

Jean-Paul Delamotte (1931–2019)

Tom Thompson

Jean-Paul Delamotte, who devoted forty years of his life to actively encouraging Australian-French relations, died at his home in Boulogne-Billancourt on 21 September 2019, aged 87. Born on 21 October 1931 in Boulogne-Billancourt, Jean-Paul was the author of eighteen books and sixteen translations, and was devoted to the cinema, being both a film producer and a subtitler of over fifty movies.

He studied in Paris at Sciences Po, at the same time as Jacques Chirac, then at Amherst College in the USA and at Harvard University (1956–1958), where he graduated in 1958 with a Master of Public Administration. Eager to learn, he hitch-hiked across the USA and Canada before returning to Paris, where in December 1960 he completed a doctoral thesis in political science at the Sorbonne entitled ‘Les Relations de l’État et de l’industrie cinématographique en France (1945–1960)’.

The early 1960s saw his poems and stories published, beginning with the publication by Gallimard of a story, *La Communauté* (1962), in its ‘Jeune Prose’ collection. *The New York Times* that year noted Jean-Paul’s first engagement with film production, when he worked for the Compagnie Française Cinématographique in developing Simone de Beauvoir’s *Les Mandarins* for an American production. This project never came to fruition. Jean-Paul’s stories were highly regarded. One, *L’Herbier d’une fille*, was published in the April 1963 issue of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* alongside texts by Henry Miller and Michael Foucault.

He befriended Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco but, sensing his own writing was making little economic impact, he decided to engage more fully with film. He acted as production manager on *Un monsieur de compagnie* (1964) and worked with Richard Quine on his *Paris When it Sizzles* (1964), an adaptation of Julien Duvivier's 1952 film *La Fête à Henriette*. It was while working with Quine that he met his future companion, Monique Desgrouas, at the Boulogne Studios. Jean-Paul was director of production for the influential film *Compartment tueurs* directed by Costa Gavras (1965), then production manager on *The Defector* (1966), where he utilised music by Serge Gainsbourg. His writing continued during this time: in 1967 Plon released his novel *Sans hâte, cette nuit...* A story, *Appartenances*, was published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in May the same year.

As producer for Reggane Films, he again worked with Gavras in 1969, this time on the film *Z*, which won the Oscar for best Foreign Language Film in 1970. At the Studios de Boulogne, he worked with director Jacques Deray on securing Paris interiors for *Borsalino* (1970) and also sourced Paris locations for Fred Zinnemann's *The Day of the Jackal* (1973). He was assistant director on the spaghetti western *Brothers Blue* (1973).

Early in 1974 Jean-Paul married Monique, who was working at the time for MGM. While it seemed a match made in cinematic heaven, it actually provided the impetus for them both to apply for university teaching positions in Australia. Eugène Ionesco supplied a reference in support of their application, as did Serge Doubrovsky and the sociologist Georges Friedmann. In the end it was the University of Newcastle that responded, and they took up teaching duties there at the beginning of second term in 1974. In appointing them, Newcastle had made an important cultural decision! Jean-Paul taught new courses on French literature and cinema created by the head of the French Department, Ken Dutton, while Monique taught classes in French language. In 1975, Jean-Paul presented classes on French cinema at Newcastle and every second week at the University of Sydney, also publishing *Signe de vie 1* and *Signe de vie 2* locally. Their only daughter, Guibourg, was born in Newcastle that year and has been a regular visitor because of her family links there.

In 1976 the Delamottes moved to Melbourne where Jean-Paul worked as a senior tutor in the Media Centre of La Trobe University. He was now absorbed with the new Australian cinema, reviewing it for French

newspapers and writing the subtitles for Michael Thornhill's *The FJ Holden*, Peter Weir's *The Last Wave*, Colin Eggleston's *Long Weekend*, and the New Zealand movie *Sleeping Dogs*.



A 1990 meeting of the Association Culturelle Franco-Australienne, hosted by the Whitlams. From left to right: Tom Thompson, Margaret Whitlam, Ross Steele (standing), Jean-Paul Delamotte, Frank Moorhouse and Kay Suters.

Photo courtesy of Monique Delamotte.

The family returned to Paris in the second half of 1976, where Jean-Paul continued to write. In 1978 Plon published a collection of stories entitled *La Bourrelle*, with a cover by Roland Topor, and Jean-Paul adapted the play *Out Cry* (also known as *The Two-Character Play*) by Tennessee Williams for the Petit Montparnasse theatre. Jean-Paul and Monique maintained a genuine interest in their Australian connections. This was actualised through their creation of the Association Culturelle Franco-Australienne (ACFA) in 1980 (which continued to 2000), and the creation of a small publishing house, La Petite Maison—the name they used for the studio they established at the back of their home in Boulogne-Billancourt to welcome visitors from Australia. The publishing house, founded in 1983 to promote Australian literature in France, was inaugurated by the publication of *L'Écharde* by Paul Wenz, the French writer who was a friend of André Gide and translator of Jack London and Joseph Conrad, and who had lived near Forbes in NSW from 1898 to 1939. Jean-Paul was entranced by his story and by the fact

that he had published novels in French for a wide audience but was so little known in his adopted country.

And so the Delamottes provided accommodation for Australian writers, artists and researchers to pursue their work in Paris, while also entertaining visiting Australians and hosting a range of events to foster Franco-Australian relations, often in partnership with the Australian Embassy in Paris. When Gough Whitlam was installed as Australia's Ambassador to UNESCO (based in Paris), a post he occupied from 1983 to 1986, both he and his wife Margaret became part of the evolving ACFA. This association continued when Whitlam was elected to the Executive Board of UNESCO (1986–1989).

I first met Jean-Paul in early 1987 when I was publisher for the Bicentennial Authority and both myself and my wife, the writer Elizabeth Butel, joined ACFA, staying at La Petite Maison that year. The Delamottes enabled us to live domestically with our one-year-old daughter Angelica, while facilitating meetings for me with notable French publishers to discuss many Australian authors. These publishers included Jean-Claude Zylberstein of 10/18 with whom I shared an interest in Arthur Upfield. That year Jean-Paul published *À la recherche d'un écrivain perdu : Paul Wenz, français et australien*, (Le Lérot rêveur). He also translated and published three stories by Frank Moorhouse and did the subtitles for the Oscar-winning film *Life is Beautiful*.

During our early times in Paris, Elizabeth (who was Lloyd Rees' secretary) engaged with Printemps to exhibit some of Lloyd's work, and the Delamottes lobbied for Rees to receive the Medal of the City in 1987. They also lobbied for singer Joan Sutherland and her husband, conductor Richard Bonyngé, to be given the distinction of being made members of the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* with the rank of *Commandeur*.

ACFA was also the initiator of the Colloque d'Études Franco-Australiennes held in Paris and Le Havre in December 1987. The proceedings of the colloquium, consisting of thirty papers, were published in 1989. I had returned from France to set up my fourth Sydney Writers Week and, responding to my ACFA 'duties', organised a Geoffrey Robertson Hypothetical—'What if France had colonised Australia?'—for an ABC televised event at Sydney Town Hall (14 February 1988). This featured the wit and guile of the great Gough, an active ACFA member.

That year (1988) Jean-Paul was awarded the Bicentennial Translators Prize for his work, which by then included his translation of Moorhouse's *The Coca Cola Kid* (*Coca-cola Kid, et autres récits*, Presses de la Renaissance, 1985) and subtitles for Dusan Makvejev's film version of the novel, as well as subtitles for the French cinema releases of *Young Einstein* (*Einstein junior*) and Raymond Longford's 1919 film *The Sentimental Bloke*, which was screened out of competition at the 1987 Cannes Film Festival.

As publisher of literature at Angus & Robertson, I contracted ACFA for Paul Wenz's *Diary of a New Chum* (1990), introduced by Frank Moorhouse, the first book in our Sydney-Paris Link series. With the backing of the French and Australian governments, Jean-Paul initiated the project of featuring Australia at the May 1990 edition of the literary festival Les Belles Étrangères, run by the Centre national du livre in Paris. Eleven Australian writers were invited, including Mudrooroo, Tim Winton and Peter Carey. It was an outrageous success for our writers, thanks to Jean-Paul's friendships with Jacques Chirac, François Mitterrand and Jack Lang (Minister of Culture from 1988 to 1993). The event drew the attention of French publishers and media. Jean-Paul, I might add, was modest in everything he did, so modest that I had no idea at this time we had the same birthday.

Jean-Paul published his own translation of Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo* in 1991, and in the following year translated Moorhouse's *Forty-Seventeen* (*Quarante/dix-sept*, Quai Voltaire, 1992). For his remarkable efforts in promoting Australian culture, he was made a Member of the Order of Australia (1992) and became an Honorary Fellow of Macquarie University in 1994.

In a long visit to France in 1994, my family lived with Alister Kershaw near Sancerre and with the Delamottes in Paris, where Jean-Paul arranged meetings for me with the publisher Robert Laffont. At this time I became aware of Jean-Paul's 'other' role as a subtitler for Hollywood classic films to be shown on French TV. His understanding of American idiom enabled forty classics to appear, and these continue to bring French audiences to classic cinema.

In 1995 Jean-Paul published a French version of my own memoir of Australian writers, *Coming out from behind: the unprinted stories behind the published books*, as *Hors-texte : confidences d'un éditeur* (translated by Anne Sauvêtre). This served as a 'calling card' for French publishers.

It coincided with the creation by the Delamottes of the Atelier Littéraire Franco-Australien, which welcomed many Australian artists and writers to France, and with Jean-Paul's translation of Moorhouse's *Grand Days* (*Tout un monde d'espoir*) for Belfond.

Robert Laffont and his wife then visited us in Sydney. He was critical of my decision to name my publishing company Editions Tom Thompson (ETT) in my management buyout of 250 Angus & Robertson and Imprint titles, which formalised in 1996.

In 1997 the University of Newcastle made Jean-Paul an Honorary Fellow and, as the inaugural Kelter Hartley Foundation Fellow, he delivered a speech on 'Reciprocity' which was published the following year in the pages of this journal, along with Colin Thornton-Smith's essay 'The Delamotte Phenomenon—Cultural Reciprocity' (*Explorations*, 24, June 1998). This seemed to give Jean-Paul renewed energy and that year he co-wrote *Aimer l'Australie* (for Larousse's 'Monde et voyages' collection) and then in 1998 published his own translation of the first three chapters of Geoffrey Dutton's memoir *Out in the Open* (*Et voilà ! : souvenirs d'enfance*) as well as *Récits du bush* by Paul Wenz.

In 2000 he published two of his own memoirs: *Vivre et revivre : journal littéraire (Australie, 29 janvier – 20 février 1977)* and *L'Indien-Pacifique : conte franco-australien* (both La Petite Maison). He also translated twelve major Australian writers for a special number of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (June 2003). In 2004 ETT published Wenz's masterly novel *The Thorn in the Flesh*, translated by Maurice Blackman and with an introduction by Helen Garner.

Margaret Whitlam's translation of the short story 'Charley' by Paul Wenz was published in 2005, and then republished with Maurice Blackman's translation of 'Jack et Jim' in a bilingual edition for Double Bush Binding (2006)—within an exhibition of individual binders shown in Sydney, Tokyo and Rennes. Jean-Paul also translated the play *Acrobates* by his close friend Israël Horovitz for the collection *Dix pièces courtes* (Éditions Théâtrales, 2007).

A long-term ambition was finally realised when Jean-Paul's translation of Marcus Clark's classic novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* appeared in France as *La Justice des hommes* (Houdiard, 2009). As Jean-Paul noted

in his journal: ‘Je suis l’esclave de Marcus’. Also in 2009 he published *En époussetant la mappemonde* by Paul Wenz. A link with Monique Delamotte’s fine binding group enabled Sabine Peirard to produce fine-bound copies of the poet Lynn Hard’s *Australia Suite* (ETT, 2010). The book, containing illustrations by Garry Shead, was first published as a limited edition of one hundred bound copies in 1998. A further two hundred blocks of sewn pages were produced for a subsequent edition, but these had become lost and only resurfaced in 2009. The freshly bound book was featured in an exhibition at Maitland Regional Art Gallery in 2010.

Jean-Paul published his memoir of his journey with Paul Wenz as *La Route de Nanima* in 2011. The Delamottes generously donated their archives from both of their associations, together with the works published under the imprint of La Petite Maison, to the State Library of NSW in 2015, in the light of Jean-Paul’s fading health. To cheer him up, ETT published another volume in the Sydney-Paris Link series, in the form of French-born cook Babette Hayes’ book *Food for Friends* (2017). When we stayed with the Delamottes in 2018, Jean-Paul immediately brought to my attention an immense book on the non-French artists who appeared at the French Salons up until 1939. Published in 2004, it included crucial information on Australian artists and he felt that it was ‘imperative’ that something should be done about this. In April 2019 we duly published *Australasian Artists at the French Salons*—dedicated to the Delamottes with ‘an abiding affection’—in our Sydney-Paris Link series. While in Paris in 2018, I had contracted with a publisher, the delightful Pierre Sanchez of L’Échelle de Jacob, Dijon, and on my return to Australia published *Their Fathers’ Land: King and Empire* by Paul Wenz, translated by Marie Ramsland, together with a new edition of *The Thorn in the Flesh*.

With his health fading in July, I wrote to Jean-Paul and Monique thus:

So our little Sydney-Paris Link gets stronger and stronger, as the List gets longer, and the days while away with the fluttering of writer’s wings and the beating of waves between our countries, drifting now into Exile Bay. Oh Mentor, wait for me and get through this beastly summer. There is so much more for me to follow up for you, so much more to do. ‘Comrade’, as Gough would tell us, ‘let us forge on and continue to create a “little window” in Paris for Australia!’ ... As you both have.

Jean-Paul died on 21 September 2019 in Paris. Five days later, so did his class-mate Jacques Chirac.

Sydney

Editor's Notes: Tom Thompson is the publisher at ETT Imprint, Exile Bay, Sydney, the site where the fifty-eight French Republicans who participated in the Lower Canada Rebellion of 1838 were 'installed' by the British Government. He is a writer and broadcaster, introduced the French edition of Mudrooroo's *Chat sauvage en chute libre* (Asphalte, 2010), introduced and edited Henry Miller's then unpublished novels *Nexus 2* (Autrement, 2004, aka *Paris 1928*) and *Capricorne* (Éditions Blanche, 2013).

The archives of Jean-Paul and Monique Delamotte, and of the Atelier Littéraire Franco-Australien (ALFA), are now housed at the State Library of NSW. The index may be found on the ISFAR website (www.isfar.org.au), under the RESOURCES tab. It is reproduced with the kind permission of the Delamottes (May 2017).