

Introduction

John West-Sooby

This special number of *The French Australian Review* features a selection of papers from those given at the second ISFAR Colloquium on *French Contributions to Australian Life and Culture*, held at the University of Adelaide on 27 September 2018. An important event in its own right, this colloquium was also a key moment in the year-long series of public talks and other events organised by the Department of French Studies at the University of Adelaide to commemorate its centenary. That series, provocatively titled *What have the French ever done for us?*, was designed to showcase some of the myriad contributions that the francophone world has made—globally, and to Australian life and culture in particular. The range of topics naturally featured the major areas of cultural and intellectual influence, such as literature, the history of the book, music, art, cinema and the French postmodern theorists; but there were also presentations on such diverse subjects as the early French maritime voyages to Australia, the French Revolution and its repercussions today, the role France played in Australia's growth to nationhood between the wars, and the French language itself, in its complex historical interrelationship with English.

The 2018 ISFAR Colloquium added further to this mosaic. Several papers were devoted to French writers and artists who have lived in Australia and whose work was profoundly shaped by their experience here. As a result, they are now part of Australia's cultural heritage. Other presentations highlighted aspects of the historical relationship between the two countries, such as the early French influences on Australia's colonial

wine industry or the political and trade tensions that emerged during the inter-war period—the latter being the subject of a keynote address by Colin Nettelbeck. The colloquium ended with a panel discussion which reflected critically on the various ways in which the centenary of the Great War had been commemorated in both France and Australia. These World War I commemorations were a reminder, if any were needed, that Australians have also had a significant impact on the French.

Extensive though it may be, the list of topics outlined above is by no means exhaustive. It nevertheless serves to remind us of the breadth and depth of Australia's French connections, some of which are well known and acknowledged in the public arena, others less so. Those links have sometimes taken circuitous or unexpected pathways, a case in point being the ripple effects in our region of the 1871 Paris Commune. Among the thousands of insurgents deported to New Caledonia following the suppression of the Commune were a number of notable figures who subsequently made their way to Australia. One such figure was the artist Lucien Henry, whose aesthetic and political ideas are subjected to a fresh examination by Angela Giovanangeli in the first essay in this special number. Taking a transcultural approach, and drawing on the artist's published articles and archival correspondence, she presents the case for situating Henry as a cultural mediator, his advocacy for the development of a distinctly Australian style for the decorative arts being the expression of an ideology inherited directly from the Paris Commune.

Another notable Commune deportee to visit Australia, albeit for a much shorter period of time, was the political activist Louise Michel, who was amnestied by the French authorities in December 1879 and who stopped briefly in Sydney and Melbourne in 1880 on her way back to France. In order to gauge Michel's impact on the Australian public, Elizabeth Rechniewski has conducted a detailed examination of the many Australian newspaper articles devoted to her—numbering over two thousand—from the time of her visit in 1880 until 1905, the year of her death in Marseille. The analysis of that reporting, which is presented here, highlights a contradictory mix of hostility and sympathy. On the one hand, it is clear that there was a deep aversion for her radical ideas, which were considered to be dangerous and threatening; conversely, though, many newspaper articles expressed a degree of compassion for a woman who came to be seen as the victim of a

repressive and ‘illiberal’ political regime. As Rechniewski notes, her case offered a ready pretext for contrasting the harshness of the French political and judicial system with the freedom of speech and tolerance of dissent that were considered features of the British system and, by extension, of Australia’s.

The third and final essay in this issue likewise deals with French visitors to Australian shores, this time in the contemporary period. In their article, Natalie Edwards and Christopher Hogarth examine the cases of Catherine Rey and Marie-Paule Leroux, two French women writers who migrated to Australia and whose writings serve as a means of exploring their impressions of life here, leading ultimately to questions about collective and individual identity. Beyond their differences, it is shown that both writers exhibit a ‘strategic exoticism’ which serves as a form of emancipation and resistance with respect to certain notions of France and Frenchness. As such, their works represent important contributions to the evolving literary genre of migrant literature.

Readers of *The French Australian Review* will be familiar with the work of an earlier French-Australian writer, Paul Wenz, whose cause was championed over many years by Jean-Paul Delamotte. All those whose path intersected with that of Jean-Paul will have been deeply saddened to learn of his recent death. It is fitting that his very great contribution to Australian life and culture, and more generally to the cause of intercultural exchange between France and Australia, should be honoured in this special number through Tom Thompson’s obituary. Jean-Paul sought tirelessly to foster ties between the two countries, and in particular to develop a greater awareness of Australian literature and culture among his French compatriots. It is no exaggeration to say that he was the quintessential cultural intermediary. Jean-Paul’s love of Australia and its culture was deep and enduring. In many respects his passing represents the end of an era. He will be sorely missed.

To complete this issue, President, Kerry Mullan, summarises ISFAR’s activities for 2019 and this is followed by two book reviews and the usual Bibliographical Notes.

The University of Adelaide