

BOOK REVIEWS

Jules S.C. Dumont Durville, *Two Voyages in the South Seas* (translated and edited by Helen Rosenman). Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1987, 2 volumes, 634 pp., \$75.

Commander Jules Dumont d'Urville (1790-1842) was one of the greatest of Pacific explorers. In 1822 he left France as Duperrey's executive officer on the *Coquille*. In three years they circumnavigated the globe from east to west and did not lose a single man! Then, between 1826 and 1829, in command of this same ship, re-named *Astrolabe* in honour of La Pérouse's flagship), he visited Australia and many of the Melanesian and Polynesian islands of Oceania. Finally, between 1837 and 1840, he returned to Oceanic and Australian waters, but also ventured twice to the unknown frozen continent of Antarctica. Two years after his last great voyage, d'Urville, together with his wife and only surviving son, died in a railway accident. The sweeping grandeur of his navigational achievements and his tragic death invite comparison with Cook and La Pérouse. D'Urville was also a man of science and letters—with an established reputation in botanical, entomological and archaeological circles. (He was awarded the *Légion d'honneur* for his efforts on behalf of France in acquiring the "Vénus de Milo".)

As a scholar d'Urville was closely involved in the writing and publication of the accounts of his expeditions and their scientific findings. In the case of his voyage of 1826-29, he wrote five historical volumes and edited another eight technical volumes (compiled by his officers), together with four atlases. This remarkable multi-volume work was published at government expense under the title *Voyage de la corvette l'Astrolabe...*

Also published at government expense (between 1841 and 1854) was the magnificent volume account of d'Urville's voyage of 1837-40. Under the title *Voyage au Pôle Sud et dans l'Océanie* it also included seven atlases. D'Urville was only able to prepare and edit four of the ten historical volumes in this account, before his death in 1842. His friends Jaquinot and Vincendon-Dumoulin completed the remaining six from his detailed notes. Although a priceless part of the printed heritage of mankind, their awesome scope and the fact that they were only comprehensively translated from French into German made them inaccessible to the general English reader and all but the most dedicated scholars.

At last the historical essence of d'Urville's accounts has been distilled in Helen Rosenman's masterly two-volume English translation. Those who have consulted the original French volumes can only begin to imagine the intimidating nature of the linguistic and editorial task she has undertaken. Rosenman has deliberately emphasised the Australian and general historical content and her abridgement has been based on the attitude that "half a loaf of bread is better than no bread". Consultation of her foreword will be vital for those who wish to quote d'Urville for scholarly purposes. Rosenman is frank. She writes:

Translators do not fit any literary category, being part masters, part servants, of the works they translate... Dumont d'Urville, although a man of wide-ranging and classical education, was not a stylist... the translation is not elegant but as faithful as possible to the text. D'Urville's narrative bears out Buffon's dictum that "*le style est l'homme même*". However, I must admit that in places where it became clumsy and circumlocutory I cut out excess verbiage, in the belief that if I found my conscientious translation boring, it would be doubly tedious for the uncommitted reader.

Each of Rosenman's chapters contains references to the original volume, chapters and page numbers, together with an indication of whether or not they are abridged. Who could ask for a better English language introduction to the French whole? But Rosenman offers even more: she provides detailed notes, appendices and a comprehensive index. It remains to be said that these two volumes—so beautifully bound, printed and illustrated—will inevitably become collector's items.

Edward Duyker

Sylvania, N.S.W.

K.A. Lodewycks, *The Belgians in Australia*. Bowen Hills, Boolarong Publications, 1988, 159 pp.

According to the 1986 Census there were only 4,539 Belgians in Australia. The lack of a "cohesive presence" and a paucity of recorded information have made their influence as an ethnic group difficult to determine. The Walloons among them have certainly had an important role reinforcing broader French language cultural activity in this country along with Mauritians, Canadians and the Swiss. The Flemings have been similarly significant in Dutch language cultural life, although they have their own traditions and national identity, according to Axel Lodewycks, the author of this pioneering survey of the Belgian presence in Australia:

In the total view of Australian immigration Belgians have never been obvious as a distinct ethnic group, but rather as individual settlers who have been to a degree more mobile or venturesome than the generality of their compatriots at home have been personally adaptable to the Australian environment of their choice. With either Dutch—or French—sounding names, they are readily distinguishable from French and Dutch migrants only by their birthplaces within Belgium. They are indistinguishable from other migrants in the matter of religious observance. No locality in Australia has been settled mainly by Belgians, nor do they anywhere in the country comprise a close-knit community of the kind which still survives in the United States and Canada. Even the memberships of Belgian clubs represent only a small proportion of local Belgian born settlers and their

descendants. Moreover, there is no evidence that a newspaper for Belgian readers was ever published in Australia.

This would seem a rather unpromising base for historical endeavours, but K.A. Lodewycks has made an admirable effort to assemble what is readily known from printed and archival sources and has sought out additional information through interviews. He begins with something of a historiographical re-orientation: making his readers aware that among the seventeenth-century Dutch voyagers to Australia's shore there were mariners from the southern Low Countries, which after 1830 became modern Belgium. (Incidentally, P.D. Sabbe and L. Buyse adopted a similar approach in their book *Belgians in America*, Lanno, 1960.) Australian ethno-historians have been criticised for supposedly nationalizing unnationalized societies and seeking tenuous "ancestors" for their community. To my mind, such criticisms are unfair. While identifying a few proto-Belgians among early Dutch explorers may not help explain the long-term presence of the Belgian community in Australia, it does help us obtain a sense of historical depth. More importantly, they are part of the story of this continent.

To a considerable degree this book is a collection of potted biographies. Lodewycks has given us much useful information on individuals such as Salvador Morhange (author of *Etude sur l'Australie, 1862-1869*), Octave Moutan (a survivor of the Marquis de Rays' ill-fated New Ireland colony), the bacteriologist Auguste de Bavay, the linguist Augustin Lodewycks and the conductor Henri Verbrugghen, to name just a few important Belgian contributors to Australia's development as a nation. *The Belgians in Australia* does not contain any detailed examination of "push" and "pull" factors which lead to emigration. There is, however, a reference to refugees from the Congo, which the author describes as the "only movement by Belgians to Australia which can be connected with any political or social development". It will surprise readers to learn that of approximately 3,500 Congo refugees who arrived by chartered flights in the early 1960s, "less than 20 per cent remained in Australia permanently". It would be interesting to know why. Lodewycks does not pretend to have written a comprehensive statement of the history of the Belgians in this country. Indeed his book serves to demonstrate how little attention the Belgians have received from scholars in both Belgium and Australia! In his preface, Lodewycks makes it clear that he hopes he will provoke further research.

One of the strengths of this book is the valuable information it contains on the history of the Belgian diplomatic presence in Australia. It also contains a good introduction to the origins of the Belgian people and their nation. But most importantly, the smallness of the Belgian community has enabled the author to produce a book which gives the reader a very real sense of intimacy—something which would be impossible for a community the size of the Italians or the Greeks.

Edward Duyker

Sylvania, N.S.W.

Edward Duyker, *Of the Star and the Key: Mauritius, Mauritians and Australia*. Australian Mauritian Research Group (P.O. Box 20, Sylvania, 2224), 1988, 129 pp., illustrations, bibliography and index, \$19.95 plus \$3.50 postage.

Mauritius has exercised a powerful fascination over artists and writers ever since it was colonized by the French in 1715. Baudelaire spent a short time there; so too did Joseph Conrad. In fact, explorers such as Matthew Flinders and La Pérouse are only the tip of an iceberg. The island was an important link in a chain stretching from Europe to the infant colonies in Australia throughout the nineteenth century.

Duyker has set out to explore the various human links that join Mauritius to Australia over the past two centuries. In doing so, he has given us a rich insight into what goes on "behind the scenes" of important historical events. To imagine that a tiny island in the Indian Ocean would have so many links with a large continent like Australia is a revelation, to say the least.

The author's research is meticulous. He has given us a panorama that includes escaped convicts on the streets of Port Louis, pardoned slaves on the streets of Sydney, and a world of dreamers afflicted with "gold fever" scurrying down shafts on the goldfields of Victoria in the 1850s. Young Mauritians were as adventurous as any when it came to setting sail into the unknown in pursuit of their fortune, it seems.

To discover that the Australian sugar industry owes much to those early Mauritian migrants comes as a surprise also. And to find out that our much loved painter, Lloyd Rees, attributed his "impressionism" to his Mauritian mother makes it easier for us to appreciate the unusual delicacy that he brought to his work.

Matthew Flinders spent six years as a prisoner of the French on Mauritius. It is a footnote in the history of our circumnavigator that few would recall. Likewise, Baudin, another French explorer to our shores, died in Mauritius on his way home from Australia.

It is clear from Duyker's painstaking research that the link between these two peoples is important. Present-day Mauritians in Australia are already making their mark in film-making, opera, business and commerce.

Of the Star and the Key is a fascinating work of social history. Duyker should be congratulated on producing a work that is both informative and entertaining to read. He has drawn this island closer to us by way of the fragile human contacts that make up the fabric of any emerging society such as Australia.

James Cowan

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