

## Book Reviews

Céleste de Chabrillan, *Courtesan and Countess: The Lost and Found Memoirs of the French Consul's Wife*, translated and annotated by Jana Verhoeven, Alan Willey and Jeanne Allen, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, December 2015, 280 p., rrp AU\$ 59.99, ISBN 978-0-52286-884-5.

*Also available in e-book and hardback formats.*

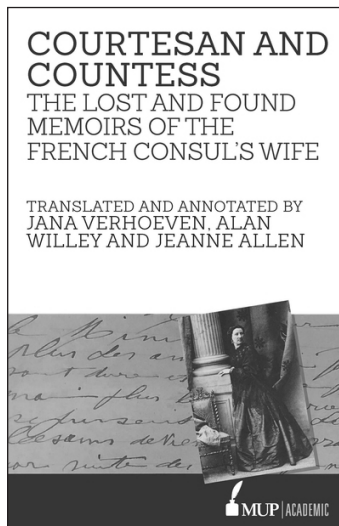
Céleste de Chabrillan is best known in Australia through the publication in 1998 of *The French Consul's Wife*, the translation by Patricia Clancy and Jeanne Allen of her second set of memoirs, *Un deuil au bout du monde*, first published in Paris in 1877. Céleste was a colourful character. She started her life in poverty but used her beauty, charm and talent as a performer to become a famed and sought-after courtesan, known as 'La Mogador'. Her memoir of these years, *Adieux au monde*, was published in 1854 and was a *succès de scandale*. The timing was unfortunate. Her passionate 10-year affair with the Count Lionel de Chabrillan was about to be formalised in marriage as they set off to Melbourne where Chabrillan was to take up the post of consul.

Melbourne society shunned the former courtesan and she painted in her memoirs a less than flattering picture of her two years from 1854 to 1856 in the gold rush town of Melbourne. Céleste decided to return to Paris without her husband, who was to die shortly thereafter, in 1858, having contracted dysentery on the return voyage to Melbourne, after visiting Céleste in Paris. So, at the age of 35, Céleste found herself in Paris, widowed and with no means of surviving, other than by her own wits.

The existence of a third set of memoirs, dealing with the period from 1859 to the end of Céleste's life, was known. These memoirs had been used by one of her biographers in the 1930s, but the manuscript seemed to have vanished totally. The story of the rediscovery of this manuscript by Jana Verhoeven is one in which happenstance played a considerable part,

as she states in the introduction to the translation. I will not divulge the story. Suffice to say that Jana Verhoeven found herself permitted to photograph the manuscript in situ and then, back in Melbourne, to start the painstaking process of deciphering and translating the memoirs, with the help of Alan Willey and Jeanne Allen.

This was not an easy task—Céleste’s handwriting was almost illegible and her spelling idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, as Verhoeven writes, ‘...the text started to come alive in the transcription. With every page of the diaries and notebooks a very personal and moving story unfolded through Céleste’s own voice.’



Extensive archival research followed in order to contextualise the manuscript and establish its relevance for nineteenth-century cultural history. The story that emerges from these memoirs is of Céleste’s continual struggle to try to achieve ‘moral rehabilitation’, as she puts it, and financial security through her writing, as a novelist and particularly as a playwright. It is the story of a woman who reinvented herself, as a woman of the theatre, not only writing plays but also directing and performing. She established her own theatre; she purchased property; she mixed with talented and powerful men; she was active in the defence of Paris during the siege of 1870; she created the Sisters of France, which served as an ambulance service; she was the inspiration for and was directly involved in

the establishment of an orphanage in Le Vésinet. Through all this, she was a sharp observer of the political and artistic life of Paris in the latter part of the nineteenth-century.

In bringing to light and translating these memoirs, Jana Verhoeven and her colleagues have made a significant contribution to our knowledge not only of Céleste de Chabrilan, but of her times. Some of the material they were working from was in a very raw state and so the translators took on the task of editing the memoirs, 'inserting explanatory expressions, deleting repetitions and smoothing over some rough grammatical constructions.' Where there were gaps in the manuscript, the authors substituted a summary from the biography published in 1935 to fill in for the missing text, so that from time to time the text switches from first person narrative to third person. Diary entries, which make up the final section of the book, complete the story from 1897 to 1907, two years before her death.

This translation has captured the liveliness and directness of Céleste's writing. The voice of Céleste seems to ring true in the English, as it would have done in the original French. She was not one for artifice or embellishment although, as the translators/editors note, she was not necessarily totally honest in her account, leaving out some things which may not have reflected well on her and portraying some people, with whom she had continuous dealings, in a less than flattering light. There are inconsistencies in her character and they become exaggerated as she encounters increasing frustrations and, most particularly, the frustrations of old age. Nonetheless, her powers of observation, her determination, her ambition and indomitable energy make for a fascinating life-story.

Congratulations are due to Jana Verhoeven, Allan Wiley and Jeanne Allen for bringing to light these unpublished memoirs and presenting to an English-reading audience this portrait of a remarkable woman and her perspective on the artistic, literary and political world of late nineteenth-century Paris.

*Jane Gilmour*

*Melbourne*

Le Comte de Beauvoir, *Ludovic de Beauvoir's Visit to Australia (Voyage autour du monde, Tome 1)*, translated and edited by John Melville-Jones, contributions by Nicola Cousen, Steve Mullins, Stefan Petrow, Marie and John Ramsland, Perth, Hesperian Press, 2016, 313 p., rrp AU\$ 50.00 plus postage, ISBN 978-0-85905-626-7.

*Available at hesperianpress.com and selected Australian bookshops.*

In 1866, Count Ludovic de Beauvoir spent four months in the Australian colonies as part of a world tour, travelling with his childhood friend, Pierre Philippe Jean Marie d'Orléans, duc de Penthièvre. After visiting Australia, the pair continued to New Zealand, South-East Asia and America.

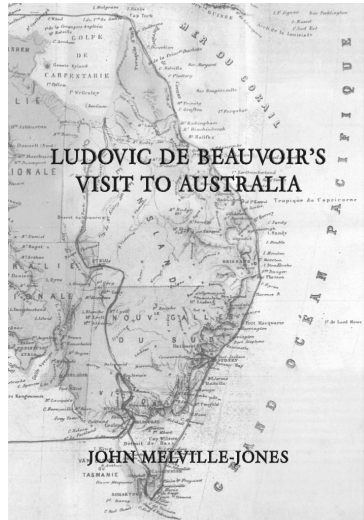
*Australie* was the first of three volumes in his series *Voyage autour du monde*. The first edition was published in 1869 to immediate critical acclaim by the French journal *Illustration* and the first English translation was published the following year. In 1873, Beauvoir published *Voyage autour du monde*, which combined *Australie* with the second and third volumes, *Java, Siam, Canton* (first published 1869) and *Pékin, Yeddo, San Francisco* (first published 1872). Beauvoir's writing was highly popular, with fourteen editions of *Australie* published in French between 1869 and 1886.

Beauvoir and Penthièvre landed first in Melbourne. From there, they explored the gold mines at Ballarat and Geelong. They journeyed up the coast and visited Bendigo and a country sheep station. They then went to Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land) and Sydney, including the Blue Mountains. Travelling up the east coast, they visited the coal mines at Newcastle, Brisbane, and the Torres Strait Islands. Somewhat confusingly, Beauvoir included a map showing the sea voyages he and Penthièvre made, overlaid by the inland route covered by Burke and Wills, whose story he much admired.

As members of the French nobility, the two young men were welcomed by leading officials and prominent citizens, and enjoyed an insider's view of upper-crust colonial society. Beauvoir took an interest in the physical world he saw—from the strange flora and fauna, to the surprisingly modern buildings. He also described political and social institutions, including self-government, economics and the convict past.

Naturally, Beauvoir's writing was influenced by the prevailing thoughts of his time. As a result, some of the language used to describe the Aboriginal Australians he met is highly offensive to modern readers. For example, he perpetuates the myth of Aboriginal cannibalism.

This is dealt with sensitively by the editorial team. In the general introduction, Marie Ramsland takes pains to explain the background and underlying assumptions, including Rousseau's theory of the 'noble savage'. Understanding the historical context makes the writing a useful reflection of the assumptions of the time.



Overall, Beauvoir's writing is engaging and informative. His book incorporates twelve photos of engravings and two maps, including images of a forest with cockatoos, a gold mine, and various Aboriginal Australians he met. He also used a wide range of statistics and social commentary gleaned from discussions with local officials.

The translation by John Melville-Jones is based on the first English translation published in 1870. Melville-Jones acknowledges he has made mostly minor changes, primarily to increase readability and to keep the revised translation 'closer to the original in some places'. The resulting translation achieves both goals, and is comfortably accessible for a modern reader.

Together with his colleagues, Melville-Jones provides a wealth of information, making Beauvoir's writing relevant for an audience 150 years after his journey. Marie Ramsland provides a comprehensive introduction covering essential background information. This introduction was based on an earlier journal article she published in *Australian Studies* 2010 (vol. 2).

Each chapter also has an individual introduction, written variously by Melville-Jones, Nicola Cousen, Steve Mullins, Stefan Petrow, and Marie and John Ramsland. These chapter introductions provide specific context for some of the more obscure details a modern reader may be unaware of, such as the various leading citizens Beauvoir meets. There is also an index for key themes and people mentioned by Beauvoir.

Melville-Jones and team have made a positive contribution in reviving Beauvoir's book. *Australie* is a genuinely fascinating read, filled with a young Frenchman's enthusiasm for the places he visits. It may also prove helpful for historians seeking to understand a non-British perspective of the young colonies. Beauvoir characterises Australia as 'a world of contrasts, rather upsetting to the ideas of the other hemisphere' (p. 297). Melville-Jones and team are to be commended for reviving, in a highly accessible format, Count Ludovic de Beauvoir's reflections on this 'world of contrasts'.

*Jill Donohoo*

*Sydney*

**Natalie Edwards, Ben McCann and Peter Poiana (eds), *Framing French Culture*, South Adelaide, University of Adelaide Press, 2015, 298 p., rrp AU\$ 55.00, ISBN 978-1-92206-486-8.**

*E-book may be downloaded free of charge.*

This well-presented publication is a collection of twelve thoroughly researched articles by academics from the Universities of Adelaide, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, Wollongong, New England and Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. Each work is diligently supported by full referencing and a detailed bibliography. The book is divided into four parts: Historical framings, Cultural icons and Cinematic framings, Photographic framings and Artistic framings.

Visually, this publication is captivating. Both black-and-white and colour images appear in several chapters to illustrate and enhance the text—surrealist paintings, works of Manet, images of the Eiffel Tower and artworks from the Baudin expedition. The technique of highlighting in bold, within the main body of the text (especially in Chapter 2), the source of specific digitised copies of artworks enhances the reader's understanding of the text.

The introduction by the editors is not merely used to summarise the work of each individual author, but is a complete chapter in its own right.

It comprises a careful explanation of the overall concept of ‘framing’, which, they argue, leads to a better interpretation of our world, before dealing with specific theoretical approaches each researcher has used in analysing his or her subject, showing how each contributor supports the whole. Each assertion is based on established theoretical works.

Individually, the sections explore how framing may be used to interpret materials within a particular medium. Taken together, they demonstrate how the visual functions as a mode of cultural representation, and how acts of framing are constructions through which we may interpret cultural artefacts from the past and the present (p. 5).

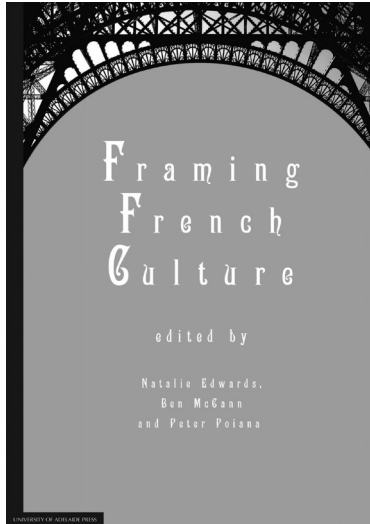
Finally, the genres are brought together in a brief conclusion subtitled ‘Framing French Culture’, which indicates that the concept of framing in this work will allow the authors to think of art, photography, scientific drawings and cinema as visually constituted, spatially bound productions.

Historical framings form the largest section. John West-Sooby and Jean Fornasiero are well-known in recent French studies for their detailed annotated translation of François Péron’s memoir (2014) and their chapters reveal the depth of their research in this field while presenting the reader with new insights. They are complemented by the work of Baudin historians Nicole Starbuck and Jane Southwood, who examine the classical influence on Nicolas-Martin Petit in his 1802 *Portrait d’Arra Maïda*, demonstrating how history itself became ‘one of the great framing devices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ (p. 9).

While the ubiquity of images of the iconic Eiffel Tower (Part 2) leads to a tendency of ‘non-seeing’, it is the many interpretations of its significance in framing French experience and culture that are of intrinsic interest. Sonya Stephens chooses the film *Funny Face* (1957) to illustrate how the ‘hermeneutic circle’ functions with respect to representations of this symbolic engineering structure. Ben McCann’s interesting chapter on the role and influence in French and Hollywood films of set designer Alexandre Trauner, from the late 1930s to mid 1980s, reveals how framing leads to ‘a symbolic reading’ of scenes because of the designer’s individualistic embellishing style that ‘paraphrases’ the film narrative.

Three essays are concerned with the overlapping of photography and autobiography, two in literary works—Annie Ernaux’s *Écrire la vie* and Marie NDiaye’s *Autoportrait en vert*. The third examines the

accumulated memory of the Pieds-Noirs in various collections of photographs and mixed-media artwork depicting Algeria and Algerians. The chapter suggests that accumulated memorabilia may obscure and even distort both the past and the present.



Careful reading is required for the fourth and final section of the collection which delves into different artistic endeavours, starting with an in-depth study of the reception and appreciation of some of Edouard Manet's paintings, followed by an examination of the hybrid nature of surrealist paintings as a result of the bringing together—unexpectedly—of different elements within a single frame. (Both these essays are well supported by images.) The final chapter 'returns' the reader to the prehistoric images in the Lascaux caves, bringing us back to the 'origins of art' and a discussion of the varying theories that investigate and discuss notions of concealing and concealment.

This is a highly valuable academic publication that explains how culture may be encapsulated within or outside various frames that can then be interpreted on different levels to reveal aspects of societies, past and present, and to reflect both the subject framed and the subject's creator. The text deserves to be slowly digested to grasp the intricacies of each topic under discussion.



This rich and gratifying publication certainly does justice to the University of Adelaide's commitment to publishing the 'best research' produced by its academics.

Marie Ramsland

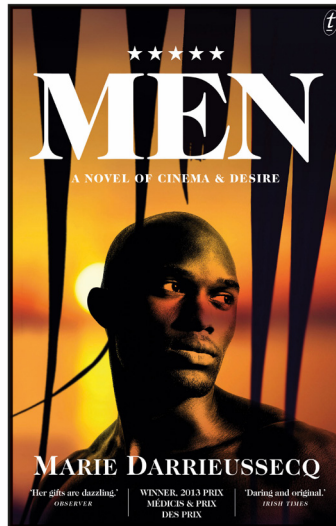
Newcastle

Marie Darrieussecq, *Men: A Novel of Cinema and Desire (Il faut beaucoup aimer les hommes)*, translated by Penny Hueston, Melbourne, Text Publishing, May 2016, 272 p., rrp AU\$ 29.99, ISBN 978-1-92524-091-7.

Marie Darrieussecq's twelfth novel, *Men*, winner of both the 2013 *Prix Médicis* and the *Prix des prix littéraires*, recounts what at first appears to be a classic love story—woman, Solange, actress, meets man, Kouhouesso, actor, at a party under the sparkling and superficial lights of cinematic Los Angeles. The connection, at least for Solange, is instant, intense, all-consuming. Yet no sooner has she set her eyes on Kouhouesso than a factor with the potential to disturb this romantic bliss soon makes itself known. Solange is white, a French national, and Kouhouesso, is black, from Anglophone Cameroon. Readers of Darrieussecq's other works may have already been acquainted with Solange in *All the Way (Clèves)*, a novel which follows her sexual awakening during her adolescent years in her native Basque village, a world in which everyone, with the noted exception of the greengrocer, is white.

Through her time spent with Kouhouesso, Solange begins to ask herself many questions: what does it mean to be white? What does it mean to be black? And, extending the latter, what is Africa? This mysterious, dark continent from which Kouhouesso originates? Solange will have the opportunity to glean some fragments of a response to these personal interrogations as she accompanies Kouhouesso across the Atlantic to shoot a film that is as all-consuming for him as is Solange's own 'love' for, or rather infatuation with, Kouhouesso. The film is an adaptation of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, set deep in the Congo. Solange arrives on African soil, not in the Congo, but in southern Cameroon, close to the border with Equatorial Guinea. On the film set, surrounded by the luxurious and virgin forest, she observes, discovers, and immerses herself within her new environment, its peoples and cultures, while waiting for the object of her all-encompassing infatuation, preoccupied with the success of his cinematographic project, to return to her.

The novel stages the complexities of what would, in politically correct terminology, be referred to as a 'mixed-race' couple. In doing so, it leads the reader to contemplate the myriad of clichés meted out to interracial couples, both contemporarily and historically, due to the implicit evocation of colonial prejudices through Conrad's novel. Yet it does not content itself with racial stereotypes, also raising questions about the role and place of women in society, and specifically within the film industry.



The title of the novel is drawn from a quote from Marguerite Duras's *La vie matérielle* (*Practicalities*), which features an epigraph translated as 'We have to love men a lot. A lot, a lot. Love them a lot in order to love them. Otherwise it's impossible; we couldn't bear them.' The French title incorporates the first line of this quote whereas the English translation restricts itself to *Men: A Novel of Cinema and Desire*. This seems an unfortunate choice by the publishers as it fails to encompass the author's elaborate depiction of her protagonist's laborious quest to understand her own 'female anxiety about the masculine' (*Télérama*).

Translating Darrieussecq's novel would have been somewhat challenging and Penny Hueston has risen well to the challenge. The author made a sincere effort to highlight the linguistic heterogeneity of one of Africa's most

ethnically diverse nations which uses two official languages inherited from its colonial era—French and English—and upward of 200 indigenous languages. Darrieussecq's use of Camfranglais, a mixture of Cameroonian French, English, Pidgin English and local languages, is noteworthy throughout the novel. However, I question the translator's choice to translate some of the Camfranglais words, such as 'ékié', rendered as 'yikes' in the English text. This remains in its original form in the French text, which certainly adds to the overall experience of travelling with Solange to this part of the world. In other sections, one can detect an effort on behalf of the translator to gradually initiate the reader to this new linguistic environment—for example an expression such as '*On y Johnnie*' (p. 221) is first translated as '*let's Johnnie there*' (p. 134) but subsequent examples are left in their original Camfranglais version with explanatory footnotes.

The *Irish Times* qualifies Darrieussecq's novel as 'daring', and that it certainly is, as it seems to work towards the explicit destruction of racial stereotypes while also, perhaps unconsciously, comforting and reinforcing them. It teeters 'daringly', for example, on the borders of the treacherous pits of exoticism yet resists, ultimately, falling in. This is most apparent in Solange's internal reflections concerning Kouhouesso's physical appearance, this 'astounding specimen' with 'Chinese eyes' whose thick skin she adores and who is the object of her acute curiosity. This is not without recalling notions of reductive European fascination with (and fear of) the exotic 'African Other', notoriously immortalised at the Paris Colonial Exposition of 1931, during which 'specimens' from France's conquered overseas territories were displayed to the French public in an effort to justify the colonial project in its 'civilising' mission of the world's 'uncivilised' cultures. Indeed, the phantoms of France's not so distant colonial past are revived here with a reference to Sarkozy's infamous 'Dakar' speech delivered in the Senegalese capital in 2007. Moreover, the cover image showing a young African man, muscular and topless, turning his gaze to a non-specified focal point in the distance against the backdrop of a roaring setting sun, does not alleviate the impression of exotic fetishism that some readers (including this one) may receive. Nevertheless, it is evident that Darrieussecq has intimate knowledge of this southern part of Cameroon. She highlights specifically its rich linguistic and tribal diversity, from the Pygmy tribes of the east to the Bamileke of the west, its spiritual belief systems, including traditional witchcraft and vengeful *Mami wata* spirits, yet also touches on issues of a more political nature, not confined to the Cameroonian national space

and relevant to the broader context of West Africa. For example, the novel implicitly considers what it means to be a young, homosexual man in a region characterised by both institutional and cultural homophobia.

A second aspect of the text that may trouble readers is its positioning within the fashionable, superficial and money-saturated world of Hollywood filmmaking. Well-known names are repeatedly dropped—a certain ‘George’ known to spend time at Lake Como, Vincent Cassel, Scarlett Johansson, Matt Damon, Godard, Chabrol, even Oprah, to name but a few. Indeed, readers may start to wonder why it is important that they be reminded that Solange travels ‘full-price business-class’ (p. 118) whether that be on an Air France flight between Los Angeles and Paris or first-class on the TGV back to her native Clèves. I was lucky enough to meet Marie Darrieussecq during her most recent trip to Melbourne to promote the English translation of her book. She explained that the choice of placing an African character within the context of a wealthy (and often shallow) American cinematographic production was deliberately calculated as a means by which to tackle clichéd images of Africans in Western rhetoric largely associated with poverty, unemployment, and a crushing collectivist identity placing the group’s needs above that of the individual. Given this explanation, one can certainly appreciate how Darrieussecq’s novel works to undermine received ideas about race and socio-economic status, yet may still question the taxing effect that specifications relating to Solange’s ‘Vanessa Bruno’ dress (p. 179) and ‘Hermès’ sarong (p. 240) can have on the reader.

Overall, an accessible, enjoyable and adventurous read which takes the reader, if willing to embark *sans* postcolonial critical baggage, across the triangular continental formation of America, Europe and Africa.

*Charlotte Mackay*

*The University of Melbourne*