

# French Migrant Writing in Australia: Australianness in Two Female Memoirs from the 2000s<sup>1</sup>

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While individuals and groups have long migrated throughout the French-speaking world, the increase in migration from the late twentieth century onwards has led to a proliferation of migrant writing. In the French context, what is most interesting about this body of literature is that it breaks free from the common directions and destinations of previous times; rather than representing journeys from a colony/former colony to the Metropole, and rather than positioning the urban spaces of France as the major catalyst for migrant experience, ostensibly more literary works are forging new patterns of travel, involving different regions and creating new global connections. In this paper, we explore two examples of such migrant literature. Analysing works by two twenty-first century writers who represent their migration from France to Australia in mid-life, we explore the means by which these works contribute to a global French literature that collapses distinctions between elite, niche and popular, and between centre and periphery.

In tandem with the increase in texts by migrant writers, *la littérature migrante* has become a central area of current scholarly enquiry in literary studies. This criticism has shifted significantly in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis presented here derives from a larger project currently being undertaken by the authors, entitled 'Transnational Selves: French Narratives of Migration to Australia'. This research is supported by funding from the Australian Research Council under its Discovery Project scheme.

Carine Mardorossian in 2002 noted a progression in thinking around migrant writing, as indicated by the title of her article, 'From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature'. Mardorossian noted a paradigmatic shift whereby writers position themselves as migrants rather than as exiles, thus moving beyond categories of postcolonial literary criticism such as hybridity, in-betweenness, belonging, nostalgia and resistance. More recently, Oana Sabo has extended this discussion, pointing to how late twentieth-century texts 'transition from the literature of migrant authors' homeland to that of their hostland' (2018, 8), whereas the migrant texts of the twenty-first century demonstrate that the 'symbolic capital' in these works 'is not solely bound to Paris, even when France remains central to their literary legitimation. [...] They thus relativize France's central position in the world republic of letters without displacing the center altogether' (Sabo 2018, 8).

Subha Xavier's work, which appeared two years before Sabo's, is concerned with a mode of interpretation that similarly moves beyond France and beyond Paris. She points towards what she calls a 'Global French Literature' that does not correspond to categories of postcolonial or Francophone enquiry. Xavier views migrant writing as a category of its own, unrestricted by national categorisation. Although she highlights the importance of national publishing industries to the dissemination of migrant works, she finds that migrant literature circulates between nations and national identities, carving out a space for itself beyond a movement from one nation to another. She suggests that 'migration manifests itself in the themes, tropes, and textual strategies of the literary work regardless of the author's citizenship or country of birth' (2016, 19). She further suggests that migrant texts frequently conform to cultural expectations within their place of publication but also criticise that culture, and that they therefore concede 'dominant paradigms and discourses while slowly undoing them from within' (122). This is particularly acute in the case of female-authored migrant texts, in which Xavier finds 'the experience of migration a wellspring of creative possibility—one that allows [them] to contest all forms of fixity, be they based on national, cultural, sexual, or racial identities' (163).

Although these analyses underscore the positive elements of migrant writing and celebrate an openness to listening to the voices of migrant writers, they also sound a note of caution regarding the consumption of this body of literature. Sabo, in particular, highlights the way in which migrant

literature has become consecrated in certain national publishing markets. Focusing on the French context, she argues that ‘a profitable market for migrant fiction informs and sustains literary production in contemporary France’ (2018, 3). Sabo points to what she refers to as a ‘niche market’, highlighting a number of changes in the literary field since 2000:

the appearance of an intermediary marketplace consisting of small and independent presses whose editors position migrant novels for both symbolic and commercial success, the rise of digital audiences that review migrant novels and thus participate in value-making processes, the creation of a new literary prize for the migrant genre, and the opening of national institutions to migrant authors (Sabo 2018, 3).

By analysing publishing trends, sales figures and the creation and distribution of literary prizes, Sabo argues convincingly that the growing dissemination of migrant literature is linked to marketability and profit. Similarly, the reality of the publishing industry and of readers’ tastes is foregrounded in Graham Huggan’s analysis. Huggan discerns a ‘strategic exoticism’ in some works of migrant literature, which is designed to appeal to a certain audience, an audience which is drawn in by the exotic aspects of the narrative while being comforted by its familiarity (2001, xi). Such a mixture of fetishisation and critique has proved to be popular among readers. In the Anglophone context, a salient example of this form of writing is Peter Mayle’s 1989 best-selling memoir *A Year in Provence*, which focused on an English migrant’s observations of Provençal events and traditions in a humorous, often smug manner.

As these critical interventions demonstrate, the reality of readership and audience is an important consideration in the field of migrant writing. Sabo in particular argues that this reality has changed in the twenty-first century and that the categories of readers upon whom publishing houses formerly relied are no longer discernible. She refers to Bourdieu’s theory of the literary field (1993), in which this sociologist:

... delineates three competing principles of legitimation: an autonomous form of recognition, granted by elite producers in the ‘self-sufficient world of “art for art’s sake”’; a ‘bourgeois’ form reflecting the taste of the dominant class; and ‘popular’ consecration bestowed by mass audiences (Sabo 2018, 15; quoting Bourdieu 1993, 51).

Sabo argues that this neat compartmentalisation of consecrating practices has altered and that in particular ‘the notions of “art for art’s sake” and “bourgeois” taste are largely irrelevant to today’s cultural industries’ (15). She argues further that Bourdieu’s theory of the literary field evolved into a ‘conception of the literary marketplace, which he divides into the subfields of “restricted” and “large-scale” production—in other words, into an elite market that produces aesthetically valuable works and a mass market that produces the commercially viable ones’ (Sabo 2018, 16). She again suggests a recent collapse of such distinct categories.

This accords with Beth Driscoll’s 2014 theory of a ‘middlebrow’ literature, which conflates ‘elite’ and ‘mass market’ texts. Driscoll describes middlebrow texts, practices, and institutions as ‘middle class, reverential towards elite culture, entrepreneurial, mediated, feminized, emotional, recreational and earnest’ (2014, 6). She further points to ‘the space in contemporary culture that is neither elite nor popular’ (2014, 8–9), where ‘literary and commercial practices are dynamically interrelated’ (2014, 13). Interestingly, Sabo insists on a distinction between migrant and middlebrow texts since, ‘unlike middlebrow texts, migrant texts—at least in France—also partake of elite culture, without revering it’ (2018, 17).

The two migrant texts we examine in this paper are examples of such texts. This article explores notions of a Global French Literature within an Australian framework, considering two texts of migrant literature published in the twenty-first century. As pinpointed in research in migrant literature, these texts depart from paradigms that position France as the centre, that place Paris or an alternative urban space as the ultimate destination, or that stage movement between former colony and colonial power. Instead, these works depict migrants leaving France for a faraway place in the Anglosphere.

We focus upon literary works by two female French migrants to Australia, published within a few years of one another. Marie-Paule Leroux’s *La Grenouille dans le Billabong : Une Française en Tasmanie* (*The Frog in the Billabong: A Frenchwoman in Tasmania*), published by Pays et Terroirs in 2004, and Catherine Rey’s *Une femme en marche* (*A Woman Walking*), published by Phébus in 2007, act as representations of French lives in

Australia for an English-speaking readership.<sup>2</sup> Both authors left France by choice and for a mixture of personal and professional reasons. These are hardly the refugee or asylum seeker narratives that form the basis of many recent studies of migrant literature, but they constitute innovative depictions of twenty-first century migration. Whereas Leroux's text represents a mostly friendly encounter between two cultures through a rather typical narrative of discovery, Rey's represents far less of Australia than its paratext suggests, using the country more as a backdrop to the author's eventual liberation from a France that she flees due to her perpetual feeling of estrangement there. Both texts overlap, however, in their critiques of French elitism in contrast to the more relaxed Australian social structure, and in their ostensible insistence on Franco-Australian historical ties. In this paper, we focus on the authors' descriptions of France and Australia beyond national boundaries. We first examine their representations of stereotypes of the two nations and how they complicate their narratives using strategies akin to the 'strategic exoticism' theorised by Huggan. We then analyse how their texts are positioned in terms of the commodification of migrant literature proposed by critics such as Sabo and Xavier.

### **'France' and 'Australia': The stereotypical and beyond**

The two writers who form the basis of this analysis, Leroux and Rey, find themselves in Australia for different reasons, and this impacts upon their perspective and their cultural comparison. Leroux arrived in Australia at the age of thirty with her husband and future business partner. Settling in Tasmania, the pair set up a business entitled *Exquisite Tastes*. Rey, by contrast, left France at forty, having fled a difficult family situation, an abusive husband and a teaching career that left her dissatisfied. Her grandparents had emigrated to Australia decades earlier and her father

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<sup>2</sup> Both texts have been translated into English. Rey's was translated as *Stepping Out* by Julie Rose and was published by Giramondo Publishing in Sydney in 2008. Leroux's work was translated as *A Frog in the Billabong: A French Woman in Tasmania* by Sabine Belaudon and Valerie Barnes and published by Littlefox Press in Fremantle in 2004. We have chosen to translate passages from Leroux's French work into English ourselves, while we have used the published translation of Rey's French original novel unless otherwise stated.

had been born there and, although they had all returned to France, Rey grew up hearing stories of life in Australia. Interestingly, just as Leroux shunned the major urban centres of Australia, Rey migrated to rural Western Australia.

Rey had already become a successful writer, having published several novels in France before migrating, whereas Leroux made her first foray into publishing with *La Grenouille dans le Billabong*. Their texts are thus very different in tone and style, with one noticeably more lyrical than the other. It should also be noted that Rey's work is far more literary and that it describes an existential quest. Leroux's work could be seen as middlebrow in a less theoretical sense than the one we are employing here: its content is a straightforward story of her middle-class life in Tasmania and of the observations she makes about the people and customs there, which confines its lyricism to playful *jeux de mots* (word games) and only describes one moment of existential angst, which is quickly defused. Rey's work is that of a more serious, professional literary writer who might well find the label 'middlebrow' to be offensive, although we hope to show that our use of this term does not denote judgement of the literary quality of her work. Despite these differences, the two writers are joined by their perspective as Frenchwomen of similar age migrating to Australia within a few years of each other and recording their observations in writing.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, stereotypes of both nations are evident in the two writers' works. However, while both writers draw on stereotypes and reinforce some of them, they ultimately undermine them, much in the way Huggan theorises. As they record their initial impressions of their host culture, both point to the differences they encounter in terms of the landscapes, the tastes and the habits of the Australian people with whom they come into contact.

Rey writes highly poetic, sensitive depictions of the open space of Australia, recording her awe at the vastness of the land and the desert of the outback. She contrasts this with the luxury she views in Australia, particularly on her forays to Perth, one of the most prosperous cities in the country. For example, she describes the young people of Western Australia thus: 'dans leurs vastes maisons logeraient vingt familles soudanaises. L'eau de leur piscine arroserait deux acres d'une terre sèche

[...]. La jeunesse? Quand elle ne se bronze pas à Cottesloe, elle vérifie le mouvement de ses actions boursières pour revendre entre deux baignades' (2007, 240).<sup>3</sup>

Leroux's introduction to Australia focuses noticeably on the more rudimentary aspects of its culture. She wonders at the low levels of hygiene and technology of a land which she views as far from Europe in distance but also ostensibly in basic customs. On arriving in Tasmania, for example, she casts a critical eye on her new home: 'Pas de téléphone, pas de télévision, pas de chauffage. Voilà! Et, écrirai-je dans mon journal, "tout est sale"' (2004, 28).<sup>4</sup> Her comparisons between France and Australia frequently centre upon basic cultural constructs, such as food and hygiene. She laments what she sees as a rare example of hierarchisation in Australia regarding gastronomical taste, which she contrasts with France's less discriminatory practices in food and hospitality, commenting that 'alors qu'en France la table et l'art de recevoir ne discriminent pas, ils sont importants aux yeux de tous les Français quel que soit leur âge, leur région ou leur classe sociale, il y a, ici, deux écoles: les "*foodies*", en quelque sorte les gourmets... et les autres' (2004, 100).<sup>5</sup> She struggles, alas, with the idea that eating in Australia is barely even synonymous with 'la table' since 'il faut être né australien pour parvenir à maîtriser l'art de se restaurer debout, en tenant son assiette, son couvert et son verre et pouvoir bavarder et manger en même temps' (2004, 96–97).<sup>6</sup> As is evident in these citations, humour is one of the main motors of Leroux's text.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Twenty Sudanese families could live in their vast homes. The water from their swimming pools would water two acres of dry land. When the youngsters are not sunbathing on Cottesloe beach, they're following the stock market and selling their shares between dips in the ocean.' (This translation is our own since this passage is omitted from the published English version.)

<sup>4</sup> 'No telephone, no television, no heating. There we go! And, I would write in my diary, "everything is dirty".'

<sup>5</sup> 'Whereas in France we are not judgemental about food and how to receive guests, since they're important in the eyes of all French people regardless of their age, the region they're from or their social class, here there are two schools: the "*foodies*", gourmet experts in some way... and the rest.'

<sup>6</sup> 'You have to be born Australian to master the art of feeding yourself while standing up, holding your plate, cutlery and glass while being able to talk and eat at the same time.'

Although her comparisons may appear glib or superior, they are written in a comical tone that renders her text highly readable to a large audience, as we will discuss further below.

Although both texts contain depictions of Australian habits, lifestyle and culture that at first glance do little to complicate representations of this land, they also draw out comparisons between France and Australia which do introduce complexities. What is most interesting about these comparisons is that they are frequently critical of French culture and mores, while highlighting the salutary aspects of Australian life. Although Leroux criticises what she views as the primitive aspects of Australian culture, for example, she also celebrates its non-elitist culture. She tells the tale of having seen a well-known actor from the highly stereotypical television series *The Flying Doctors* at a hotel in Hobart and states, ‘je remarque avec le temps que les vedettes, malgré leur notoriété, sont beaucoup plus accessibles qu’elles ne le sont en France, elles vivent au grand jour sans pour autant déclencher le délire sur leur passage’ (2004, 84).<sup>7</sup> She similarly writes of an episode in which her mother speaks in a campsite laundry room to the wife of the New South Wales Premier Bob Carr: ‘ma mère fait presque une syncope quand je l’informe du statut de son interlocutrice! Elle vient de faire l’expérience que les Australiens—fussent-ils premiers ministres ou vedettes de cinéma—ne se prennent jamais au sérieux et restent toujours incroyablement abordables’ (2004, 150).<sup>8</sup> As is clear from these examples, and as Jacqueline Dutton has demonstrated (2016, 94), anecdote plays a central and recurrent role in Leroux’s narrative.

Rey’s subtle, lyrical text also points to the differences between France and Australia in a way that celebrates elements of the culture of her host land. Rey is highly critical of the elitism she experienced in France and portrays Australia as a means through which to free herself from the shackles of hierarchy. Despite her criticisms of the blasé Australians obsessed with

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Over time I have noticed that, in spite of their fame, celebrities are a lot more approachable here than they are in France. They live everyday lives without provoking frenzy whenever they pass by.’

<sup>8</sup> ‘My mother nearly has a heart attack when I inform her of the status of the lady she’s talking to. She’s just come face to face with the fact that Australians—whether they’re Prime Ministers or film stars—never take themselves too seriously.’

wealth and luxury, she also points to the acceptance she finds in a rural, working-class area. Having been raised in a working-class environment in France and having been stigmatised during her career as a teacher and writer as a result, she views Australian working-class culture both as more accepting and as more accepted in wider society. It is this resistance to hierarchy, coupled with the less elitist academic and publishing practices, that enable her to reinvigorate her writing while in Australia. Indeed, in her article, ‘*Est-ce que vous écrivez toujours?*’ (‘Do you still write?’), Rey reflects upon the development of her writing following her migration to Australia. The male writer who asked her the question she uses as the article’s title is emblematic of the hierarchical Parisian authors—who are, she claims, ‘*toujours persuadés que Paris est le centre du monde*’—and of the French publishing industry, which is ‘*toujours majoritairement masculin*’ (2011, 337).<sup>9</sup> Natalie Edwards has written elsewhere that Rey represents her migration to Australia as a source of self-reinvention, as she manages to transform her self-narrative, her writing and her language use through the space of rural Western Australia. Rey thus joins Leroux in a celebration of Australia as a peripheral space in which she in fact gains more privilege. Both writers display an admiration for the faraway space of Australia. As French people, they are positioned as exotic, but they also muse on the exotic nature of Australia. In this way, their musings on exoticism become marketable products, as narratives of discovery of a foreign land and its quirks.

The strategies adopted by Rey and Leroux can be linked to Huggan’s notion of ‘strategically self-conscious exoticism’ in postcolonial writing, which does more than simply pander to a wonder-seeking audience (Huggan 2001, 116). His 2001 work examines how the reception of postcolonial writers, particularly as demonstrated by prizes, is dependent on how they commodify and exoticise concepts such as ‘marginality’, ‘resistance’ and ‘authenticity’. Huggan locates this strategy in postcolonial writing, examining ‘the means by which postcolonial writers/thinkers, working from within exoticist codes of representation, either manage to subvert those codes or succeed in redeploying them for the purpose of uncovering differential relations to power’ (2001, 32).

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<sup>9</sup> ‘still convinced that Paris is the centre of the world’, ‘still mostly male’ (our translation).

A similar type of exoticism is at play in Leroux's and Rey's texts. Both writers tend to celebrate their marginality within Australia at first, then their resistance to certain parts of the country's culture (as seen in their critiques above), but they ultimately come to terms with Australia and celebrate a new kind of authenticity there. In many of the stereotypical remarks they make about Australia, they work within exoticist codes of representation, but both subvert these in their reactions to power, with strategies ranging from Leroux's humorous plays on the English language to Rey's lambasting of the Paris-centred French literary establishment. Both end up celebrating the new hybrid selfhoods they have created, which make them stand out as something beyond 'French'. The very concept of 'Frenchness' then becomes increasingly criticised, especially in Rey's work.

Both Rey and Leroux celebrate the exotic otherness of the English language but use this language for subversive means. What is especially prominent in Rey's novel is her celebration of the possibilities of adjusting identity through the use of a mixture of two languages. Rey names this language 'ma langue créole', highlighting how this individual linguistic formation is personal to her and her story, and writes that 'vivre en situation d'exil volontaire, c'est s'offrir la possibilité de redécouvrir sa propre langue' (2011, 346).<sup>10</sup> She peppers her text with English vocabulary, such as when she describes her grandmother by saying that 'elle était du style *behave yourself*' (2007, 112).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, she uses a variety of Australian English slang and swear words to form her highly irreverent style, such as when she writes about Australians' 'absence de peur', which she sees as 'doublée d'une capacité à faire des réserves d'espoir': 'C'est le désir d'y croire qui fait dire au *true blue* même dans les pires moments: ça va aller. *No worries. She'll be right. She*, c'est la fatalité, la vie, la destinée' (2007, 107).<sup>12</sup> These English words and expressions are italicised in the text and stand out from the principal language of Rey's prose. Her usage of English may be rooted in a desire to convey her experience in Australia more concisely or

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<sup>10</sup> 'my creole language', 'living in the situation of voluntary exile gives you the possibility of rediscovering your own language' (our translation).

<sup>11</sup> 'she was of the "behave yourself" kind' (Rey 2008, 83).

<sup>12</sup> 'lack of fear', 'coupled with an ability to hold hope in reserve'. 'It's the will to believe that makes the true-blue Aussies say even at the worst moments: it'll be OK. No worries. She'll be right. She, that's fate, life, destiny' (Rey 2008, 79).

accurately—this is partially autobiographical, after all—but it also has the effect of exoticising the text, emphasising the foreignness of its perspective within familiar narrative tropes.

Rey's exoticising play with language finds echoes in Leroux's work, although most often in the more comedic recounting of linguistic misunderstandings typical of narratives of intercultural discovery. Leroux points to several instances of the use of Australian slang, such as when a local woman persists in asking her husband, '*How are you, mussels?*' (2004, 222). She recounts how he interprets this as a reference to the seafood sold by his epicurean business before realising that this is in fact a greeting and veiled comment on his physical appearance, since the woman is asking '*How are you, muscles?*'; 'Ah, les mystères de la langue!' Leroux exclaims (2004, 222).<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere, she also uses linguistic prowess to deflect criticisms of the French nation. *French Suck!* is the first line of her chapter telling of her 'Tribulations Françaises' during the period directly after French government agents sank the Greenpeace *Rainbow Warrior* ship in Auckland Harbour in 1985. In the environmentally friendly state of Tasmania, during this ostensible French affront to Australasian protestors (protesting against the French nuclear testing on the outlying atoll of Moruroa), local people boycott Leroux's business and offensive graffiti appear on her property and in public places. However, French humour soon comes to the rescue, as another French resident decides to play with the expression 'suck'. The offending graffiti is changed:

Un de nos amis, un Français, se munit d'une bombe de peinture rose bonbon et un soir se charge de 'transformer' le slogan 'French *suck!*' dans le sud de Hobart. Il y ajoute '*beautifully*', 'merveilleusement'. C'est que ce verbe change complètement de sens lorsqu'il est suivi d'un adverbe (2004, 157–158).<sup>14</sup>

In a show of linguistic irreverence, she translates this *jeu de mots* to her French readers, playing on a stereotype of French sexual sophistication

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<sup>13</sup> 'Ah, the mysteries of language!'

<sup>14</sup> 'One of our friends, a Frenchman, equipped himself with a can of candy pink spray paint and took it upon himself one evening to transform the "French *suck*" slogan in South Hobart. He added "*beautifully*" to it. This verb completely changes meaning when it is followed by an adverb'.

and exceptionalism: ‘dans le cas présent, les Hobartiens pouvaient lire le lendemain matin à leur réveil, “les Français sucent merveilleusement!”’ (2004, 158).<sup>15</sup> Thus Leroux uses the racial stigma of which she and other French citizens become objects whilst in Australia as an opportunity to talk back to their host culture, performatively ‘declining’ certain stereotypes of them much in the way that Mireille Rosello (1998) describes immigrants doing in the face of racist rhetoric in the French context. Although Dutton writes that the ‘scars’ of this anti-French victimisation resulting from the *Rainbow Warrior* affair ‘remain tender’ (2016, 96), Leroux uses this set of incidents as an opportunity to turn this traumatic, conflictual situation into a moment of critique, both of the host and of the home culture. The fact that she has been a victim of Australian racism, she suggests, helps her to develop an understanding of racism on a more global scale:

Cette expérience, aussi horrible soit-elle, m’apporte beaucoup, néanmoins, sur le plan personnel. Elle m’ouvre les yeux d’abord. Je comprends mieux, maintenant, ce que doivent endurer les Africains, les Arabes ou les Israélites qui vivent en France qui font constamment les frais du racisme et qui sont en butte à des discriminations en tout genre. C’est tout simplement insupportable (2004, 158).<sup>16</sup>

Leroux’s comparison of her experience of discrimination with the plight of racial minorities in France is somewhat ostentatious. Nevertheless, what is interesting about it is that it serves to position her as a global other within this migrant narrative. She claims a connection with other recognisable migrants and points to the commonalities in their experiences. While ignoring important degrees of suffering caused by racial abuse, episodes such as this exoticise this migrant narrative and place the writer in the position of the global French migrant. Both writers thus play with the exoticisation of their narratives through their cultural comparisons, their use of language and their positioning as the exotic other in a foreign yet familiar space. Such a positioning appeals to particular audiences, both at home and abroad.

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<sup>15</sup> ‘in this case, upon waking from their slumber the morning after, Hobartians could now read, “French suck beautifully!”’

<sup>16</sup> ‘As horrible as it was, this experience brought me a lot on a personal level. First off, it opened my eyes. I now better understand what Africans, Arabs and Jews living in France who bear the consequences of racism and are subject to all sorts of discrimination have to endure. It’s quite simply unbearable.’

## Middlebrow migrant writing

As Leroux's and Rey's texts play with the concept of 'Frenchness' and locate themselves in an interstice between celebrating Australian culture and deriding French, their writing poses questions about publication practices, dissemination and readership. The literary texts they develop could not be described as 'elite', to recall Bourdieu's terminology, since these are not texts that are consecrated by highly regarded literary awards, nor are they studied at institutions of higher education. But neither are these examples of the 'backpacker literature' recounting a Francophone European experience in Australia which has become increasingly popular over the last decade (such as, for example, Sophie Libion's *Une année en Australie/A Year in Australia* or Emmanuelle Ferrieux's *Tour de chant/Singing Field Trip*). While the texts of Rey and Leroux are examples of life writing that are relatable to the average reader, it would be simplistic to brand them as 'popular' or 'mass' literature since they are produced via niche publishers, in the French language—although they deal with experiences in an Anglophone country—and would potentially sell better in English (both works have in fact been translated into English, although the English translation of Leroux's work is harder to obtain). They could thus be viewed as examples of the 'middlebrow' texts of which Driscoll underlines the contemporary popularity. Such texts are not elite, yet nor are they popular, in Driscoll's theorisation. In an article in *The Sydney Review of Books* in 2015, Driscoll focuses on the middle-aged, female readership of three popular novels in Australia (*The Landing* by Susan Johnson, *The Other Side of the World* by Stephanie Bishop and *Relativity* by Antonia Hayes), pinpointing women readers as a target for the commodification of certain types of books. Though Driscoll's work has drawn the ire of reviewers for its allegedly 'snobbish' critique of the publishing industry's 'cult of the middlebrow', the term 'middlebrow' is a useful tool for understanding the willingness of publishers to produce the works in question in this essay. Both Leroux's and Rey's texts sit between literary categories and, while they require an educated readership, this readership need not be from the elite. This is particularly the case for Leroux, whose text's strategic exoticisation lends itself to such a readership. Rey's text, on the other hand, is more literary and its sophistication will be welcomed by a more informed audience, but it is still open to reading by such a middlebrow audience.

Such possibilities of dissemination seem to have been understood by the texts' respective publishing companies. *La Grenouille dans le Billabong* is published by Pays et Terroirs, a small publication company located in Cholet, in the Loire region of Western France. One of the main objectives of this press is to celebrate regionalism. As the paratext of Leroux's text proclaims:

Pays et Terroirs a développé une librairie spécialisée en histoire et en régionalisme. Son catalogue compte aujourd'hui plus de 200 titres, en grande partie disponibles en rayons ou par correspondance [...]. La Tasmanie... Marie-Paule, originaire du Loroux-Bottereau dans le vignoble du pays nantais, avoue ne pas savoir grand-chose de cette île australienne, mystérieuse, nichée au creux des Quarantièmes Rugissants, à part peut-être de vagues histoires de diables, quand, avec son mari, Alain, elle y émigre en août 1991.<sup>17</sup>

This small press therefore promotes the peripheral rather than the centre and the provinces rather than the centrality of Paris. Publishing with a press that aims to promote and legitimise the regional, Leroux is perhaps pushing this to its limit by locating her work in an area as peripheral as the Antipodes. Moreover, her text is situated in non-mainland Australia, in the island of Tasmania rather than the urban centres of Melbourne or Sydney, so is about as peripheral as possible. *La Grenouille dans le Billabong* will thus be promoted to an audience in France interested in writing that resists the Paris-centred publishing industry, and to an audience in Australia that is sufficiently educated to read it but not necessarily from the elite.

*Une femme en marche*, by contrast, is published by Phébus, a medium-sized press that has been in existence since 1976. Although located in Paris, the company's website proclaims its resistance to literary norms. It describes itself as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> 'Pays and Terroirs has developed a book business specialising in history and regionalism. It now has more than 200 titles in its catalogue, mostly available through stores or by mail order [...]. Tasmania... Marie-Paule, originally from Loroux-Bottereau in the wine country around Nantes, admits she didn't know much about this mysterious Australian island, deeply nestled in the Roaring Forties, apart perhaps from a few vague stories about devils, when she and her husband Alain migrated there in August 1991.'

cette maison d'édition, exigeante et non-conformiste dans ses choix, offre un catalogue à l'ancrage marqué par la littérature étrangère, qui s'ouvre de façon prometteuse au domaine français. [...] Les lecteurs en quête de 'plaisir du texte', d'une littérature affichant une sensibilité à l'homme et son destin, à l'humanité en somme, les amoureux d'espaces et de liberté y trouveront des récits de voyage et des témoignages auxquels le catalogue fait la part belle, à côté de romans français et étrangers.<sup>18</sup>

Rey's work is therefore similarly published by a press that is committed to the peripheral, targeting an audience that is interested in a literature about the non-Parisian elsewhere. While its catalogue is noticeably more literary, containing works by established and prize-winning literary writers, its offerings will be open to a range of readers interested in the *étranger* ('foreign' or 'outside').

This is not to say, however, that Leroux and Rey are simply puppets of an exoticising middlebrow publishing industry. Both texts set up their affiliation and critique as a means of exploiting middlebrow expectations. While *Une femme en marche* is initially located in France in the early part of the author's life before switching to Australia following Rey's migration, the narrative itself is not centred upon the depiction of Australia or Australian culture. Instead, its main narrative motor is the transformation of its forty-year-old female protagonist. Such a narrative arc will likely find resonance among the middlebrow audience Driscoll defines, and Rey's critiques of France and Australia provide the necessarily tantalising backdrop. Rey's depiction of French culture in particular conforms to Xavier's argument that migrant authors 'exploit [their] native culture for profit', while at the same time they refuse to 'conform to a cultural exotic that is not of [their] own making' (2016, 96). Rey critiques France but tempers her exoticisation of Australia by focusing on the intimate experience of her central female character. Leroux's exploitation of France is obvious in the name of her business,

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<sup>18</sup> 'this publishing house, demanding and non-conformist in its choices, offers a catalogue marked by its grounding in foreign literature but also promisingly open to the French market. Readers in search of 'textual pleasure', of literature displaying a sensitivity towards people and their destiny, towards humanity in short, lovers of wide open spaces and freedom will find here travel stories and experiences, which this catalogue privileges, alongside French and foreign novels.'

Exquisite Tastes, which plays on the stereotype of a superior quality of French foodstuffs, but also in the motifs of the text itself. Most clearly, the comedic title that focuses on the Anglophone nickname for the French would likely appear crass to an elite reader, but foregrounds a commercial approach to cultural difference. Leroux's text may conform more closely to the commercial aims of a press aiming towards a middlebrow audience, but she is a struggling businesswoman who is able to publish her work successfully and proceed to having it translated. She is likely making financial gain from the dissemination of the work, even though she was not a published author or literary writer prior to experimenting with migrant literature. Such a phenomenon illustrates the entrepreneurial spirit with which Driscoll associates middlebrow literature. This appears to be a short-lived enterprise for both writers, however. Rey continued to publish literary works following *Une femme en marche*, some of which received critical acclaim. Nonetheless, she encountered increasing difficulties in finding a publisher in France for her work, which has become more experiential and non-conformist. As she has moved away from a style that could attract a middlebrow in addition to a more sophisticated readership, interest from French publishing houses has waned to such an extent that she has now published her first work in English. *The Lovers* was released by Sydney-based publishing house Giramondo (which has published translations of her French-language work) in 2018. Leroux, by contrast, has remained in Australia but has never published since *La Grenouille dans le Billabong*.

Based on a theoretical grounding that draws from some of the most recent ideas surrounding the notion of migrant literature, this article demonstrates that, despite their differences, these two female writers of French migrant experience have, with the help of French publishing houses, produced texts which privilege the provincial. Both works, although not necessarily elite works of art in Bourdieu's terms, contribute to a new global literature in French in a middlebrow manner. As a site of emancipatory escape from a restrictive homeland, Australia is celebrated in both texts as a country that has done much for these French authors. Both texts write back to France with a largely positive, if sometimes puzzled, set of images of Australia. These hybrid works simultaneously call into question notions of France and Frenchness, making these 'middlebrow' texts fascinating contributions to discourse on the Francosphere.

They point to overlaps between the vast French- and English-speaking worlds. They display how French language texts are being produced for a wide range of readerships and in some ways act as loci of resistance against a Paris-dominated metropolitan French publishing market. Far away from France as it is, Australia is in some ways a major site of emancipation for migrant literature in French. This article originated as a paper in a conference held in Adelaide, South Australia, by the Institute for the Study of French-Australian Relations in September 2018, entitled ‘French Contributions to Australian Life’. Our reading has argued that what these French texts do for Australia is to portray a range of positive aspects of French-Australian cultural ties and to complicate narratives of national belonging. For natives of a nation whose exceptionalism is so often underlined to insist on such ties with a nation generally recognised as a core part of the Anglosphere, this is surely significant.

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