

Wednesday 26th October 2022 18:00-20:00h

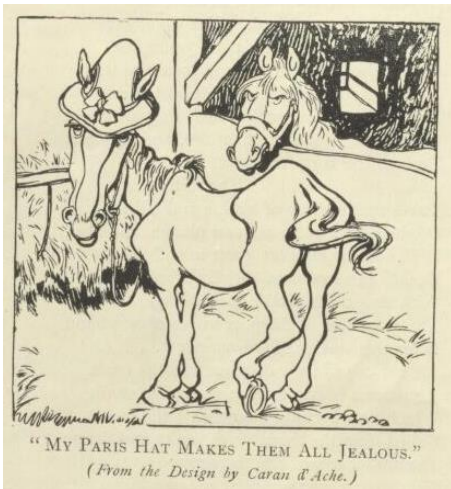
Dr Alexis Bergantz (RMIT University)

'When you order a book from France by the time it arrives here you have ceased to want it'

Finding French books and talking literature in nineteenth century Australia

French literature was an important strand in the strong Francophilia that characterised the elite intellectual and cultural life of nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia. Yet geography and history created particular conditions of access to French books and the dissemination of knowledge of French literature remained limited well into the twentieth century.

Scholarship has to an extent examined the accessibility of French books in public and private collections but only until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The following decades, however, saw important changes that affected both the trade in books and colonial Australians' relationship to literature. From the late 1880s Australia was absorbed within an imperial British book trade, which flooded the colonies with more and cheaper books. At the same time discussions of federation and national unity created a new impetus for a homegrown literature distinct from that of Britain.



In this presentation I consider some private book lists, the lists of public and commercial libraries, and some of the work of literary critics James Smith and Alfred George Stephens. Questions about the accessibility of books and the dissemination of French literature serve to prop up a broader research agenda that seeks to examine a phase of transition in Australian literary criticism where considerations of foreign/French literature went from being largely colonial British to national Australian and what this can reveal about Australia's shifting relationship to Britain and France.

Cartoon by Caran d'Ache (n.d.), reproduced in *The Bookfellow*, issue 1, 3 January 1907

Alexis Bergantz is a lecturer in Global & Language Studies at RMIT University. His research focuses on Franco-Australian history, the French Pacific and New Caledonia. He co-chairs the Research Committee of the Institute for the Study of French-Australian Relations (ISFAR) and his first book, *French Connection: Australia's Cosmopolitan Ambitions* (NewSouth, 2021) recently won the 2022 NSW Premier's Australian History Award.

Venue: The Oxford Scholar Hotel (Level 1), 427 Swanston St, Melbourne
(RMIT University Tram Stop 7; Melbourne Central train station)

Cover charge (includes refreshments) \$25. Bookings: <https://www.trybooking.com/CDJAD>