH  
 A SCHOLAR OF FRENCH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE,  
 AUSTRALIAN CATHOLICISM AND  
 FRENCH-AUSTRALIAN HISTORY  
 1929–2014

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Members of ISFAR will be saddened to hear of the death of Dr Colin Thornton-Smith, a founding member of the Institute, who also served for many years on the General and Editorial Committees. Readers of *Explorations* will know that he was a frequent contributor of articles and book reviews. They may not know that his keen interest in French writing on colonial Australia was by no means the only, or even the first, research field he pursued with typical thoroughness and enthusiasm.

Colin was educated at Xavier College, then at the University of Melbourne under Professor A. R. Chisholm, graduating with an M.A. (Hons) and a Diploma of Education. His teaching career began in two Victorian country high schools and continued at Trinity Grammar. Once he had almost completed a PhD, a career in tertiary teaching beckoned: first in the newly-established Newcastle University College (1962) and finally in the French Department of the University of Melbourne (1965)—he was one of Professor Chisholm's 'homing pigeons'. The subject of Colin Thornton-Smith's thesis was 'Creative problems presented by the theme of grace in the modern French Catholic novel to Bernanos and Mauriac', Catholicism and French literature being two areas of research that he maintained throughout his career with a typical combination of meticulous detail and historical perspective.

Outside the relative calm of study and teaching, Colin's involvement with the Catholic Church was quite the opposite: it was active and political. The 1950s and '60s were dominated by the covert right-wing, anti-communist organisation called the Movement, led by B. A. Santamaria. He and his supporters pursued their aim of saving the country from communism with extraordinary zeal, approved by the Church. This burning issue divided families, eventually leading to a split in the Labor Party and the formation of the Democratic Labor Party. The only effective opposition was expressed in the monthly publication, the *Catholic Worker*, of which, ironically,

Santamaria had been the founding editor and main contributor for the first few issues. Colin joined the *Catholic Worker* in 1956 and remained on the editorial committee until 1967. Most of the group—mainly lawyers and academics including Max Charlesworth, Xavier Connor, James Griffin, Val Noone and Paul Ormonde—had met at University. Although the journal was banned by Archbishop Daniel Mannix, they continued to publish and sell it despite condemnation from the pulpit and insults from parishioners.

Those years inspired two articles in later years. The first, ‘Echoes and resonances of *Action Française* anti-Semitism in early issues of the *Catholic Worker*’, was published in *the Journal of the Australian Jewish Historical Society* (1991), and the second, ‘The young Santamaria and his mentors’, his last substantial work, in *Santamaria—the Politics of Fear*, ed. Paul Ormonde (2000).

Colin Thornton-Smith is known principally, however, as a scholar and teacher of French language and literature. He was a tireless researcher, writing books and articles on a variety of French subjects, including a book of French vocabulary and a widely-praised edition of Mauriac’s *Destins* (1983). He was looked on thereafter as a Mauriac specialist. He also contributed articles on French literature to the *Australian Journal of French Studies*.

Members of ISFAR will know him best for his articles in *Explorations* on French writing about colonial Australia. He was one of the first researchers to examine a wide range of texts beyond the early navigators and explorers. His *Analytical Checklist of First-hand Accounts in French of Colonial Australia* (1986), followed in 1991 by the co-authored (with the writer of the present tribute) *Analytical Checklist of French Fiction and Pseudo-memoirs Set in Colonial Australia*, have provided a very valuable resource for later workers in the field. His major contribution in this area is a translation with introduction and notes of *Les Squatters australiens* (1861) by the early French-Swiss winegrower, Hubert de Castella, after whom St Hubert’s winery is named. This work involved a detailed investigation of the Yarra Valley vigneron, many of whom were of Swiss origin. It is an excellent translation and a good read, written partly to counteract the exaggerated, negative impressions of *The Gold Robbers* written by Céleste de Chabrilan, the notorious wife of the first French Consul to Melbourne, and the memoirs of Antoine Fauchery, a flamboyant failed gold-seeker, photographer and café owner.

Colin Thornton-Smith's organisational and inter-personal skills were used to good advantage when he was Chairman of the French Department at Melbourne University from 1984 to 1986. He was a person of great integrity, an excellent teacher and a much appreciated colleague with a quiet sense of humour. Colin took early retirement in 1989, but it was only from teaching; his French-Australian research continued as before until a stroke at the end of 1999 gradually impinged more and more on his life.

Those who knew Colin well also remember him as a nature-lover and great handyman, who excelled in unauthorised renovations. Having lost his own mother as a very small child, he was a great family man. He married his wife, Betty Edmondson, in 1954 and they produced seven children. Betty was a talented pianist and a wonderful support to Colin until she died in 2002. Colin's enduring interest in language and history lives on in several of his children.

*Melbourne*