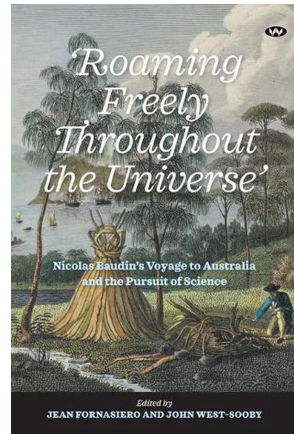


## BOOK REVIEWS

**Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby (eds), *Roaming Freely Throughout the Universe: Nicolas Baudin's Voyage to Australia and the Pursuit of Science*, Adelaide, Wakefield Press, November 2021, 341 pp., rrp AU\$ 39.95, ISBN 978-1-74305-827-5.**

Nicolas Baudin's voyage to Australia is one of the best known of the French scientific voyages to the Pacific in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These voyages, from the first French circumnavigation by Bougainville (1766–1769) to the final voyage of Dumont d'Urville (1837–1840) to the Antarctic, provide fascinating insights into the early development of science, particularly life sciences, in the context of the evolving professionalisation of state-sponsored research, and the changing political and cultural climate of global exploration, colonisation, revolution and Enlightenment.



Baudin's voyage (1800–1804), in the middle of this period, is distinctive for several reasons. With the most substantial contingent of scientific staff, it returned one of the largest scientific collections, yet failed to manifest the scale of scientific benefits expected. Unusually, the official narrative of the voyage was largely written by a civilian scientist, such as François Péron, rather than an edited compilation of journals dominated by that of the commander. It was also the most publicly controversial voyage since Kerguelen's court-martial. Perhaps because of these factors, the Baudin voyage became a pivotal turning point in French maritime expeditionary science, being the last voyage with independent civilian naturalists. Subsequent voyages employed medical officers to complete scientific research under much tighter naval and museum control.

The formidable body of scholarship surrounding the Baudin voyages is certainly grounded in the rich archival resources which the Baudin Legacy

Project (<https://baudin.sydney.edu.au>) continues to transcribe, translate and publish online. This anthology of new work is underpinned by another significant body of archives, the Péron papers from the Lesueur collection in the Le Havre Museum.

*Roaming Freely Throughout the Universe*, edited by Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby, focuses on science and the role of François Péron, one of only three scientists to complete the journey out of the fourteen who originally embarked. The book is helpfully clustered into four sections: the first on the scientific context of voyaging, the second on Péron himself, the third on the scientific records from the voyage and the fourth which, initially, seems to be about participants who were not Péron.

It would be a mistake, however, to approach this book as a simple thematic collection of essays ranging from broad contextual analyses to close character assessment and detailed scientific or bibliographic re-readings. In fact, the essays have been skilfully situated to foreshadow later developments, gradually layering and revealing detail, nuance and complexity and giving the collection an unexpected narrative structure that is, at times, positively thrilling. The gradual unpacking of archival detail and reanalysis is such a revelation that I almost feel the need to provide a spoiler alert before continuing this review.

Jean Fornasiero's opening chapter sets the scene for repositioning the analysis of this most controversial of French voyages. Rather than focussing on whether the struggle for authority between the accounts of the commander, Nicolas Baudin and his trainee naturalist, François Péron, was a personality clash or a product of political and social changes, she argues that new insights may be revealed in the context of different approaches to science with national, institutional and disciplinary contexts. As becomes increasingly clear through the book, the history of scientific tensions—between field and laboratory, theory and observation, museum and scientist, big picture and fine detail, blue sky and applied—are precursors to the same tensions and conflicts inherent in modern science.

As John West-Sooby notes in his opening chapter, 'Baudin's expedition to Australia thus constitutes a particularly compelling case study in terms of the figure of the scientific voyager, the evolution of which had reached a critical point' (23). He describes Péron and his cohort battling against the

designation of ‘mere’ collectors, and yet the voyage’s ultimate legacy was the vast scale of its collections, rather than the ‘scholarly exploitation of the treasure trove’ that Péron might have hoped. John Gascoigne’s chapter on the ‘Pacific laboratory’ further explores these intellectual complexities or ‘fruitful tensions’, highlighting the significant influence of the father of natural history, Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon who, while encouraging collecting, also enabled a broad spatial and temporal canvas that facilitated future developments in biogeographical and even evolutionary thought.

Jean-Luc Chappey’s chapter, exploring Péron’s anthropological science, exemplifies the challenges of interpreting scientific value retrospectively. Rather than confining himself to observation and collection, Péron’s adherence to empirical research led him to ‘test’ Indigenous strength against European with his ‘dynamometer’. Far from gaining him a reputation for pioneering anthropological science, this approach is argued to have ‘led nineteenth century French anthropology down the medical and biological path at the expense of the social and cultural approach’ (39). The dubious assumptions behind Péron’s anthropological approach seems to confirm the belief of influential museum director Georges Cuvier that scientific voyagers should confine themselves to collecting and leave any theory or analysis to the museum scientists back in the lab. How wrong he was.

The focus on Péron intensifies in the second section and introduces the key new material that has inspired and informed much of the book: Gabrielle Baglione and Cédric Crémère’s descriptive summary of the 4,239 manuscript pages in Péron’s hand in the Lesueur collection of Le Havre Museum. As Margaret Sankey demonstrates in the next chapter, Péron’s notes about the voyage and about the publication of the voyage account, reveal exactly how the inexperienced Péron constructed his unusual narrative. As a zoologist, however, I am most excited about the largest component (over 2/3 of the total) which are Péron’s scientific, largely zoological, notes.

The loss of the notes documenting the provenance of specimens in the natural history objects in the Muséum d’histoire naturelle, Le Havre has previously been blamed for the lower scientific value of the Baudin collections. Even when available, such notes may be neglected by voyage historians, perhaps because their significance requires taxonomic expertise but also because of the challenges of transcription. Scientific descriptions of the time were often written in Latin, and Péron’s otherwise ‘very elegant’

and ‘exquisite’ handwriting is not always readily deciphered on the delicate, sometimes disintegrating pages. Extracting the full significance of these manuscripts requires a genuinely multidisciplinary collaboration.

Stephanie Pfenningworth closes this section, unpacking the emotional context of Péron’s ‘sensibilities’ as explored in eulogies and his own somewhat melodramatic writing. It is fair to say that Péron’s youthful enthusiasm for adjectives, and his own abilities, somewhat undermines the scientific reader’s confidence, particularly when so little compelling scientific work was completed before his premature death.

Investigating the scientific value of the voyage begins in the third section on the scientific records themselves. Michel Jangoux opens this section addressing the role of the second ship in the Baudin voyage, the *Naturaliste* which, under the command of Emmanuel Hamelin, returned early to France with a precious cargo of specimens, including a large number of living plants and animals. By documenting the fate of the various specimens from the Pacific to France, the Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle and Josephine’s garden at Malmaison, Jangoux provides a map that will assist in reconstructing provenance for many displaced specimens.

In the next chapter, Jangoux focuses on the rich and diverse invertebrate collections brought back from the voyage, questioning why the curator of invertebrates at the Museum, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, published so little on them despite their obvious breadth. Here, a remarkable discovery is revealed. Jangoux reveals not just how the provenance of these specimens was lost, but also the unimaginable scale of the loss. This was no mere matter of naming new species. In a letter to museum staff, Péron explains that he consistently sampled invertebrates from every section of the coastline surveyed around Australia, noting the variations in form, colour and abundance within and between species. There was, he wrote ‘no specimen whose provenance cannot be rigorously identified’ by the order and number of the crates and packages in which they were packed. He warned ‘if this numerical order of the crates or objects is changed, the entire fruits of my careful work will be lost’ (172).

Tragically, Péron’s warning came too late. The specimens had already been repacked and consolidated on their arrival, for transport to Paris, where they were sorted taxonomically, rather than geographically, no

doubt with surplus ‘duplicates’ sold or discarded, fulfilling Péron’s fears that ‘the strongest foundations for the zoography of New Holland’ had been destroyed.

Péron’s well-known misdemeanour of taking the credit for specimens collected by his deceased colleagues never fails to generate a gasp of horror from scientific audiences. But this unintended crime against Péron is enough to make any biologist cry. Forget what Australia might have been like if it had been colonised by the French. Imagine instead what theories might have sparked if the great evolutionary thinker Lamarck had been able to collaborate with the young empirical collector on a vast collection of geographic variation spanning a continent now well-known for its distinctive and prolonged history of evolutionary isolation. Instead, decades passed before Darwin and Wallace used their own scientific voyages to formulate theories of natural selection and biogeography. The opportunity for French-Australian biology to form the foundation of evolutionary science, rather than being relegated to the fringes as a colonial oddity, was lost.

The painstaking work of reconstruction is illustrated in the chapter on birds by Phillipa Horton, Justin Jansen and Andrew Black from the South Australian Museum, which transforms Péron’s fleeting references to birds in his voyage account into a series of detailed and carefully observed descriptions which, if published, would have seen nine ‘new’ Australian birds attributed to the Baudin expedition. Justin Jansen’s analysis of Péron’s anatomical study of an albatross demonstrates the quality of Péron’s early training and his development over the journey from trainee to published authority.

The final section of the book turns to Péron’s fellow travellers, providing a valuable insight into the ‘survivors’ of this voyage, who eventually returned to France. Jean Fornasiero delicately but decisively unpicks the accepted image of Baudin’s second-in-charge Emmanuel Hamelin as the loyal and stalwart captain of the *Naturaliste* and reconstructs a far more nuanced image of a man better suited to battle than scientific diplomacy in the contested territory of his nation’s enemies. Paul Gibbard illustrates the challenges the scientists faced on their return, through the fate of botanist Théodore Leschenault. Far from being lauded for achievements that brought glory to the French state, many struggled even to be paid.

Restoring the fortunes of those who died on the journey is even more difficult, particularly when their achievements have been overshadowed or erased by survivors. John West-Sooby's chapter on Péron's more experienced fellow trainee zoologist Stanislas Levillain as well as René Maugé goes some way towards redressing the neglect of the zoologists who did not return.

The book ends, fittingly, with Louis de Freycinet, who served as lieutenant on the Baudin journey and sided with Péron to write the official narrative that sidelined Baudin. Fifteen years later, he would recommence these French voyages with a command of his own, on which science was done, not by savants, but by naval surgeons and pharmacists, with whom civilian savants like Péron had once battled for specimens. Nicole Starbuck extends our insight into Freycinet beyond his well-known cartographic and command skills. In one final twist, she reveals that Freycinet's sympathies and sensitivities towards Indigenous Australians bear far more resemblance to those of his maligned commander, Baudin, than they do to his colleague Péron.

This collection is far from just an anthology. It is a revelation, of character, personality, tragedy, sadness and monumental achievement. The progressive chapters reveal ever deeper layers of discovery, dispelling myths, uncovering further complexities and solving long-held mysteries. It is both a delight to read, for the new insights and discoveries it reveals, and also a lasting document of great value to French-Australian scientific history.

*Danielle Clode*

*Flinders University*

**John Drury, *Two French Sisters in Australia: 1888–1922: Berthe Mouchette and Marie Lion, Artists and Teachers*, Melbourne, Anchor Books, November 2021, 214 pp., rrp AU\$ 39.95, ISBN 978-0-64883-502-8.**

John Drury's recent book focusing on the lives of the French-born artists and teachers Madame Berthe Mouchette (1846–1928) and her sister Mademoiselle Marie Lion (1855–1922) is a commemorative tribute to these two remarkable and courageous artistic women. Published in the decade a century after their respective deaths in the 1920s, the book reinforces

and extends their cultural worlds and the historic and ongoing cultural relationship between Australia and France. Mediated through the French Governor in New Caledonia, Mouchette, in 1889, was conferred by the President of France with the prestigious decoration of the *Palmes*, for her service to art and education in France and Australia—the first for a woman.

Drury is adept at genealogical and biographical research and its documentation. He has traced and recorded the sisters' immediate family ancestry in France and their time in Melbourne, after their arrival in 1881, where they commenced teaching French language and art in Mouchette's Melbourne studios and soon in private girls' schools, most notably at Oberwyl in St Kilda, which they established in the mid-1880s. Not confined to the French community, the sisters' networks were expansive. Mouchette's husband Nicolas Émile, briefly the acting French Consul in Melbourne, died in 1884—he was a former patient of Dr Duret whose daughter became the influential Madame Charlotte Crivelli. Mouchette's oil portrait of Nicolas Émile stayed with her throughout her life. Exhibitions of the sisters' artwork in solo and groups shows and exhibitions of their students' artwork were frequent and well received by the public and the press. These exhibitions, which included a large display at London's Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886, increased the enrolments of young female students at Oberwyl from around Australia, until the severe economic depression put paid to the enterprises and the sisters, undaunted, left Melbourne for Adelaide in the early 1890s to rebuild their lives afresh, teaching art and French and exhibiting their work.

In both places they were embraced and promoted by vice-regal patronage and elite and middle-class society. In Melbourne, Mouchette instructed Lady Loch in art and in return Loch was a keen supporter of Mouchette's and Lion's work. This embrace was repeated in South Australia by the Governors' wives and elite society including the Barr-Smiths' patronage. Obtaining a knowledge of French culture and skills in speaking and writing French were attributes sought by young Australian girls and women, when a polite education was regarded as both ornamental and useful in the progress of what was perceived as a fledgling, civilised society. It is well known that Mouchette founded the *Alliance Française* in Australia at a meeting at Oberwyl in 1890, and she and Lion were later founding members of the Adelaide branch. Spiritually directed, the sisters were drawn to Theosophy,



becoming early members of the Theosophical Society in Adelaide, extending their networks and friends, and meeting and hosting Theosophy's international leader Annie Besant, whose portrait Mouchette painted. Today, it hangs proudly in the Theosophical Society Rooms in Adelaide.

Generous in including the many backstories to his research and the oral and written accounts and anecdotes he garnered over many decades in preparation for this book, Drury can at times blur the focus of his two subjects. At times, the text reads as research and information reports, unedited and stacked together, and this weighty structure, including the reprinting of full contemporary newspaper reports, inhibits the narrative flow and can disengage the reader.

Perhaps this burden reflects the dearth of any surviving diaries and correspondence penned by the sisters, an obstacle often faced by historians pursuing and interpreting their subject. This is countered by some moving reports quoted in the book. An example of this is Mouchette's reflection on losing one's sight, published in the Theosophical Society's journal in 1912 and titled 'The Sight of Blind'. 'How could one live life without seeing the beauties and colours of nature' she asks, before contemplating how Theosophy had given her capacities to understand about the 'clear-seeing' of the 'basic colour of the aura' visioned by a blind person, exemplifying for her the different planes of inner and outward experience beyond a human's physical body and mind. Lion's accounts of the sisters' adventurous and spiritually motivated pilgrimage across India in 1902, which were published in Adelaide newspapers, brimmed with vivid and riveting observations about Buddhism and Hinduism and their respective philosophies, and the temples, monasteries, shrines, ceremonies, dress, and hierarchies she and Mouchette saw at close hand. One is struck by Lion's open, cultural sensitivity to diverse beliefs, customs and spiritual practices and the wisdom, knowledge and joy these two sisters received and experienced in India. Unsurprisingly, Mouchette's sketches made in India became references for landscape and architectural studies she painted and exhibited after they returned to South Australia.

Few of Mouchette's paintings have surfaced. Nonetheless, the book maps Mouchette's and Lion's artistic practice in painting flowers, miniatures, tapestry painting, landscapes, biblical and history subjects, and portraits, but it does not analyse the work in the context of historical and cultural changes in the art world. Clearly the subject matter and techniques the sisters used



were grounded in their love of nature and their training in France, but the qualities of charm and feminine sentiment would soon fall out of fashion. Sometimes with the assistance of photographs, Mouchette rendered realism in portraiture with a tight, close handling of form, which in some of her later illustrated work appears slightly wooden—her flower paintings, for me, are her most poetic and expressive genre. Of significance is Drury's discovery of several of Mouchette's paintings, but the results of Lion's creative hand, particularly in miniature painting, remain elusive to history. Far less so is Lion's literature, some of her work having been translated into English from French for the first time in Australia during her lifetime. As Drury observes, her literary achievements were recognised and registered by literary historians and bibliophiles throughout the twentieth century. Given the close Adelaidean artistic circle, Mouchette was acquainted with and stayed with Bessie Davidson, the artist from Adelaide then living in Paris, who has since achieved fame in Australia for her colourful modernist paintings, inspired by French post-impressionism during the first half of the twentieth century.

The observation of nature and the training of the hand and mind to render nature thoughtfully in compositions were central to Mouchette's practice and teaching. Although not mentioned in this book, Mouchette was influential on the work of Australian artist Clara Southern, who attended classes, and exhibited at Oberwyl in the 1880s. Mouchette's artistic approach also resonated in the instructive philosophy of another of her young students, the Tasmanian Mary Walker, who also studied at Oberwyl: her instruction, 'so go to nature and paint what you see: idealised by your own poetic feeling', was passed on by Walker to her own young female students.

Mouchette and Lion never lacked empathy, courage, and determination. Living modestly in and developing, the 'back blocks' within the Adelaide Hills, they continued to teach French, exhibit, write, cultivate a cottage garden around the wooded environment of their home and studio, and take the train to town. Known to locals, rich and poor, the sisters were integral to the life of their communities. They held festivities and games for the local school children annually. In many ways, every student and every soldier was the child they never had. Stirred by the call of duty and patrimony the sisters travelled to Paris and nursed and comforted wounded soldiers during WW1. They continued their charitable support of both French and Australian allied

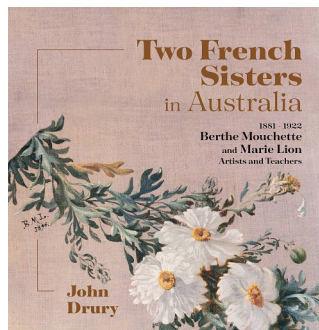
soldiers back in South Australia, teaching Australian soldiers, for example, to speak rudimentary French and introducing them to French customs, so their future experiences amidst friendly locals in a foreign land at war would not be so confusing.

Determined that after the war Adelaide should adopt a ravaged town in France so that its returning inhabitants could be clothed, housed, and its farming and agricultural infrastructure re-developed, the sisters, with other advocates, rallied support from South Australians for funds to ensure this work could be carried out in Dernancourt in the Somme. Mouchette left Adelaide in 1922, returning to French soil after the death of Lion. Aged 82, Mouchette died in France six years later. Her active war and post-war charitable and selfless efforts are commemorated in her representation in the ‘Gallery of Heroes’ in the Musée Somme (<http://www.musee-somme-1916.eu/le-musee-et-la-galerie-des-heros/>). Drury’s accounts of the ongoing regard and hospitality shared by official representatives and the peoples of the two regions in France and Australia provide a warm and uplifting end to his tribute.

*Two French Sisters in Australia: 1881–1922: Berthe Mouchette and Marie Lion, Artists and Teachers* has been a labour of love for Drury. Love’s labours are not lost, and the book serves to further advance Australia’s cultural relations with France, honouring and sustaining knowledge of the lives, work and example of Mouchette and Lion in our shared cultural memories.

*Andrew Montana*

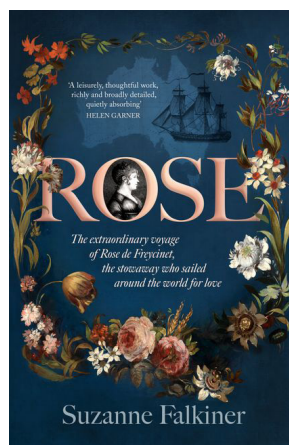
*Melbourne*



**Suzanne Falkiner, *Rose: The Extraordinary Voyage of Rose de Freycinet, the Stowaway Who Sailed Around the World for Love***, ABC Books, Sydney, March 2022, 404 pp., 21 illustrations, bibliography, index, ISBN 978-0-73334-235-6.

Suzanne Falkiner's *Rose* is an engaging account of the life of Rose de Freycinet, née Pinon (1794–1832). The book is also a biography of Rose's husband Louis Claude de Saulces de Freycinet (1779–1842) on whose *Uranie* expedition 1817–1820 she was secreted, in male guise, at the age of twenty-two. This was very much contrary to French naval regulations.

Rose de Freycinet was not the first woman to circle the globe. That honour belongs to Jeanne Baret who accompanied the botanist Philibert Commerson aboard Bougainville's expedition (1766–1769). But unlike Jeanne Baret (and Marie-Louise-Victoire Girardin who took part in d'Entrecasteaux's expedition), she was only briefly in male guise, kept a journal and wrote letters home during many of her landfalls. Suzanne Falkiner has used Rose's manuscripts and the various edited and published versions of her journals and letters (and those of her husband and fellow voyagers) with discernment and skill.



Rose was a significant participant observer, during what would become the first major French expedition of the Restoration: showing the moth-balled Bourbon flag and undertaking important geographical, geophysical, meteorological, ethnographic and natural history work. The *Uranie* visited Gibraltar (the first French naval vessel to do so since 1793), Teneriffe, Rio de Janeiro, the Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, Shark Bay (Western Australia), Timor, the Moluccas, islands off the Papuan coast, Guam, the Sandwich Islands and New South Wales (where they were warmly received by Governor Lachlan Macquarie), before a southerly traverse of the Pacific and a shipwreck in the Falklands. Like her husband and the rest of the crew, Rose would endure hunger, rain and cold as a castaway, until rescue was negotiated with a visiting American whaler. That rescue eventually involved the purchase of the whaling vessel *Mercury*, rechristened *Physicienne*, for

the final leg of the voyage back to France. While Rose was privy to many of her husband's problems and anxieties, Louis—complicit in her embarkation and certain of official reprimand on his return—did his best not to mention her in his journal. The expedition artist Jacques Arago (brother of the mathematician, physicist and astronomer François Arago) had no such qualms in his published account.

Even before Marc Serge Rivière's valuable English translation of Rose's Journal, *A Woman of Courage* (National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1996), Australians were introduced to Rose de Freycinet through Marnie Bassett's *Realms and Islands* (Oxford University Press, London, 1962). Bassett was a careful and discriminating scholar. Her book was a valuable historical contribution, but it was punctuated with many long quotations. Falkiner's book is a more elegantly crafted narrative, enriched by broader scholarship and more private papers than Bassett had access to six decades ago.

Educated and well-read (she was the daughter of a school mistress), Rose was nineteen when she married Louis in 1814. He was sixteen years her senior and during Bonaparte's consulate had taken part in the Baudin expedition to Australian waters with his brother Henry [the i-grec spelling is in his baptismal record]. Falkiner covers this part of Louis' life in some detail. While she does not shy away from Baudin's petty, even spiteful behaviour, she endeavours to provide some critical balance to the unrelenting negativity towards him on the part of the Freycinet brothers and the naturalist François Péron.

In my biography of Péron, I mistakenly asserted that Louis and his brother Henry belonged to the nobility. Having visited the family's château at Saulce-sur-Rhône and the graves in the local cemetery, that seemed credible. Suzanne Falkiner, however, informs her readers that they were, in fact, from the haute bourgeoisie. Sure enough, when I double-checked their baptismal records in the parish registers for Montelimar, despite the family name 'de Saulces de Freycinet' (with two nobiliary particles), their father was not described as a 'homme noble'. Nevertheless, it seems likely that they had noble aspirations during the Ancien Régime. Conversely, I am sceptical of the purported republican ardour of family members after the Revolution. Suzanne Falkiner also states that Louis' family had Protestant roots, but clearly his forebears did not flee France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. They returned to the old faith, rather than

suffer the harsh repercussions of forbidden worship, dissolved marriages and forfeited inheritances. Louis was baptised with a good French Catholic name, not one from the Old Testament as was popular among Huguenots. Freycinet père embraced the initial progressive reforms of the Revolution, but was not a republican zealot. He and his sons do not appear to have been born-again Calvinists either. In 1815, four hundred experienced naval officers were purged from the navy to accommodate returning noble emigré officers. It is hard to believe that, just two years after Waterloo, Louis XVIII would have given command of the first major scientific voyage of his reign to someone shrouded in suspicion. However, Louis de Freycinet, like many others at the time, had already shown himself to be adept at changing with the political wind.

The *Uranie* had a chaplain: the Abbé Florentin-Louis de Quélen de la Villeglée. Falkiner asserts that ‘Louis had probably made his now rather unusual request for a priest so that his devout wife would not be deprived of Mass during the voyage’. The presence of Catholic priests on French naval vessels had been standard practice prior to the Revolution. (Under the Naval ‘Ordonance du Roi’ of March 25, 1765, sailors could receive six lashes for merely missing ‘Mass, prayer & catechism without legitimate cause’.) With the Restoration, Catholicism once more became the state religion and naval chaplains were reinstated under the ordinances of 1816. Louis’ request for a chaplain, therefore, was not unusual, but sea-going priests were in short supply despite their salary being raised to what a lieutenant de vaisseau received. This was mainly because the French clergy had aged and had more than halved in number during the turmoil of the Revolution.

Not only was Rose a pious Catholic, she was also decidedly conservative and naïvely unquestioning of established institutions such as slavery in the European colonies she visited. Although she expressed concern for the thirst and fatigue of the ‘poor blacks’ who carried her about on a palanquin in Mauritius, Falkiner tells us that ‘confronted now with slavery practiced by her own compatriots, Rose’s attitude was typically conciliatory. The slaves were treated more gently than in any other colony, she was assured, and she felt that their work was less arduous due to the great number assigned to any given task’. Rose also echoed disapproval of mixed-race unions, declaring: ‘Creole ladies [Europeans born in the colonies] have a horror of these women [mullatos], and with good reason, because they are the ruin of their

families, and the cause of many bad marriages'. Falkiner does not sanitise Rose's racism and sexism; indeed, she is careful to state that this comment was 'later expunged from her [Rose's] published journal'. Historian Marnie Basset was also very critical of the unscrupulous changes made by Charles Duplomb prior to publication of the journal, in Paris, in 1927.

Steeped in the prejudices of her time, Rose appears also to have been anti-Semitic. I was confronted by her derogatory use of the expression 'notre juif' for the avaricious American whaling captain John Galvin. I have previously raised the possibility that the anti-Semitic allusions employed to describe the Chinese in Timor, in the official account of the Baudin expedition (*Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*, iv, pp. 86–7), might have been inserted after François Péron's death by Louis de Freycinet who oversaw this and the other final volumes of the publication. One can have little doubt of his broader ethnocentric prejudices. Falkiner informs us that 'Louis noted that in Mauritius a white skin set a man above his compatriots even more surely than did a noble lineage in Europe' (pages 121–2).

Numerous members of the *Uranie* expedition participated in subsequent French voyages of exploration. Louis-Isidore Duperrey commanded the *Coquille* circumnavigation (1822–1825). Auguste Bérard sailed with him; so too did Paul-André Gabert. François-Esprit Bertrand later participated in Dumont d'Urville's first *Astrolabe* voyage (1826–29), as did the remarkable surgeon-naturalists Joseph Paul Gaimard and Jean-René-Constant Quoy. I enjoyed 'meeting' these men again in Falkiner's engaging book. I do, however, have some other minor comments. René Maugé, zoologist on Baudin's expedition, was not buried at sea (page 25); he was interred on Maria Island (Tasmania). Quoy's birthplace Maillé was not the town in central France (Indre-et-Loire); it was in the other Maillé in the coastal Vendée. And I don't believe that one can truly conflate Quoy's political sympathies as 'republican *and* Bonapartist' as Falkiner does (page 63). Surely, a true republican could not easily accommodate Bonaparte's imperial despotism. Nevertheless, he was a veteran of the Napoleonic navy. Gaimard, on the other hand, was most certainly a Bonapartist, regulating his life with the anniversaries of the victories of the Empire. And yes, he had an 'eye for a pretty woman' (page 63). When researching Gaimard's career for my biography of Dumont d'Urville, I was very surprised to discover that he made a collection of female pubic hair during his voyages!

Louis de Freycinet was elected a member of the Académie des Sciences in 1825 (an honour denied Dumont d'Urville), but he was not given command of any more significant voyages. No doubt, Rose's presence aboard the *Uranie* was a black mark against his name. In 1832, Louis contracted cholera in Paris. His feisty and loving wife Rose insisted on nursing him personally. He survived, but tragically she then contracted the disease and died at the age of thirty-seven. The couple had no children and Louis did not remarry. He died in 1842 in the Château Gazavel, close to his own family château. Seven years later, Rose's remains were reburied with his. The gravestone can still be seen close to the entrance to the cemetery at Saulce.

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**Andréas Pfersmann, *La littérature irradiée : Les essais nucléaires en Polynésie française au prisme de l'écriture*, la courte échelle / éditions transit, Marseille, May 2021, 88 pp., 10 €, ISBN 978-2-91727-028-8**

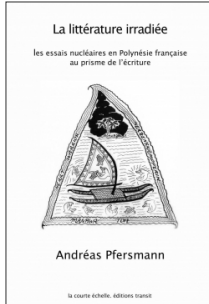
Between 1966 and 1999, France conducted 193 nuclear tests (46 of them atmospheric tests) at the atolls of Moruroa and Fangataufa in French Polynesia (Te Ao Maohi), continuing a practice of using its colonial holdings for experiments it would not undertake in the metropole. Before embarking on the tests in the Pacific, France had conducted tests in French Algeria from 1960. France was, of course, not alone in this endeavour. Together with the United Kingdom and the United States, between 1946 and 1996, more than 310 tests were conducted in over twelve locations across the Pacific. While it was not the first, France did have the dubious distinction of being the last to pursue these practices, persisting for longer than others.

In *La littérature irradiée : Les essais nucléaires en Polynésie française au prisme de l'écriture*, Andréas Pfersmann, a literature academic at the Université de la Polynésie française, explores the interplay of issues relating to France's nuclear testing in the Pacific, as reflected in the work of literary writers in French Polynesia, as well as in metropolitan France and in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The book, whose title is a play on words ('*littérature irradiée*', denoting both the thematic content of the works explored and the proliferation



of literature on the subject), seeks to understand how France's Centre d'expérimentation du Pacifique (CEP) and its nuclear tests in Moruroa and Fangataufa have been represented in literature, broadly defined, shedding light on the connections between writing strategies and ideological positions regarding nuclear testing in French Polynesia.



Fittingly, the book opens with a text in Tahitian—the lyrics of a 1995 song by the Tahitian songwriter Angélo Ariitai Neuffer entitled ‘Ta’ero ātōmī’ (translated into French on the facing page as ‘*Poison nucléaire*’) which captures the toxicity of the whole enterprise—the land, the ocean, the people, even the truth itself are all contaminated, as representatives of the French state carry out the tests and then refuse to tell the truth about the harmful effects of them.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I focuses on French spy and adventure novels inspired by the CEP (Centre d’Expérimentation du Pacifique), beginning with Pierre Nord’s 1966 novel *Nuages atomiques sur Tahiti*, the plot of which centres on a counter-espionage agent who works for the CEP and defends it against fanatic pacifists. Other French spy novels present a more complex picture—some for and against the nuclear tests. Jean Meckert’s *La vierge et le taureau* (Presses de la Cité, 1971) presents a highly anti-colonial picture of the presence of the French in Polynesia. Patrick Pécherot’s *Tiurai* (Gallimard, 1996) focuses on the ways in which the truth about the effects of the tests was obscured by a pro-colonial media, medical service and NGOs. Pascal Martin’s *Le Seigneur des atolls* (Presses de la Cité, 2011) shows how destabilising and destructive the French nuclear tests were culturally and politically for island communities attached to their Polynesian traditions.

Part II moves from French texts to English-language literature by writers from Aotearoa (New Zealand). New Zealand’s opposition to these tests is of course well known, most dramatically illustrated by the 1985 sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior* by French secret service agents, but the activism by New Zealanders against these tests in fact began much earlier. In 1972 the New Zealand playwright and novelist Maurice Shadbolt was among a group that approached Moruroa and Fangataufa aiming to disrupt French experiments. In his 1975 novel *Danger Zone*, Shadbolt clearly draws on

this experience, telling the tale of a group of New Zealand activists who take to the water, sailing to the atolls of French Polynesia in an effort to stop the tests. Although the ideological position of this text is clearly anti-nuclear, Pfersmann notes the visible absence of Tahitians from the narrative (a symptom of the French literature he explored in Part 1 also), along with the hypermasculine world the protagonists inhabit. Māori writer Cathie Dunsford's 2000 novel *Manawa Toa (Heart Warrior)* is something of a corrective to this, presenting what Pfersmann describes as 'an ode to the struggles and solidarities of women' (38), while also positioning itself in sympathy with Pacific First Peoples. As Pfersmann points out, however, Dunsford's text is ultimately a view of French Polynesia from the outside, offering no perspectives on the interactions between the CEP and Polynesian society.

Part III moves us into Polynesian perspectives, as Pfersmann guides us through political fiction, song and performances produced by Polynesian writers. The section opens with French Polynesia's first Indigenous novel, Chantal T. Spitz's *L'île des rêves écrasés (Island of Shattered Dreams)*, translated by Jean Anderson (1991, 2007), which denounces French nuclear tests, situating them within a longer history of French colonial oppression of Indigenous knowledge, culture and identities. In Titaua Peu's 2002 novel *Mutismes* (published at much the same time as Dunsford's *Manawa Toa*) it is the devastating harms of French nuclear testing that are emphasised and the failure of outsiders to identify with the struggle of Polynesians. Other works, including Jean-Marc Tera'ituatini Pambrun's *Le Bambou noir* (2005, Éditions le Motu), and various songs, performances and poetic works bear the traces of a growing independence movement, campaigning for an end not only to French nuclear testing, but to colonial rule.

This short, elegantly written book offers an excellent introduction to the richness of cultural production and varying perspectives on French nuclear testing in the Pacific over the course of more than thirty years of experimentation. Around eighty pages in length, Pfersmann's book may be modest in size but, despite its brevity, it is impressive in scope, managing to tackle highly important issues and provide a concise yet detailed analysis, placing the texts within their social, political and historical contexts. Major achievements of the book are Pfersmann's centring of Polynesian perspectives and his weaving together of work by writers in three languages

(French, Polynesian and English), often dealing with texts that are ‘relatively little known and often difficult to access’ (11).

While the question of France’s nuclear testing in the Pacific may have largely disappeared from the radar of concerns of Australia’s politicians and the mainstream media, Pfersmann shows how the devastating consequences of the tests continue to be felt and reflected in literary writing down to the present. The onus is on readers in Australia to open their eyes both to the cultural richness of these writings and to the ongoing fallout to which they bear witness.

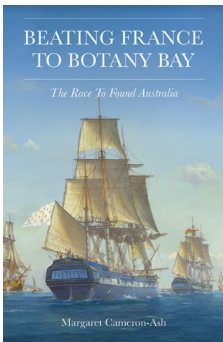
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**Margaret Cameron-Ash, *Beating France to Botany Bay: The Race to Found Australia*, Sydney, Quadrant Books, November 2021, 465 pp., ISBN 978-0-64899-612-5.**

*Index, bibliography, thirteen maps, eight monochrome illustrations, twenty colour illustrations.*

There is now a genre of popular non-fiction that presents historical subjects as contests or obstacle-strewn quests. A hero, a nemesis (or just someone who doesn’t play cricket), impediments and hidden motives offer engaging narrative devices. In *Beating France to Botany Bay*, Margaret Cameron-Ash offers us a ‘race’, purportedly between Arthur Phillip and the French explorer Lapérouse, to reach the east coast of Australia and found a colony.



On page 85, Cameron-Ash offers her readers some historiographical musings: ‘where the archives are silent, evidence can be found elsewhere’. Well, sometimes. Unfortunately, when she does not have this other ‘evidence’, she speculates with frequent qualifying words such as ‘would have’, ‘may have’, ‘probably’ and ‘no doubt’. Alas, there is doubt. I wish she had heeded Occam’s Razor—when presented with competing hypotheses, one should choose the one with the fewest assumptions.

Cameron-Ash focusses on Thomas Jefferson's request to John Paul Jones (one of the founders of the United States navy) to investigate the Lapérouse expedition before its departure from France. Jefferson was anxious about French ambitions on the north-west coast of America. On page 178, Cameron-Ash quotes Jones's letter to Jefferson of October 5, 1785, at the very end of which he speculates that the

attention of a great Prince [Louis XVI] . . . *may be* [reviewer's italics] to extend the Commerce of Factories at a future Day, for the Fur Trade on the North West Coast of America; and another to establish Colonies in New Holland, after having well explored the Coast, and made Experiments on the Soil of that vast Island, which is situated in so happy a Climate, and so contiguous to the Establishments of France in the East Indies.

Cameron-Ash then converts John Paul Jones's *may be* into a firm statement of fact: 'This news that a French colony *was to be* [reviewer's italics] planted in New Holland would have been of particular interest to the governments of Great Britain, the Dutch Republic, and the Kingdom of Spain. However, Jones had been instructed to maintain secrecy ...'.

Cameron-Ash then argues that this supposedly secret intelligence came to the attention of John Ledyard (veteran of Cook's third voyage) through his association with Jefferson, that it was then passed on to Joseph Banks and that it then precipitated the British government's decision to establish a penal colony on the east coast of Australia. This causal chain is presented with descriptions of imagined meals and conversations.

It should be noted that John Paul Jones merely speculated about a potential French colony on the north or west coast of New Holland, rather than the east coast, otherwise, why would he have concluded his report with the phrase 'so contiguous to the Establishments of France in the East Indies'. In any case, when Jefferson passed on Jones's report to Secretary of State John Jay on October 6, 1785, he wrote that France had an 'intention to settle factories, and not colonies, for the present'. And he used the word 'conjecture' when he referred to New Holland.

The information was unlikely to be unique. Britain had an ambassador in France. It was peacetime and French ports were accessible for British travellers, merchants or agents. Frenchmen also wrote to their friends in England. On August 4, 1785 (two months before Jones wrote to Jefferson)

Labillardière informed his friend James Edward Smith of preparations for the Lapérouse expedition. Both were friends of Joseph Banks, who had something of an open house for visiting scientists and had plenty of time to make his own enquiries if he was interested (see Duyker, *Citizen Labillardière*, Miegunyah, 2003, pp. 28–31).

*Beating France to Botany Bay* does contain several engaging chapters. Cameron-Ash's discussion of the life of the American loyalist John Ledyard is one. While I enjoy biographical summaries of relevant individuals in an historical narrative, Cameron-Ash can't resist delivering them even when there is no firm proof that an individual was even present say, in the home of Thomas Jefferson or Joseph Banks. It doesn't stop there. Bonaparte, we are told, applied to join the Lapérouse expedition, but his application was unsuccessful (page 167). To be fair, this tale has been repeated by John Dunmore, Jill, Duchess of Hamilton and others, but seriously questioned by Robert Laulan, historian of the *École militaire* (see Robert Laulan, 'Que valent les "cahiers" d'Alexandre des Mazis?', *Revue de l'Institut Napoléon*, April 1956, pp. 54–60).

I share Margaret Cameron-Ash's belief that New South Wales was settled by the British because of broad strategic considerations and great power rivalry. But this rivalry was not just about France; it also involved Spain and Spanish colonies in the Pacific and South America. New South Wales was not simply a location to send convicts after the Americans gained their independence. Alan Frost's *Convicts and Empire: A Naval Question 1776–1811* (1980) was a seminal work in this area. But Britain's strategic considerations do not mean that there is truth in the tired old trope that Australian history might have been very different had Lapérouse arrived a few days earlier than the First Fleet. Lapérouse only received orders to sail to Botany Bay when he was at Kamchatka in September 1787. He did not receive orders to abandon the rest of his voyage of exploration and there is no evidence that he was ordered to establish a rival or pre-emptive French colony in New South Wales. Who would have peopled and governed this French colony from the all-male crews of just two French vessels of exploration, already depleted by loss of life in Alaska, Samoa and even Botany Bay? Still more Chinese sailors from Macau? How would it have been sustained until it became viable, if ever? The French government had already had its fingers burned by Maurice Benyovszky's colony in

Madagascar in the previous decade, and chose to dismantle it, rather than invest more funds from its cash-strapped coffers. The French fiscal crisis had only deepened. While replacing colonies and fisheries lost in North America remained attractive, France was on the verge of Revolution.

Cameron-Ash makes much of the plants and seeds carried on Lapérouse's expedition, suggesting that they were intended for establishing a colony (page 181). However, Lapérouse's orders from Louis XVI offer more clarity on what appears to have been an altruistic Enlightenment project:

Sieur de la Pérouse will leave O-Taïti after a month's stay. He will be able to visit the islands of Huaheine, Ulietea, Otaha, Bolabola [Bora Bora], and other Society Islands, in order to procure additional provisions, to provide these islands the handiworks of Europe which are useful to their inhabitants, and sow seeds there, plant trees, vegetables, etc. which could subsequently present new resources to European navigators crossing this ocean ('Mémoire du Roi' in Milet-Mureau, *Voyage de La Pérouse*, vol. I, p. 11).

André Thouin, director of the Jardin du Roi (later the Jardin des Plantes), who purchased these seeds and seedlings for the expedition, also saw the transportation of these European plants 'likely to be useful to inhabitants of the countries that we will travel in' as a training exercise for the return voyage with other living botanical bounty. In his letter to Lapérouse, dated May 19, 1785, he wrote: 'This good work would not be a pure loss for us since it would provide the Gardener with the means to ensure the best method to use to bring back to Europe the productions that could be useful' (see Yvonne Letouzey (ed.), *Le Jardin des Plantes à la croisée des chemins avec André Thouin 1747–1824*, Éditions du Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, 1989, p. 201).

Accompanying Cameron-Ash's speculations are some surprising statements. On page 256, she declares: 'The launching of the First Fleet was tantamount to an act of war against France'. After describing all the armaments loaded aboard the First Fleet, she glibly asserts: 'Arthur Phillip hoped that he was adequately prepared for any encounter with Jean Lapérouse' (page 305). There is no documentary foundation for this assertion, but many reasons to question it. Are we to believe that the ships of the First Fleet were not armed in case of rebellion by the large body

of convicts they were forcibly transporting to the antipodes, or potential resistance from the Indigenous people whose land they were about to invade, or attack by pirates or other hostile forces during the long voyage? Offering further strategic anxieties, she asks: ‘Were French military reinforcements on their way from Mauritius?’ (page 356). No, they were not on their way from Mauritius, 10,000 kilometres by sea from Botany Bay.

While Lapérouse did have orders to gather intelligence and explore future commercial opportunities for France, his orders embodied impressive ambitions in the natural and physical sciences, including geophysics and hydrography. Ultimately, his expedition would conduct the first systematic scientific experiments ever conducted on Australian soil. At least Cameron-Ash references Doug Morrison’s and Ivan Barko’s article on this subject, but in her quest for ulterior motives she sidelines the important scientific story.

In her previous book, *Lying for the Admiralty*, Cameron-Ash argued that during the *Endeavour* voyage, James Cook sensed the presence of Bass Strait and that he also made a secret excursion from the north shore of Botany Bay and discovered Port Jackson in 1770. She believes that he kept these discoveries secret, that he lied for the Admiralty. She reaffirms this in *Beating France to Botany Bay* (see page 32) and would have us believe that Arthur Phillip carried these secrets with him on the First Fleet. Even if this was so, I am not convinced that this made any difference to the course of Australian history. In *Lying for the Admiralty* (page 161), she tells us that Cook ‘kept Tasmania safe from the French for three decades’. Yet, the currents Cook encountered from the east, in 1770, also made d’Entrecasteaux suspect a strait when he approached Van Diemen’s Land from the opposite direction in 1793 (see Duyker & Duyker (ed. & trans.) *Bruny d’Entrecasteaux, Voyage to Australia and the Pacific*, pp. 135–6 & 163). It would still be another decade before the island was settled by the British.

Cameron-Ash discusses the various pantomimes of colonial possession and Arthur Phillip’s declaration of an ‘Anglo-Dutch border’ between ‘New Holland’ and ‘New South Wales’ and British territorial claims embracing all of Cape York and running south. Was this really an historical boundary based on exploration priority rights, or just a cynical land grab? Well, either way, it was contemptuous of the Indigenous inhabitants, but the mindset of the times is informative. In 1606, the Dutch explorer Willem Jansz charted the west coast of Cape York as far south as Cape Keer-Weer. James Cook



only charted the east coast. The Dutch also charted the Gulf of Carpentaria in the seventeenth century, not to mention the western and much of the southern coast of Australia, including Van Diemen's Land, by 1642. When two strange ships were first sighted by the British at the entrance to Botany Bay in January 1788, is it any wonder that Watkin Tench, aboard the First Fleet transport *Charlotte*, should have recorded the initial conjecture, not that they were French, but that 'they were Dutchmen sent to dispossess us' (Tench, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, chapt. viii).

Cameron-Ash construes Arthur Phillips's relocation of the ships of the First Fleet from Botany Bay to Port Jackson, not just as a pre-emption of France, but as a 'battle'. The decisive shuffle north is described as 'a near-run thing', or, rather, John Hunter we are told '*may have* [reviewer's italics] anticipated the Duke of Wellington's remark after Waterloo' (page 368). There are more extraordinary statements on the following page:

The Battle of Port Jackson was possibly the most significant naval victory in the era of Anglo-French rivalry. The Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 has received the most glorification of any naval battle in history, but it decided little. It did not prevent the invasion of England, as Napoleon had abandoned that plan months earlier. It did not end the Napoleonic Wars, which raged for another ten years. The Battle of Port Jackson in 1788 received no glorification, but it shaped the history of the eastern hemisphere (page 369).

Few would dispute the profound significance of the establishment of the first permanent European settlement on the coast of Australia, especially for the Indigenous inhabitants, but can we really accept that Lapérouse was the antagonist in a 'battle' when he visited New South Wales, moreover, one that eclipsed the significance of Trafalgar seventeen years later? At most it could be construed as an awkward political dance. If there was a 'Battle of Port Jackson', literal or metaphorical, how is it that Watkin Tench could write the following in his *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay* (chapt. xii):

About the middle of the month [March] our good friends the French departed from Botany Bay, in prosecution of their voyage. During their stay in that port, the officers of the two nations had frequent opportunities of testifying their mutual regard by visits, and every interchange of friendship and esteem.

It remains to be said that had Lapérouse lived to complete his voyage, he would have fulfilled his orders to survey other parts of the northern and western coasts of New Holland. But he didn't. His expedition came to grief off Vanikoro in the Solomon Islands.

I have no doubt of specific French interest in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel (Tasmania), Western Port (Victoria), and King George Sound and Swan River (Western Australia). Dumont d'Urville, certainly had secret orders to search for potential locations for a French colony (see Duyker, *Dumont d'Urville*, Otago University Press, 2014, p. 172). And I don't need convincing that the British acted to pre-empt the restored Bourbon monarchy from establishing such a colony in the 1820s, and the Orleanist monarchy from doing so in the 1830s, just as they pre-empted Napoleon two decades earlier in the wake of the Baudin expedition. However, this book does not provide convincing evidence that Lapérouse was engaged in a race with Arthur Phillip, or that he had secret orders to establish a French colony at Botany Bay in 1788.

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