French Connection
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The culture and politics of Frenchness in Australia, 1890-1914.

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December 2015

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University

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This thesis contains no material which has previously been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or institution and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made.
This thesis is a cultural history of ideas about France and the French in Australia during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It explores the links between representations of France, and of the French, and the ways in which different groups of individuals, whether they were French migrants or Australian colonists, mobilised these representations in social life.

Until recently, studies of the French presence in Australia have tended to encase French lives in an ethnic framework, linked primarily to a social history of migrants. Although this has rescued some of their stories for posterity, it has also tended to marginalise them from a broader national story.

This project, in contrast, combines French and Australian private and public sources (memoirs, letters, newspapers and works of fiction, as well as official government archives) to examine the shifting relational significance of France, both for the Australian nation and for individuals who lived during a formative period in its history. Pitched in the liminal space between two countries’ records, the thesis demonstrates that the tensions that arose in the articulation of cultural difference between Australian colonists and French and francophone migrants are revealing of the complex and sometimes paradoxical expressions of Frenchness in the antipodes in the decades before the Great War. They show some of the processes at play in the on-going definition of Australian culture and character in the early Federation era and bring to light a range of political and personal meanings that France had in people’s lives.

In underscoring the connections that the Australian colonies, and later the Australian nation, entertained with France, this work helps bring to light the global and transnational connections constitutive of Australian history and identity.
Acknowledgments

This work would not have been completed without the help of many people to whom I owe a large debt of gratitude. The unwavering support, sound advice and sharp eye of my supervisor, Dr Alexander Cook, has helped me see this project through. Dr Carolyn Strange’s academic rigour and intellectual precision as well as her moral support have been crucial to me. This work would also not have been possible without the unfailing support of Dr Peter Brown since the inception of the project. Associate Professor Frank Bongiorno has generously provided exhaustive feedback on a whole draft at a later stage. The intellectual and collegial stimulation from everyone else in the School of History, from staff to fellow postgraduate students cannot be stressed enough.

Emeritus Professor Ivan Barko once described himself to me as a ‘facilitator’, which he has been, providing me with difficult to find documents. But the word does not do justice to the important role he has played as a cornerstone of the French-Australian research network for many decades; the work done through the aegis of the Institute for the Study of French Australian Relations has, in turn, been crucial to this project.

Librarians and archivists in France and Australia armed themselves with patience to deal with my sometimes very obscure requests, and I owe them a lot. Margot Riley at the State Library of New South Wales, Anne Sophie Cras at the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères in Nantes and Jacques Pétillat at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris deserve particular mention. Meredith Murray’s keen eye has helped me find many Proustian sentences and Frenchisms: what is left is entirely my fault.

To the Australian descendants of French migrants who have shown such strong enthusiasm and contributed all they could to this project, Jacqueline Dwyer, Michel Reymond, Gaston Liévain, Liz de Chastel, the Droulers family: this work is yours as much as it is mine.

I also thank the Herbreteau family in Nantes for taking me in. For their unfailing support and generosity, I also thank my parents and Elizabeth Kinne. Finally, Paul, who has read far more of this work than he ever should have, my deepest thanks.
Pour ma grand-mère
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Abbreviations

Australian Dictionary of Biography
Correspondance Politique et Commerciale
(Political and Commercial Correspondence)
Correspondance Politique et Commerciale, Nouvelle Série
(Political and Commercial Correspondence, New Series)
Archives of the French Consulate in Melbourne
Archives of the French Consulate in Sydney
Archives of the French Embassy in London (Fonds CH)
Archives of the French Embassy in London (Fonds K)
Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (or archives of the Ministry)
Mitchell Library
National Archives of Australia
National Library of Australia
State Library of New South Wales
State Records of New South Wales

ADB
2CPC
139CPCOM
428PO
662PO
378PO/CH
378PO/K
MAE
ML
NAA
NLA
SLNSW
SRNSW
A note on translation

For ease of reading I have translated all French quotes into English; all translations are my own unless otherwise stated. To indicate that a quotation was originally in French, the author’s name is followed by an asterisk (*) in the footnotes. The originals can be found in the Appendix under the heading of each respective chapter.
Introduction

In September 1906, ‘disillusioned’ and out of sorts, the French acting vice-consul in Australia took to writing to his superiors in Paris. In the letter, Eugène Lucciardi recounted the insults he had just witnessed against the grandeur of his nation. He had attended a Victorian exhibition showcasing the work of state schools and was still reeling at the heresies he had seen: how could they draw the Union Jack above Madagascar, when it was a French colony? Worse: one student wrote a report confusing Marat, the revolutionary martyr, so famously assassinated in his bath in 1793, with Joachim Murat, the ‘Dandy king’, brother-in-law to Napoleon I, who died a whole twenty-two years later. The acting vice-consul was adamant: the report and the exhibition were ‘an automobile accident translated into text’ – it was a car-crash.¹ To add further offense, just a year later, the Premier of Victoria, Sir Thomas Bent, absentmindedly castigated one of his political opponents for ‘shooting in the back’ like a Frenchman.²

Had France not been, since the time of Louis XIV, the quintessence of civilisation and a mighty military power commanding all nations? Had not all artists and aristocrats, dandies and diplomats, connoisseurs and courtesans turned their eyes towards France, its literature, its language and its fashions?³ Certainly some of these ideas still found an echo when the Australian writer Christina Stead enthusiastically wrote in 1929 that Paris, where she had just moved, was ‘not so much … the French capital, as the capital of the modern world’. She was not prepared to leave this vibrant and intellectually saturated haven any time soon.⁴

Ideas about France and French culture in Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were multifarious and sometimes contradictory. They oscillated between expressions of Francophilia and Francophobia, and one did not preclude the other.⁵ They were as much an inheritance from Australia’s British origins as they were a result of the French geopolitical

¹ Lucciardi* to MAE, 11 September 1906, MAE, 428PO/1/69; Argus, 4 September 1906, 6; Raleigh Sun, 14 September 1906, 7
presence in the South Pacific. From food to fashion, high art to sexual degeneracy, and conflicting ideas and ideals of masculinity and femininity, Frenchness played an important part in defining what it meant to be civilised in the antipodes. At this crucial time, when disparate British colonies were contemplating unifying into a single political and cultural entity, the perennial ‘sweet enemy’ of Britain played an important role in the cultural processes that defined Australianness.\(^6\)

People of French origin have been a part of the Australian story since the beginning of white colonisation, from lowly cooks and diggers on the gold fields to more prominent figures in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century urban centres of Sydney and Melbourne. Yet, as this work will argue, French migrants never exercised a monopoly in the articulation and mobilisation of ideas about France and the French in the colonies. Indeed, at times they played a relatively insignificant part in the process. Still, French migrants came with their own ideas of what being French meant. Much like the outraged acting vice-consul in Melbourne, many believed France and her culture ought to be seen as a shining beacon to the world, a culture and a model with universal applications. But French national universalism was defined by exclusion as much as inclusion, and, besides, not everyone outside France thought about it in those terms. As a global disembodied culture with a long history, Frenchness was a contested site, productive of tensions and conflicts.

This thesis examines the history of representations of French culture in Australia and asks how some of these ideas were deployed in everyday social life. It is a cultural history of the role that ideas about France, the French and Frenchness played in Australian history in the last years of the nineteenth century and during the beginning of the twentieth. At the same time, it considers how some groups and individuals, whether they were French migrants or Australian colonists, mobilised ideas about France in their daily lives, and why they did so. It seeks to recreate a world that did not completely exist, but which influenced people’s lives and contributed to the shaping of modern Australian culture. It offers insights into Australia’s perceived place in the world in the nineteenth century, and explores some of the processes at play in the shaping of its culture, while allowing for the retrieval of the life stories of largely-forgotten groups of French and francophone people who called l’Australie home.

Australian conceptions of France and of the French were entwined with the new nation’s evolution during the late colonial and Federation era. The origins of these conceptions, however, are to be found in the millennium-long relationship between France and Britain, so that examining Australian culture and history must take into account this longue-durée context.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy.*
Indeed, many scholars have shown the significance of the Franco-British relationship in shaping the rise of British nationalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Historian Linda Colley has argued that it was during the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries that ‘Britons’ came to define their common sense of ‘Britishness’, mercantile and Protestant, largely in opposition to the Other, not only the non-white other in the newly acquired overseas possessions, but the perennial white and Catholic Other on the other side of the English Channel: the French. Not as they were necessarily, but as the British ‘imagined them to be, superstitious, militarist, decadent and unfree’. More recently, Fabrice Bensimon and others have shown the on-going political impact and legacy of the 1789 and 1848 French Revolutions in British literary and political thought.

Reacting in part against Colley’s influential thesis, Robin Eagles contended in his *Francophilia in English Society, 1748–1815* that Colley’s focus on religion and mercantilism as the basis of an emerging national consciousness in Britain did not sufficiently acknowledge the cosmopolitan (read French), to an extent even Catholic, love of arts and fashion of the ruling Whig elite who wielded considerable influence both in matters of taste and of politics. Indeed, writing some years earlier, Gerald Newman had made somewhat similar claims that before the 1789 Revolution the French, and ideas attached to French luxury and notions of taste, were crucial in facilitating the establishment of marked class differences in Britain between the cultural elite and the lower orders. The contingent definition of Britishness was played out in relation to shifting ideals about conduct and behaviours. On a different topic, but with related relevance for this study, historian Michèle Cohen changed the focus from the building of a cohesive British national identity in war to the relational construction of masculinity. She examined in particular how the image of the masculine ideal of the English gentleman was constructed in direct opposition to the foppish Frenchman, the paradoxically effeminate yet passion-consuming lover of women. But whether different parts of the British Isles looked to France for political and social inspiration or with suspicion, France remained a significant and constant barometer throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through which ideas

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about taste and refinement could be framed, and against which British class differences could be articulated.13

With such a long and deeply entangled history of relations between France and Britain it comes as no surprise that many of the images and ideas about France that were prevalent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain were transported to the antipodean colonies as part of the mental furniture, first of shiploads of convicts and then of successive migrants. Yet cultural transfers never represent a carbon copy of their model, and already-contested images and thoughts find themselves selected, adapted and redefined to suit local environments by new and different actors. The island-continent might have been gradually peopled by ‘exiled Britons’, but these were fast becoming Australians, and the way they looked to France changed, and in turn changed them.14

For this reason, there were never just two players in the special relationship between Australia and Great Britain. For some time now, historians in Australia and elsewhere, seeking to unsettle the established national narrative, have replaced Australia within the broader context of the British Empire and the concomitant concept of Britishness. These studies have successfully displaced older assumptions about the relationship between metropole and colonies, between centre and periphery, by fleshing out the complex webs of connection between the different constituents of the Empire through a particular attention to the circulation of ideas and individuals and the postcolonial concepts of class, race and gender.15 This has resituated Australian historiography within a more global, sometimes transnational, framework through ‘the study of relationships, networks, and connections, traced back and forth and indeed around the Empire as a whole’.16 Yet, as Marilyn Lake has noted, ‘the challenge of locating “Australia”


16 Recently the burgeoning field of transnational history has taken up these intellectual advances partly to show the importance of the international flow of ideas and people on a global scale in the shaping of seemingly national-bound phenomena such as legislation or culture. One of the early pitfalls of the transnational approach has been sometimes to side-step the nation altogether in an effort to show its cultural and relational construction, perhaps too willingly forgetting the relevance of nationalism – and nations – in historical actors’ lives, particularly in the late-nineteenth century. For significant works stemming from Australian scholars see Marilyn Lake and Ann Curthoys, eds., Connected Worlds:
in “one vast interconnected world” must include, but also take us beyond, the relationship between metropole and colony. Indeed, to understand the cultural links between Australia and Great Britain we must take that relationship not only beyond the centre and periphery dichotomy, but outside the British Empire. In this, the important role played by France and French culture in the shaping of Britishness should be taken into account, whether in examining Australia’s links to the British Empire or in exploring the creation of distinct Australian ways of being.

Chronologically, this study starts with an Australian myth and ends with the First World War. The Great War stands out as an obvious end point because it so drastically changed the world order and the bilateral relationship between France and Australia. Germany by then had long supplanted France as the rival to Great Britain. Diggers gained new, first-hand, experience of France during the war, some marrying French women, and France and Australia entered a new and more direct economic and cultural relationship. My starting date is more fluid, but represents, primarily, a historiographical choice. The 1890s correspond to what would come to be known as La Belle Époque in France, a time of perceived prosperity in both the economic and cultural domains. More significantly, for this study, the 1890s were a pivotal period in Australian national history. While chapters one to three of this thesis cover a longer period starting from the 1860s, the two and a half decades directly preceding the Great War are my focal point because of their significance in Australian national historiography.


In his now classic study of national character, *The Australian Legend*, Russel Ward drew on the Turner thesis of the frontier to identify the location and moment when the essence of what it means to be Australian coalesced. He sought to chart the birth of what he interchangeably, and rather vaguely, called the national ‘ethos’, ‘legend’ or ‘mystique’.

According to Ward, the essentially Australian values of egalitarianism, mateship, irreverence for authority and anti-imperial patriotism were fostered in the particular conditions found in the Australian bush in the 1890s, predominantly amongst Irish and English ex-convicts. From its first publication in 1958, Ward’s study initiated an ongoing debate, in and out of academia, about Australia’s sense of itself. The *Legend* has itself become legend, a lieu-de-mémoire from which most discussions continue to stem. Critics have been vociferous of course, arguing, for instance, that Ward’s thesis overlooked the roles played by women, Aborigines, migrants and urban values in the creation of an Australian culture, and that the bush mythology became pervasive largely through the role played by the urban intelligentsia of the Sydney *Bulletin* who saw in it a natural national canvas on which to paint their own masculine, bohemian and urban values.

The present work is, amongst other things, another stage in the on-going quest to deconstruct some of the assumptions made by Ward and the radical nationalist historians whose works continue to be prominent in the articulation of contemporary discussions about Australianness. As John Docker has pointed out, some of the opponents of the Australian Legend did not simply displace Ward’s conception of a distinct Australian ‘spirit of the age’. They replaced it with different ones, more suited to their own social and political inclinations.

In what follows, I do not seek to rewrite French or francophone people into Australian history as mere adjuncts of that history, or to celebrate their contribution to a monolithic idea of national culture; rather, agreeing with Docker that historical periods do not possess ‘a single true spirit, a single dominating character, a single ideology or discourse’ but are ‘contradictory, heterogeneous, diverse, fragmented’, this work seeks in its own modest way to contribute to the displacement of a uniform – often overwhelmingly ‘British’ – conception of national culture in a multiracial settler-colonial society, one whose ‘quest for identity’ has produced, it seems to the eyes of this outsider, its

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own bitter and divisive mythology of belonging. The Australia depicted in these pages – made up of colonial Australians from various places as well as French and Francophone migrants and their children - resembles a more contested, complex and cosmopolitan impressionist painting.

Until now, ‘the French’ in Australia have been uncomfortably wedged between French migration history on one side, and Australian ‘ethnic’ or contribution history on the other. In France, since Gérard Noiriel’s seminal book Le Creuset Français, significant work has been done in and out of academia in the field of French immigration history. Although the field has grown at a noticeable rate in recent decades, French scholarship remains overwhelmingly concerned with immigration rather than emigration. This is well exemplified by the French journal Migrance. Out of 36 issues published between 1992 and 2010, issue 26 (2005) alone is dedicated to French emigration (to the Americas). Most of the other issues focus on France as a receiving country, while some others are devoted to other European countries (primarily Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Luxembourg, Britain and Germany), and a few others offer thematic studies on literature, sexuality and archival research. But if it is true that the French have been very reluctant to migrate, and this was especially true in the nineteenth century, some nonetheless did.

The lack of attention to French emigrants within France can be partly explained by contemporary societal factors. Indeed, François Weil has suggested that the noticeable lack of studies of French emigration reflects, foremost, a short-sightedness inflicted by the primacy of ‘Hexagonal’ national history. Readings of French migration history, more often than not, tend to see France as the receiving country par excellence and so the migrants who elected to leave France, for whatever reason, are perceived as breaking the French national social contract. By doing so they have been excluded from a place within national historiography. There are, of course, notable exceptions. But few of these studies aim at understanding the history of

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26 French geographers in the nineteenth century referred to the shape of France as forming a hexagon, which has since become a synonym for the metropolitan nation.
28 A number of volumes have been published on French migration to America: Nicole Fouché, L’émigration Française, Etude de cas: Algerie, Canada, Etats-Unis (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1985); Nicole Fouché, Émigration Alsacienne aux Etats-Unis, 1815-1870 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1992); Annick Fourrier, Le rêve Californien: Migrants Français sur la côte Pacifique, XVIIIe-
migrants, of individuals, in their country of destination outside of an assimilationist or contribution paradigm. They tend to conceptualise ‘the French’ solely as immigrants or emigrants.

In Australia, moving from one nation to another sees migrants generally escaping the bounds of one national historiography only to be trapped by another. The scholarship emanating from Australia reveals similar problems to those of French migration history. Since the development of the ‘ethnic history’ genre in the 1970s, migrants’ lives in Australia have been often sealed off from mainstream historiography. Reflecting the new multicultural mould in which Australia sought to recast itself under the Whitlam and Fraser governments, the first laudable impulse behind the development of ethnic history (or contribution history) was to carve out a space in the history of the nation for the multiple newly-acknowledged ethnic groups composing the fabric of Australian society.  

Most of these studies follow a similar structure: they are first concerned with the reasons behind migrants’ decisions to leave their home country, they expand on the period of settlement and integration, and finally take stock of the contribution migrants have made to national culture. It is within this tradition that the only book-length study of the French in Australia has been published. Anny Stuer’s book *The French in Australia*, initially a demographic study completed as an ANU PhD thesis, opened up the field of Franco-Australian research, and all works in the field have since acknowledged their debt to her. But ethnic histories did not simply parallel new multicultural policies. As Hsu Ming-Teo has pointed out, they also internalised their limitations: neither multiculturalism as it stood in the 1970s and 80s, nor the ‘ethnic studies’ monographs challenged the idea of a ‘core’ ‘Anglo-Celtic’ and monolithic national culture. In fact, they posited ethnic cultures composing the Australian national cosmogony as gravitating (rather awkwardly) around it. In the wake of Anny Stuer’s seminal publication, a steady number of conferences and exhibitions followed throughout the

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30 Contribution histories continue to find a niche market, see for instance Jürgen Tampke, *The Germans in Australia* (Port Melbourne, Vic: Cambridge University Press, 2006); for a thorough and critical discussion of the limitations of the ethnic history genre focusing on the German case see Gerhard Fischer, “Debating the “German Presence” in Australia: Notes on Research and Research Desiderata”, in Andrea Bandhauer and Maria Veber, eds., *Migration and Cultural Contact: Germany and Australia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009).


1980s and the theme has continued to generate interest. A number of honours, masters and doctoral theses have also dealt with various aspects of the French presence or French influence in Australia, exploring topics such as the teaching of French at specific Australian universities, the trade in French books in the antipodes, and studies of particular individuals. Taken together, these studies have highlighted many aspects of the diverse history of the French and French culture in Australia but have lacked an engagement with the formation of collective and individual identities and ways of being in Australia. Migrants were generally an added flavour, a part of but never completely part of the story. Taking a much broader, synthetic approach, Robert Aldrich’s _The French Presence in the South Pacific, 1842–1940_ stands apart in the historiography of the French in the region. It still remains the most important work in the field in book form, covering a vast period both thematically and chronologically. For the purposes of the present work, the width and depth of Aldrich’s study of the French presence – economic, commercial, military and social – have been very valuable. Chapter 7 of Aldrich’s work deals more particularly with the economic and political relationship between France, Australia and New Zealand, but earlier chapters on missionaries and the navy have provided important background information. Where Aldrich is concerned with examining how myths and images of the Pacific have informed French political and economic strategies locally and in the metropole, I am concerned with examining how representations of France and the French have informed personal identities and social strategies in Australia. The peer-reviewed journal _The French Australian Review_ (formerly _Explorations_), a bi-yearly publication produced by the Institute for the Study of French Australian Relations (ISFAR), has also provided a salutary platform since 1985 for researchers interested in all aspects of Franco-Australian relations.

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34 Margaret Kerr, _The Teaching of French Literature at the University of Sydney, 1887–1955_ (Masters of Arts, Monash University, 1972); Patricia Gray, _French Books in Early Australian Public and Private Collections_ (Masters of Arts, Monash University, 1981); Naomi Forwood, _Les Français en Australie à travers le Courrier Australien 1892–1901, analyse sociologique_ (Bachelor of Arts Honours, University of Sydney, Department of French Studies, 1983); John Rosemberg, _Studies in the French Presence in Australia_ (Masters of Arts, Monash University, 1985); Jocelyn Middleton, _Augustine Soubeiran, Une Française en Australie 1884–1933_ (Masters of Arts, University of New South Wales, 1990).


36 A non-exhaustive but very useful bibliography of works on the French-Australian connection, particularly for the post-WWI period, which is not covered here, can be found in Colin Nettlebeck, ‘French-Australian Relations: Towards an Historical Perspective’, _The French Australian Review_ 57 (Australian summer, 2014–2015): 3–27. See also Ivan Barko and Eric Berti, eds., _French Lives in Australia_ (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2015), this recent publication brings together...
Still, because ‘the French’, as migrants or as an economic or political force, have largely remained at the centre of previous studies, they have tended to marginalise broader questions, of importance to cultural history, concerning the ways in which France, and the French, were understood in the Pacific world. Indeed, studies of the French in Australia or of the French presence in Australia have tended to conceive of ‘the French’ as a monolithic and homogenous migrant group possessing a uniform imported national identity and culture. As a result of this, little attempt has been made to examine ‘the French’ who came to the Australian colonies in relation to the dynamics of Australian cultural history. One limitation of such an approach is that it encases the people under scrutiny in a framework that reifies them as archetypes of a nationality, leaving little room to ask questions about the formation and significance of individual or group identity, or about the contingent relations of power that have given it meaning. I wish to heed historian Hsu-Ming Teo’s call to overcome the essentialist stance of Australian ethnic histories and French migration history, to consider more significant ‘postmodern preoccupation[s] of international cultural history’ such as ‘issues of identity construction, discourses of power and the politics of resistance and cultural transformation’. 37

This thesis follows Homi Bhabha’s invitation to scholars to ‘focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences’ in order to understand ‘society itself’, the lived-in world. 38 It is concerned with the changing and plural meanings attached to the idea of ‘Frenchness’, the people for whom Frenchness held a particular significance, and the reasons for that significance. Within this study France is not primarily a physical location, nor is it the domain of the French alone, but rather it is a mental map, or a ‘scape’, a social space of meaning, to borrow Arjun Appadurai’s pertinent terminology. Within this space, ideas about France existed, not just as imagined, contested and plural, but also as enabling social facts. 39

Most scholarship on Franco-British relations has tended, as Fabrice Bensimon recently noted, to focus on either moments of Francophobia or moments of Francophilia, often underscoring a class divide between a cultivated francophone elite and a popular dislike of the French, gauged through the press, particularly during moments of international tension. Such moments have included the Fashoda Incident, the Dreyfus Affair or, specific to Australia, the issue of the

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transportation of French convicts to New Caledonia. This approach has been very fruitful in the past. Certainly, a similar class divide can also sometimes be observed in the Australian context, as the following pages will show. However, this study is not confined to these moments of Francophobia or Francophilia, as they might be registered through a reading of Australian newspapers. I am concerned not only with the times, often linked to international conflicts, when Australians looked to France with more love than hate, hate than love, or an ‘inextricable’ mixture of both. Rather, I am concerned with exploring some of the images and ideas at play in relation to social life, and analysing what they may have meant to people during this era of Australian history. In this respect my approach is also informed by the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu which has encouraged me to consider specific moments of conflict or times when the articulation of cultural difference was most potent, in relation to different understandings of Frenchness mobilised by different sets of people within a cultural field. These different understandings could become a source of conflict, or a mode of communication between Australians and the French, between factions within the local French émigré community, or among other Francophones. Although this perspective underpins my thinking and writing generally, it is the particular focus of the second part of the thesis, chapters three to six, which is composed of four interconnected micro-histories, to which I will come shortly.

These sections of the thesis are particularly shaped by the concepts of cultural and symbolic capital. Present in all aspects of social life, cultural and symbolic capital are present in the ways we express our taste. What does reading French books say about a person? What does it say if they read them in the original French? Not everyone would recognise that a new gown was imported from Paris and was the apex of fashion, but for those who did, it would be decoded as a symbol representing financial affluence and bon goût. As a result, the woman wearing that dress could be perceived as belonging to a certain stratum of society: the petite bourgeoisie or the leisured class. It is through sometimes seemingly anodyne choices that people establish social hierarchies. Pierre Bourdieu’s conception of the relation between culture, social structure and action is a fruitful way to think about combining the study of representations with an analysis of social life. Bourdieu’s sociology seeks to overcome the false dichotomy between the determinist dimensions of social life proposed by structuralism and the rational-actor theory that

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gives prominence to human agency. His triptych of culture, social structure and action, along with his key concepts of habitus and cultural and symbolic capital, allow for a theory of practice in which actors become cultural agents who are not constrained by cultural systems in a deterministic way, but can invoke different possible meanings within those systems of thought to establish social differences. In *Distinction*, in particular, Bourdieu argues that systems of domination permeate all cultural practices and interpersonal exchanges. Thus, I analyse Frenchness in this study not with the aim of reifying an identity for a migrant group but in order to study the social processes at play in the *mobilisation* of culture, for migrants, first-generation Australians, self-styled Australian bohemians, and even a self-selected group of ambitious bourgeois Melbournian women. Frenchness, for historical actors, is not something that French people inherently possess (though they might think they do); rather, it is a strategy, or a ‘tactic’ which allows its practitioners to draw from a variety of meanings available to them in order to be perceived as exhibiting certain qualities, through a variety of signs such as language, cultural references, behaviours, manner of dress, or membership of a social club.

The method and structure used in this thesis are influenced by Bourdieu’s theories. The thesis seeks to combine a study of the cultural system with a study of the ways in which some actors navigated that world of ideas and symbols. Chapters one to three are concerned with representations of France and the French in Australia. They ask which images were dominant at different times, and why. They span a period from around the 1860s to 1914. Chapters four to six focus on a series of micro-histories showing how people went about their daily lives mobilizing some of these ideas. They seek to show how the broader history of discourse, representation and culture explored in the opening section, interacted with, and affected, the social and personal lives of men and women during this period. Certainly, micro-histories come at a cost: their focus on detail and individual or collective stories means that they cannot claim to be representative. Yet they offer valuable advantages. They allow us to hone in on the lives of people to reveal the processes at play in identity formation and the multiplicity of those identities. They precisely allow us to take a closer look where previous studies have stayed at the level of the homogenous whole. As a result of this focus on individuals, this thesis is not in


any strict sense a history of political ideas. It does, however, provide significant insights on questions of politics insofar as these considerations affected the ways Australian colonists thought of the French. They also informed the identities of French migrants, thousands of miles away from the patrie with universal aspirations.

Chapter One maps out the recurring images of France and of the French that dominated the general public sphere in Australia. Frenchness was pitched between long-established ideas about high art and high culture and their civilising effect and the more recent modern concerns about civilisation’s descent into the abyss. Paris, which to many foreigners signified France, was itself seen not only as a fountainhead of modernity and the arts, but also as the epicentre of the mal du siècle, of decadence. The French were seen as embodiments of those symptoms, helping to define the contours of British ideas about masculinity and morality. This chapter speaks of the tenacity of a cultural identification with Britishness in the Australian colonies, but it equally reveals a space of possibility where a nascent Australia was imagined as part of a broader cosmopolitan world, a new world, one that was British but also uniquely Australian.

A significant proportion of Australian images of France had roots in traditions that were much older than the new colonies themselves. Yet, as Chapter Two will discuss, Australian perceptions of France were also affected by more local dynamics, some of which had their genesis in the geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean. In particular, this chapter focuses on the consequences of the French decision to create a penal settlement in New Caledonia. It considers the impact of the flow of French convicts to Australia on popular and political discussions about Australian nationhood and about France and the French.

From thinking about French convicts in Australia, Chapter Three turns to consider the broader dimensions and significance of French migration to the colonies and its interactions with Australian perceptions of France. Here I both develop and problematize aspects of the existing scholarship on French migration, taking the complex life stories of these men and women out of the confines of contribution history to rethink their collective story in light both of their successes, and their failures. This chapter also underscores the diversity of individual stories, revealing tears in the social fabric of a group of migrants that was anything but homogenous.

Chapters four to six focus on the 1890s and 1900s. Chapter Four analyses the performative aspect of Frenchness for a relatively insulated and self-selected group of French men belonging to the business community in Sydney and Melbourne. The narrative is centred upon two incidents, each illustrating particular social uses of ideas about nationality as they were welded to conceptions of personal and group honour. The first case study relates to events in Sydney in 1898, during the time of the Dreyfus affair. It examines the reaction of the French community when the official representative of the Queen in New South Wales, the seventh Earl of
Beuchamp, called out the Dreyfus trials as a parody of justice and castigated the French for not upholding their declared values of liberté, égalité and fraternité. The second case study focuses upon Melbourne, at around the same time, when the French business community was embroiled in a seemingly never-ending series of libel cases involving several of its more prominent members. Amalgamating claims to shares in a mining company with questions about personal reputation, this story further probes the intersection of the concepts of honour and nationality. Together, these micro-histories show the way actors deployed these concepts together, discursively and emotionally, in social practice, either to enhance a projected group identity or to unsettle existing social hierarchies.

The sense of Frenchness for those who claimed familial association often changed with the passage of time and the distance between migrants and France. Chapter Five looks at the story of a Franco-Australian family’s relationship with France over the course of two generations in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Built primarily around two travel diaries, written thirty years apart by father and daughter as each journeyed to the country of their forebears, this chapter charts the different Frances they imagined and encountered. The diarists are connected through kinship, the act of writing and their confrontation with shifting notions of home and belonging as the family became more rooted in Australian soil and the French connection slowly faded. They chart a transition from the role of France as a deep facet of identity to a vaguer mark of family memory and social distinction.

In the final chapter, I consider how the Alliance Française in Melbourne became, from its inception, a contested site for the articulation of two irreconcilable visions of what France and the French language represented: a trophy of cultural status for a sealed-off bourgeois Australian world or an essential facet of collective identity for the local French community. I explore the conflicting ideas attached to French culture within these two groups by considering the Alliance as an instrument of social reproduction, that is, an institution that could produce and confer different forms of symbolic and social capital depending on the identity of its master - or mistress.

In the following pages I draw on a variety of sources from two different countries. In Australia, I have made wide use of colonial newspapers, public and private documents, and official documentation held in State archives. In France, the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) were very useful. Most of the archives hosted at the Courneuve, which consists mainly of the correspondence between official French representatives in Australia and the Quai d’Orsay, have been extensively used by historians (notably Aldrich). Part of the originality of the present work is that I have combined these not only with Australian sources, but also with other official archives that have seldom been examined before. Indeed, the ‘second’ site of MAE, in Nantes in the west of France, is host not only to the correspondence of the French
representatives in Australia with the French embassy in London but it also hosts the archives of the Melbourne and Sydney consulates themselves. These last, in particular, have been vital in grasping a more detailed understanding of the lives of the French communities in Australia and their interaction with their host country. The reason that these archival sources have been so under-utilised until now is partly to be explained by the fact that they were only repatriated in 1988.45 Unfortunately, the vagaries of archive survival result in Melbourne’s being slightly more represented in this work than Sydney. Only one box of material for Sydney has found its way back to France, compared with over seventy for Melbourne for the period covered here. I have tried to compensate for this imbalance in my choice of case studies and through my use of Australian archives (particularly focusing on the Mitchell Library and the New South Wales State records). Still, the abundance of sources from both countries meant making hard choices, and the direction I have taken with them was ultimately decided by my methodological framework.

The stories recounted here, the assemblage of cultural encounters, with their mix-ups and often bruised egos, matter because they open up a space where we can see how the island continent of Australia was entangled from early in its history with international cultural influences and historical processes in ways that reflected and inspired deep ambivalence. This tension between the desire to reproduce an old European world and the desire to start afresh in the Pacific helped to define Australia and Australians as much as the stories of the bush mythology. In between proud or perhaps arrogant Frenchmen and women, and some sometimes envious or peeved Australian colonists, we can glimpse a more connected and cosmopolitan Australia, one that was half imagined and half real.

Chapter 1

Frenchness in the Antipodes

In his three-volume work *The Desultory Man* (1836), a collection of satirical tales and anecdotes about France and French life under the Restoration and the July Monarchy, the English novelist and historian George P. R. James often commented on the French feeling of superiority: ‘They have told the world so often that they are the most civilized nation in Europe, that the world believes it.’ But whether the British loved or hated the French, supported or opposed their claims to civilizational pre-eminence, the French cultural and political influence on Britain and the British world cannot be denied. Whether it was art, music, architecture, food, fashion or manners, French culture played an important role in the nineteenth century in setting a standard of cultural sophistication and quality throughout the British world.

In the chapter entitled ‘Distinctions,’ the ‘Desultory man’ also described what he saw as fundamental differences between the English and the French. ‘An Englishman is proud, a Frenchman is vain,’ he tells us. The former are wary of change yet indefatigable. The latter are shallow but embrace change. Both are brave, but the Englishman fights coolly, while the Frenchman is hot-tempered. In conversation, an Englishman ‘seems going on a journey’ while ‘a Frenchman is taking a walk’: one is efficient and to the point, while the other gets distracted and seems volatile and frivolous, but knows how to make the experience more pleasant. Indeed, we are told that the French have a profound love of pleasure. When eating, the Frenchman will describe ‘every sensation it produces in his mouth and throat, from the tip of the tongue down to the stomach, and winds it up with

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1 George Payne Rainsford James, *The Desultory Man*, vol. 2 (London: Saunders and Otley, 1836), 150.
a smile’. In the end, the author concludes that the ‘Frenchman is constitutionally a happier animal than an Englishman’ for he is born a philospher, ‘he enjoys to-day, he forgets the past, and lets to-morrow take care of itself’. But though the French are ‘gay, witty, brave, and not unfeeling,’ their histrionic character is prone to vehement emphases and affectations in language which more often than not mask the emptiness of their words.³

This chapter focuses on those stereotypes, those dominant ideas about what was often called ‘national character’, about France itself and its people. Historians agree that national identity, or discourses about that identity, are historically contingent, culturally constructed and defined by a process of exclusion and delineation.⁴ In Australia, as Neville Meaney and others have shown, it was through an organic identification with the idea of a British race or Britishness that such demarcation was often articulated.⁵ By linking the colonies to a wider British world, the emerging national story of belonging was part of a greater story of British expansion and the global civilising mission it purported to uphold.⁶ So it comes as no surprise that British stereotypes about the French could be found almost unchanged in the Australian colonies.

Yet as the century approached its end, and as elements of social Darwinism and racial anthropology increasingly worked their way into considerations of foreign cultures, people started wondering what the ‘Australian type’ was going to be.⁷ Words like ‘Gallic’, ‘Anglo-Saxon’, ‘Teutonic’ or ‘Celt’ were in frequent use and differences of history and culture were increasingly understood as a reflection of something innate and immutable. An article published in 1902 in the Melbourne Argus could therefore state that ‘the French foot is narrow and long’, ‘the foot of the Scottish is high and thick; that of the Irish flat and square; the English short and fleshy’.⁸ But with a nation then only

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³ James, The Desultory Man, 2:145–153.
⁸ Argus, 6 December 1902, 4.
one year old and avowedly ‘98% British’ in its composition, what kind of feet did Australians have?

People discussed at length French fashion, food, arts and literature. But through these discussions about the place of France in the world – heralded at the same time as the fountainhead of the arts and as a bottomless pit of social and moral degeneracy, a harbinger of modernity and a repository of tradition – Australians were having a conversation about Australia’s own identity, about what Australianness meant or could mean at a crucial time when the nation was itself still coming into its own.

A taste for France

To understand how the Australian colonies, and eventually the Australian nation, viewed France, it is instructive to first consider the millennium-long relationship between France and Great Britain. Since the days of William the Conqueror the relationship between France and Britain has been intense and troubled. It has also been fertile, for neither of the two perennial ‘sweet enemies’ would be what it is without the other. Although fear of invasion on either side never quite subsided until the Second World War, the two countries had been largely at peace since the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, when their rivalry had been taken overseas in the imperial race. At the time Victor Hugo wrote his Cromwell in 1827, Robert and Isabella Tombs tell us, many observers thought France and Britain were in fact very similar, and in many ways France appeared to be following in the political and social footsteps of her neighbour across the Channel. In each country – although more than a century apart – a period of revolution had been followed by a military dictatorship and finally replaced by a restored but limited monarchy. The ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688 seemed to have paved the way for France’s own ‘Three Glorious Days’ of the July Monarchy. But things changed in 1848. The revolution that led to the short-lived establishment of France’s Second Republic drastically altered contemporary perceptions of this historical equivalence. The differences between the two countries seemed even more acute four years later, as the newly-self-styled emperor tightened his grip on power and actively sought to transform France into a modernising, expansionist dictatorship. At mid-

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9 Tombs, That Sweet Enemy.
10 Tombs, That Sweet Enemy, 321, 332.
century, then, the British and the French were believed by many to have parted ways – again.\textsuperscript{11}

Despite considerable antipathy to French politics within the British public sphere during this era, however, it was during Napoleon III’s Second Empire that France appeared to reach a new zenith in its supremacy in the arts, culture, taste and fashion, symbolised by the ubiquitous crinoline dress of the empire.\textsuperscript{12} This aura of cultural pre-eminence can arguably be traced as far back as the days of Louis XIV, but it is in the middle of the nineteenth century that France made particular concerted efforts to play on long-held ideas about French luxury and taste, ideas that both Napoleon III and the ensuing Third Republic were keen to cultivate.

Indeed, that France and the French had better taste than anyone else might have seemed at the time to many as natural, as an essential quality of the people. It was an idea that had been common place for centuries. But the mid-nineteenth century became a turning point for France, which now actively embraced such ideas, in part to bolster its economy. One convenient starting date for that process of invention could be 1851, at the time of the first International Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London. As Whitney Walton has argued, it was then in particular that the marked differences between the French and English modes of production led the former to embrace their particular manufacturing industry, focusing on style and quality rather than seeking to emulate Britain in the mass production of cheaper goods. Both the English and the French saw the Exhibition as confirming the long-held idea that the French simply had better taste.\textsuperscript{13} This in turn led to economic policies in France explicitly geared towards safeguarding the idea of French taste.\textsuperscript{14} In high demand in particular were what were called \textit{articles de Paris}, a large range of products including fans, buttons, musical instruments and artificial flowers.\textsuperscript{15} This marked the beginning of a pattern in French economic policies which aimed at preserving and capitalising on the idea of exclusivity and lavishness, as can still be seen with the ideas of \textit{appellation} and \textit{terroires} and the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Tombs, \textit{That Sweet Enemy}, 352; Bensimon, ‘Britain during the 1848 Revolutions and the Changing Features of “Britishness”’.
  \item Walton, \textit{France at the Crystal Palace}, 10.
  \item Walton, \textit{France at the Crystal Palace}, 7.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
restriction of the use of regional names for certain products like Champagne and Cognac. Before the Great War, Australia had had very little direct contact with France, culturally or commercially, and most interactions were mediated by Britain. It was not until 1882, with the opening of the Pacific service of the steamship company the Messagerie Maritime, which linked France to Australia and Noumea through the Suez Canal, that direct travel was made possible. Until 1898, with the signing of a postal convention between Australia and France, all parcels and letters going in either direction first had to go to Britain. Commercial exchanges remained limited. Australia mainly exported primary products to France, especially wool, and imported very few items, mainly luxury goods and wines and spirits. Technological advances in travel and refrigeration gave Australians high hopes for their over-producing meat industry, but that was without counting on French protectionism and preferential tariffs given to Argentina. During an exhibition of colonial products in Roubaix in the north of France in 1911, the French President, Armand Fallières, told George Reid, then High Commissioner for Australia, that France ‘will try not to be jealous’ of Australian wines. But he knew the French market was protected by high tariff rates, and had nothing to fear.

In the early-twentieth century the list of items imported into Australia from France had grown longer, but it still largely reflected the specialisation of French industry as well as the demands of Australian consumers. These items included clocks and watches, clothing, ceramics, confectionery, millinery, rubber goods, musical instruments, silk goods, champagnes, wines, brandy and liqueurs, toys, glassware, jewellery, dressed feathers, shoes, perfumery and pipes, as well as items more symbolic of modernity such as the phonograph and motor-cars. Despite limited direct contact between Australia and France for the greater part of the nineteenth century, however, the omnipresence of

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18 Sydney Morning Herald, 31 January 1898, 5; Argus, 1 February 1898, 5.
19 For more on the growing commercial ties between France and Australia see Aldrich, The French Presence in the South Pacific, 1842-1940, 199–236.
20 Sydney Morning Herald, 15 March 1905, 5; Sydney Morning Herald, 21 March 1905, 26; Sydney Morning Herald, 23 March 1905, 3; Argus, 4 November 1910, 8.
21 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 July 1911, 9.
22 Argus, 4 November 1910, 8.
things French and the importance of French culture in Australia was staggering, as the rest of this chapter will show.

**Fashion**

In the late nineteenth century, Republican Paris continued to hold the same sway in matters of fashion as ‘Paris royal’ had done decades earlier. In the eyes of Franck Schoell, a prominent French writer and specialist in the French language writing in the 1930s, it represented a beacon of *bon goûт* and high fashion. This was testified by the vocabulary of the ‘feminine art of clothing’ which borrowed heavily from the French language the world over: the names ‘crêpe de Chine’, ‘fil d’Ecosse’, ‘chiffon’, and ‘voile’ conferred a certain cachet upon ordinary items.\(^{23}\) It is hard to argue with this assessment when we consider the advertising pages of Australian weeklies and dailies. Many women’s pages – but not only women’s – advertised a gamut of French fashion items throughout this period, from the respectable heavy dark cloth tunics of the turn-of-the-century with puffed-out shoulders, bolero collars and a ‘smart diminutive tie’, to the bright, floral and airy chiffon evening gowns worn on the French Riviera on the eve of the Great War (Plate 1.1 and 1.2).

Melbourne in particular, after the 1870s, was thought to be better than Sydney for high end luxury items. Although they still relied on Sydney for stock, Melbourne shops were more selective, and the buildings were newer and more functional, so that the city quickly appropriated the image of a more modern, urban and sophisticated metropolis.\(^ {24}\) The journalist Richard Twopeny noted this difference in 1883, claiming that ‘Melbourne is quasi-metropolitan, while both Sydney and Adelaide are alike provincial in their mode of life’.\(^ {25}\) In particular, he – slightly tongue-in-cheek, one suspects – commended the ladies of Melbourne for their newly-acquired taste and efforts in emulating Parisian fashions, despite the disadvantages of their colonial location:

> And take them all-in-all, they do not dress badly; indeed, if one considers the distance from Paris, and the total want of a competent leader of fashion, they may be said to dress well, especially of late years. The highly fantastic and gorgeous costumes for which Melbourne used to be notorious are fast


disappearing. Successful diggers no longer take their wives into a shop, and ask how much colour and stuff can be put into a dress for fifty pounds.  

But he qualified his praises when he wrote that this did not mean that money could buy taste: ‘Nor when she had got a handsome dress does the Melbourne grande dame know how to wear it.’

It was not only the elite who sought the prestige of the French connection – though no doubt they could afford to pursue it more effectively. Whether that connection was real or imagined, it served as a ubiquitous marketing strategy across social classes. It was used to promote an astonishing range of products. Dressmakers and shopkeepers used this to their advantage, and a fondness for French high fashion trickled down to the department stores. In 1890 David Jones claimed that its ‘elegant millinery’ was coming from ‘the best English and French sources’. Oddly, it also advertised ‘freshly gathered’ French flowers. And if the national connection of *La Maison Parisienne* in the new Sydney Strand Arcade, purportedly ‘the only French glove house in Sydney’, was not self-evident, it was highlighted nine times in a single advertisement, with each pair of gloves on sale prefaced with the adjective ‘French’. Other dubiously ‘French’ items ranged from hair removal cream to ceramic toilet ware.

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26 Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia*, 75.
27 Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia*, 75.
28 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 August 1895, 7; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 December 1890, 1.
29 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 1895, 1.
30 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 November 1890, 1.
Food

The attraction of French culture extended from the adornment of bodies to the means of nourishing them. Restaurants had begun sprouting throughout England by the 1830s, and the emerging gastronomy practised within them was heavily influenced by French cuisine. It had become fashionable for the British elite to boast a French cook, an acquisition made easier by the arrival of French chefs following the 1789 Revolution.31 In the colonies, such prized staff were in meagre supply. But several establishments boasted French food for a range of budgets. In 1900 on Hunter Street in Melbourne, Adolphe’s Diner Parisien promised ‘a combination of French Cooking and Bohemian freedom’ – the latter facilitated, perhaps, by the inclusion of free wine with a meal. In the same year, Luca’s Town Hall Café on Swanston Street announced that its recently renovated interior came with a new genuine French chef, while a number of smaller tea salons advertised delicious French pastries for ladies out shopping.32

Undoubtedly the most notorious of all French dining establishments in Australia, in the period between 1890 and 1920, was the inimitable Paris House. Located at 172 Philip Street in Sydney, it was founded by Monsieur Desneux who also owned a charcuterie around the corner on King Street serving andouillettes and pâtés.33 This venue was taken over by another Frenchman from Lille, Gaston Liévain, together with his Belgian wife. In 1911 Paris House advertised itself as an ‘ultra-moderne’ restaurant, with private rooms and a dining balcony. It had an à la carte menu that boasted a variety of French and international specialties: venison, truffle omelette, bouillabaisse, foie gras and caviar.34 The ground floor was a popular bistro but the second floor was classier and more expensive. The third floor was a champagne lounge sponsored by Moët & Chandon.35 What is most striking about Paris House is that it acted as a fulcrum of a series of overlapping social worlds. It was the place to be. It catered for Sydney’s literary and artistic crowds, its amateur sporting teams (the Wallabies rugby team and the Amateur Sailing Club dined there), and also the local French community.36 It

32 Truth, 13 May 1900, 6; Punch, 25 October 1900, 475; Sydney Morning Herald, 17 August 1896, 8.
33 Dwyer, Flanders in Australia, 27.
34 Paris House Menu, 1904, Private Collection.
36 Sydney Morning Herald, 2 November 1910, 11; 31 August 1912, 20; 21 July 1913, 10.
welcomed incoming crews from cruise ships as well as foreign dignitaries. And it hosted annual Bastille day celebrations, either at Paris House proper or catering for a function held just down the street at St James Hall.37

Plate 1.3. Paris House Menu cover art, 1904, private collection.

The Arts and Literature

The engagement with France within Australia’s literary and artistic communities was not limited to clothes and champagne at Paris House. The attractiveness of France could at times appear faddish and, to some, stifling. One commentator in 1891 thought it was a craze to be attributed to the recent visits to Australia of famous French celebrities such as the actress Sarah Bernhardt. Her visit had ‘kindled the artistic flame in matters musical and theatrical to the highest pitch ever recorded,’ and ‘not only has greater

37 Sydney Morning Herald, 14 March 1899; Courrier Australien, 17 April 1897, 2; 24 July 1908, 2; Sydney Morning Herald, 16 January 1911, 8.
enthusiasm [for the arts] prevailed, but “high art” has been the vogue, especially *l’art Français*. But it was more than a passing fad.

Australians were avid enthusiasts of French theatre and opera. They imported troupes both from Britain and directly from Paris. In fact, productions of both French theatre and opera in Melbourne in the late nineteenth century surpassed those in German or Italian. The ‘made in Paris’ label sold and sold well. The performances of the ‘Divine Sarah’ – Sarah Bernhardt – during her Australian tour in 1891 were all given in French – with translations provided to the audience. As Charles Sowerwine and Gabrielle Wolf have noted, her resounding success in Australia ‘indicates both her own prestige and the colonials’ cultural Francophilia’. In addition, some critics claimed that French entertainment, merely because it was French, had a civilising effect on the crowds: there was supposedly less elbowing, with people finding their places in the theatre or opera in an organic flow, without resentment or jealousies of place or rank.

An enthusiasm for French art did not necessarily translate into an ardent love of France itself. When the Australian soprano Nellie Melba, who had studied in Paris and achieved international fame in Europe and America, came home, most of her repertoire was also in French. But the soprano’s enthusiasm for French culture did not automatically extend to the land and its people. That Melba did not simply embrace a passive form of Francophilia is made very clear when, at the beginning of the Great War, she flatly refused to lend her time and her name to fundraising efforts organised by the French representatives in Melbourne and sponsored by a large portion of the urban elite.

As we have previously observed, in the late nineteenth century, Australian knowledge of France was still first and foremost mediated through Great Britain. This was in large

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41 Vice-consul to MAE, 16 July 1915, MAE, 139CPCOM/20.
part due to the character of the press. The *Sydney Morning Herald* published two regular columns from an overseas correspondent, ‘Parisian Gossip’ (1890–1893) and ‘The Paris Letter’ (1891–1903). These were political and social in content but extended to a coverage of Europe as well. They were supplemented by regular columns from overseas correspondents. One of these was the renowned Australian author and journalist ‘Tasma’ (Jessie Couvreur). Growing up in the 1850s and 1860s in the small colonial town of Hobart in Tasmania – the colony that was the inspiration for her pseudonym – Tasma was largely educated by her Franco-English mother who instilled in her a passion for knowledge and literature from an early age. After a disastrous first marriage, Jessie moved to Europe where she married the Belgian politician and journalist Auguste Couvreur. This second union afforded her the opportunity to explore her literary creativity and journalistic flair. She published in journals in Europe and Australia, and gave many public lectures on Australia in Europe, and vice-versa. According to her biographer Patricia Clarke, Tasma’s columns, published from 1879 ‘from her base in a hotel in the Latin Quarter,’ gave Australian colonists a unique and rare opportunity ‘to read so consistently and in such depth about the intellectual life of Europe’. With these exceptions, however, the greater majority of newspaper articles in Australia dealing with France or the French were simply taken from British papers, tabloids or magazines. And so in the pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* one could read a piece by Arthur Conan Doyle on his ‘impressions’ of his visit to France, first published in the *London Speaker* in 1894. Doyle’s own experience was clearly mediated by the existing ideas and stereotypes prevalent in the late-nineteenth century English-speaking world. Much like the *Desultory man*, he saw the French as a histrionic people, keen on duelling; he thought them proud and honour-loving. At the same time he was enchanted by the French devotion to arts and culture, with museums and galleries opened even on Sundays, where Frenchmen of all classes would gather to educate themselves in the appreciation of ‘the Beautiful’. The Beautiful with a capital B would refer to classical works, sanctioned by the state and the establishment through

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46 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 July 1894, 6.
academies like the Salon. It was an approved, largely conservative version of the Beautiful that Doyle praised, one that brought a sense of stability to ideas about the forward march of civilisation and the order of the world. But as we shall see later, the alternative literary and artistic cultures that were emerging would eventually lead many foreign observers to also castigate the French as a decadent people, harbingers of moral and cultural decline.

British perceptions of France were in particular marked by the high reputation of modern French literature. According to British publishers’ lists, in the first decade of the twentieth century English translations of French books outnumbered those from any other language by about eight to one. Alexandre Dumas’ D’Artagnan series went through no less than five editions in just ten years; Hugo, Anatole France, Balzac, Molière, Daudet and Montaigne followed closely. In the Book Monthly in 1903, London vendors indicated that novels by Maupassant, Daudet, Balzac, George Sand as well as Zola and poetry by Musset, Baudelaire and Verlaine were widely read in the original French. Interviewed for the same issue and asked why people chose French books, one bookseller replied ‘Why French? To improve their knowledge, and because they expect something a little – a little – what could I call it – something a little chic.’ If you were well-read and well-to-do, you read French books, or at least claimed to. As one commentator remarked of the extensive coverage of French literature in the Saturday Review (often reproduced in the Argus) ‘not to know your Zola, Guy de Maupassant … is to confess you are behind the times’. Australian papers accordingly reproduced articles from the St James Gazette or Blackwood’s Magazine discussing the lives and works of the Goncourt brothers or the two Alexandres Dumas, or reprinted Henry Trollope’s brief history of the life of Molière. The interested student of foreign cultures could read more formal studies on national character such as P.G. Hamerton’s French and English (1889) and J.E.C. Bodley’s two-volume history, France (1898).

This enthusiasm for French literature extended to a wider interest in language. This was reflected at a local level in Australia by a range of initiatives such as various literary circles. Collectively, these initiatives spoke to Australians of their link with a wider

49 Argus, 8 August 1891, 13.
50 Sydney Morning Herald, 25 April 1892, 8; Argus, 25 June 1892, 13; Sydney Morning Herald, 4 January 1892, 3.
51 Campos, The View of France, 11.
educated world in which French literature and language signified a cosmopolitan identity. A well-known figure in these circles was Madame Juliette Henry. She had followed her exiled de facto husband, Dr. Paul Rastoul, to New Caledonia after the events of the Paris Commune. She was expelled from Noumea and settled in Sydney from where she helped the deported of the Commune. After Rastoul drowned while attempting to escape from the island prison on a makeshift raft, Juliette married another Communard, the artist Lucien Henry. While Lucien was making headway in the artistic community in Sydney, Juliette Henry gave French lessons from their flat in Victoria Street in the suburb of Potts Point. She also held a regular literary salon, the Cercle littéraire français (1893-1898). The meetings of the Cercle involved musical performances by local and visiting French or francophone artists, and literary discussions, either at her home or in the rooms of the YMCA near central station.

During her memorial service at Waverley Cemetery in 1898, she was praised for being the embodiment of ‘the French spirit’, the ideal of the femme savante, an alert and intelligent woman who believed that her sex ought to play an important role in civic society through becoming the ‘mistress of the home’. These eulogies reflected particular ideas about French femininity which became important in discussions in Australia about the place of women in society, as we will see later.

Chief among the cultural initiatives promoting French language and literature was the Alliance Française. Founded in 1883 in Paris, it was officially recognised by the French government as promoting the public interest of France two years later. With subsidies from Paris, it quickly became a vector for a form of secular cultural imperialism whose avowed aim was to promote French culture and language, particularly in locations where the formal French empire had no hold. In Sydney, the French Consul General George Biard d’Aunet opened a library of the Alliance ‘for the encouragement of the study of the French language and literature’ in March 1896. According to Ivan Barko, it is possible that Biard d’Aunet set up a library before an Alliance proper in order not to

54 Sydney Morning Herald, 2 May 1894, 6; Sydney Morning Herald, 5 May 1894, 10; Sydney Morning Herald, 22 February 1897, 3; Sydney Morning Herald, 8 April 1897, 6.
55 Sydney Morning Herald, 7 November 1898, 3.
57 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 February 1896, 11.
compete with Juliette Henry’s *Cercle Littéraire*. The library was turned into a fully fledged *Alliance Française* one year after Juliette’s death in 1899. The library was open both to subscribers (for one guinea per annum) and to the general public (for a 3d deposit per volume for two weeks). You could also become a member for life for five guineas. Initially the library comprised about 500-600 books such as novels, dramas, poetry and history. It also offered some French newspapers. Within the first year the number of books grew quickly to 1,000 through a combination of private donations and contributions from the headquarters of the *Alliance* in Paris. It had accumulated 70 subscribers and three life members by December. Two years later, in 1898, while promoting the work of the lending library and the *Alliance*, the consul told the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the library counted more than 1300 volumes, with more on the way, and that subscribers could find among its collection the classics: Racine, Voltaire, the romantics like Hugo ‘and even the realistic writings of Emile Zola’.

The growth of the library in these early years is impressive, but one can wonder how much of an impact it had beyond the confines of the French expatriate community. In the first two years of its existence it lent 3,164 books, but 2,140 of those were to French members. Some works were mailed to the country, and a sub-branch of the library was opened in Brisbane with 60 subscribers. In Victoria, the *Alliance Française* (founded in 1890) offered 2,000 volumes in its own library, as well as literary lectures and soirées. It too, however, was at first limited to a narrow group of people, but for reasons we will explore further in chapter six. An opinion piece in the *Argus* in 1908 complained about the difficulty of finding French books in Melbourne: ‘it is very difficult to get French books either new or second-hand, in Melbourne, and when you order a book from France by the time it arrives here you have ceased to want it’, apparently unaware of what the *Alliance* had had to offer for close to two decades.

In many ways, Australians were more likely to learn about France through British and American authors such as Matthew Arnold, Henry James, William Thackeray and

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59 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 February 1896, 11.
60 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 December 1896, 6.
61 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 July 1898, 7.
63 *Argus*, 9 May 1908, 16.
George Moore. These writers perpetuated existing ideas and stereotypes about the French that found their basis in the longer history of British travels to France over the centuries. Christopher Campos notes in his *The View of France*, that George Moore’s *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888), in particular, had more influence on English perceptions of France than ‘all the works of Flaubert and Zola’. Moore’s *Confessions* portrayed for the first time, to English-speaking audiences, the life of Bohemian Paris in the 1870s and 1880s and the early impressionist art scene. The idea of *la vie de bohème*, first made popular in 1851 in the stories of Henri Murger and further popularised in George du Maurier’s *Trilby* (1894), held out the promise of an alternative world of café-concerts, absinthe, poetry and licentious encounters with *grisettes* away from the restraints of the Victorian moral order. None of the main characters in *Trilby* were in fact French; Bohemia was made in France but for a foreign audience.

Australian bohemianism has been well documented by historians over the years. It is often conceived to have begun with the arrival of Marcus Clarke in Melbourne in 1863. For Tony Moore, ‘the late nineteenth century was a golden age’ for Australian Bohemians. It stimulated ‘art, journalism and nascent national visions’. But, as Peter Kirkpatrick has also explained, if ‘a certain Francophilia had become part of the costume’, the pub-going, all-male environment of Australian *bohème* leaned more towards British practices and harked back to British literary tradition as well. In Australian pubs du Maurier brushed shoulders with Shakespeare.

The Francophilia of Australian Bohemians was in many ways affected. It was a ‘revolution in style, not substance’ that served, for a time, as a vehicle to imagine an

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alternative to an oppressive Victorian moral and artistic order. No one took this affected Francophilia as far as J. F. Archibald, the co-founder and editor of the nationalist journal *The Bulletin*. As he changed his first names from John Feltham to Jules François, Archibald’s self-reinvention as a half French, half Jew (through his mother) – complete with a Parisian goatee – pushed the connection further than anyone else. Few Sydney-siders today, as they walk past the Archibald fountain in Hyde Park, stop to read the plaque dedicating it to Franco-Australian friendship. Money for the fountain was bequeathed by Jules François in his will, with specific instructions that the commission must go to a French artist.

Archibald is often singled out for rewriting his family history to create an invented past, linking him to an imagined world of French sophistication and cosmopolitanism. Yet he was far from the only individual to indulge this fantasy. Fred Broomfield, sub-editor of the *Bulletin*, himself donned a Cavalier hat, ‘a peaked beard and an upbrushed [sic] moustache’, a get-up that Norman Lindsay labelled a ‘histrionic make-up’ with a comical effect just one step removed from theatre pantomime.

Beyond their personal appearance, the colonial bohemians of the 1880s liked to wine and dine (even if they often drank beer) in French cafés such as the Maison Dorée in Melbourne or the Café Français and Paris House in Sydney. For Archibald, in particular, the connection was important because it translated into social gain, providing a Warrnambool policeman’s son with the cultural and symbolic capital to transform himself into a dandy. But the French connection went further than bohemia and endured even when for many, by the 1920s, the down-market, anti-bourgeois garb looked out of fashion.

Indeed, in its early days, the *Bulletin* and its contributors had prided themselves on their radicalism. It was, at times, republican, secessionist, socialist, revolutionary. The attraction of France for many of the writers associated with the journal was that it seemed to represent many of these things. By the mid-1890s, as Sylvia Lawson has


73 Norman Lindsay, *Bohemians of the Bulletin* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965), 149.

74 White, *Inventing Australia*, 96.

75 Moore, *Dancing With Empty Pockets*, 50.
shown, that radicalism had started wavering, in favour of pragmatism and a more established liberalism. But the idea of France was not abandoned. Paris House (the cheaper, downstairs part) remained a favoured haunt of the Sydney literati into the 1920s when Christopher Brennan presided over a weekly luncheon club on Fridays called *Les Compliqués*, where ‘it was agreed or decreed that the conversation … should be in French’. This made for some disparity in the level of loquacity of the attendees. It was claimed that Brennan himself often came up with ‘a phrase that belonged to the language of the seventeenth century’. But the Friday rendezvous speak of the enduring power of that French connection beyond bohemia.

**Paris from the antipodes**

In the eyes of foreigners Paris has always tended to signify France. The images of the café concert and of boulevard-loving, absinthe-sipping dandies were so prevalent before the war that an English-raised Frenchwoman, Clair de Prats, shouted a true *cri de coeur* in 1912 by publishing a book entirely dedicated to debunking this narrow view of her home country:

> The average Englishman’s impression of France is based upon Paris, or rather, upon that portion of Paris known as Montmartre and rejoining in the Moulin Rouge and entertainments of a similar character. He imagines Frenchmen to be immersed in a continual round of hilarious and improper gaiety, forgetting that Paris is by no means typical of France, and Montmartre by no means typical of Paris.

She would have rolled her eyes and shrugged her shoulders at Australian Bohemians. ‘Paris is mostly cafés’, wrote Norman Lindsay in 1912 – although he had been in the French capital mere hours. For H. M Green, the ‘atmosphere’ in Paris came from many places, ‘the small twinkling eyes of the dirty, old, bottle-nosed cab-drivers’ and

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80 *The Lone Hand*, 1 July 1912, 185-193.
the ‘way the women carry themselves’, but above all from ‘the light-hearted drift and chatter about the cafés’.\textsuperscript{81} Both wanted to see more cafés, and the lifestyle that came with them, in Sydney; ‘here is what Australia needs, an institution made especially for us’. Green enjoined his readers to imagine how delightful it would be to watch the ‘burning ferryboats streak gold with moving fires’ on a warm summer evening over a coffee drunk ‘from a comfortable little marble table’. ‘All the main arms of the harbour should have Continental cafés overlooking them; from Manly, into the city itself; though the Domain, out even to South Head’. At least their vision for a future caffèinated Australia has largely come true, although ‘take-aways’ probably defeat the point they had in mind. Indeed, beyond gentle hedonism, Green believed that cafés were necessary to Australia, not only because they were representative of a culture he admired, but because of their civilising effect. He saw them as capable of calming excesses and passions.\textsuperscript{82}

By the time Lindsay and Green reached Paris in the early twentieth century, the city had gone through multiple architectural and urban planning innovations. Undoubtedly the most significant of these took place during the reign of Napoleon III, and had a deep impact on the way the rest of the world saw Paris as a modern city. With his prefect, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, the self-proclaimed Emperor oversaw the destruction of parts of the insalubrious old Paris to make room for the now well-known radial boulevards and symmetrical avenues. The ‘chalk-coloured facades’, described by Henry James as decorating ‘with their pompous sameness the broad avenues,’ were built with Napoleon’s new aristocracy and bourgeoisie in mind. They conveniently displaced the lower classes to the edges of the city.\textsuperscript{83} Despite this the socialist Christina Stead found them ‘so light, so bright, so chic and so charming’.\textsuperscript{84} Though not to the taste of all, Haussmann’s buildings quickly became a ‘symbol of architectural and planning prowess’, and, along with similar modern improvements to the German cities of Cologne and Berlin, they provided inspiration for comparable colonial plans for the widening and restructuring of Sydney’s own William Street in the decades preceding the Great War. The plans were never fully realised because of the depression that hit New South Wales in the 1890s, and William Street fell into architectural limbo – where

\textsuperscript{81} The Lone Hand, 1 May 1909, 12.
\textsuperscript{82} The Lone Hand, 1 May 1909, 16.
it has stayed arguably ever since. Only a few hundred meters away from where the Archibald fountain still stands, however, it is not difficult to imagine how the large wide street was thought to be a perfect prospect for a bourgeois promenade dotted with cafes and terraces, adorned with local sandstone mouldings.\footnote{Max Kelly, \textit{Faces of the Street: William Street, Sydney 1916} (Paddington, N.S.W: Doak Press, 1982) 3; Max Kelly, ed., \textit{Nineteenth-Century Sydney: Essays in Urban History} (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1978); Sowerwine and Wolf, ‘Echoes of Paris in the Antipodes’, 83.}

The boulevards of ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ were similarly compared to those of Paris. Collins Street was where people went to be seen ‘Doing the Block’, as a ritual social emulation of Parisian flâneurs.\footnote{Graeme Davison, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne} (Melbourne: Melbourne University press, 1988), 230.} When an international competition to design Australia’s new capital city of Canberra was held in 1912, the third prize went to the Parisian planner Hubert Donat Alfred Agache.\footnote{John William Reps, \textit{Canberra 1912: Plans and Planners of the Australian Capital Competition} (Carlton South, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 110–113.} The judges found Agache’s eighteen drawings to be ‘exceptionally attractive’, according to John W. Reps. But they did not think his idea of dividing the city into specialised quarters as practical as the architect believed. Still, how French could have Canberra looked; in the description of his plans, Agache enjoined the judges to imagine ‘in the centre of the \textit{place} the Court of Justice, with its squat gates, and facing this a Triumphal Arch inscribed in an Exhedra’ (Figures 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6).\footnote{Quoted in John William Reps, \textit{Canberra 1912}, 110–111; copy of the original plans and descriptions in French can be found in MAE, 428PO/1/48.} Yet, perhaps significantly, his Haussmann-inspired proposal did not win. It seems that for an Anglo-Saxon country, young as it was then, imitation of Parisian architecture, as much as of French culture, could not touch its founding stones. In the end the winning designs were a tribute to the English Garden City movement, the proposal of an American.\footnote{On the international competition see particularly Reps, \textit{Canberra 1912}; on the history of Canberra see Nicholas Brown, \textit{A History of Canberra} (Cambridge University Press, 2014).}
Plate 1.5. ‘Detail Concordia Place’, NAA: A710, 7.
Napoleon III had wanted his Empire to be built under the dual gods of etiquette and taste, and more British visitors flocked to Paris than ever before during his reign. Paris and its lifestyle were more affordable than London, and the reconstituted aristocracy of the Second Empire was less finicky about the pedigree of its visitors than that of the Restoration. This contributed to the conjoined images of pleasure and modernity that came to represent the city of light which the Third Republic actively cultivated. Over time it also became more closely associated with the advent of modern technology. The Eiffel Tower would become its most famous symbol, built for the centenary celebrations of the Revolution but never taken down. The widespread enthusiasm for, and consumption of, modernity in Australia thus helped to ensure that France was regularly to be found in the electric spotlight as an exporter of technologies as well as of that quintessential modern invention - the celebrity or ‘star’. The world-renowned French pilot Maurice Guillaux completed the first Melbourne to Sydney mail flight in 1914, inspiring a number of Australians to become pilots themselves, including a then

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seventeen year old Charles Kingsford-Smith.92 When the famous female cyclist Madame Serlopette toured Australia, she helped cement the idea that France was at the forefront of modernity. In the Sydney Cricket Ground on June 25 1898 she donned her racing skirts to show the assembled crowd the 26 miles per hour speed that her engines could reach.93 The Sydney Morning Herald saw the performance as proof that ‘Paris is undoubtedly the home of the motor-cycle’.94

France was not just a symbol of modernity. It also carried an aura of intellect and culture that the capital city, in particular, had developed over the centuries. Although other European centres such Vienna and Berlin could at times rival Paris, and were becoming increasingly competitive in the domains of science and the arts, the French capital had a history of prestige going back to the middle ages. What is more, the French propensity for centralisation meant that Paris hosted most of what Christophe Charle calls the ‘symbolic resources’ of its nation: libraries, museums, salons and galleries. This meant that, until early in the twentieth century, more students, scholars and artists favoured Paris over other French cities.95 Painters, in particular, seeking intellectual and artistic inspiration, flocked to Paris, not only to bathe in the reputation of the capital but to learn the radical innovations of the time - impressionism, symbolism and, more generally, of modernism. Between 1872 and 1899 nearly one thousand Americans exhibited at the Salon. This led outraged French students at the Beaux-Arts to circulate a protest pamphlet in 1886.96

Although Australians were fewer than Americans among the artistic pilgrims of the age, many who were to become prominent names upon their return spent time in Paris if they could. In 1887 John Longstaff studied at the atelier of Fernand Cormon, a ‘leading French historial painter’. Many followed in his footsteps a few years later. Among them were George Bell, James Scott, James Quinn, Harold Power and George Lambert, who all spent a few years studying the French academic style in the 1890s and 1900s at the Académie Julian, the Ecole des Beaux Arts, the Académie Colarossi or the Académie

93 Sydney Morning Herald, 25 June 1898, 12.
94 Sydney Morning Herald, 27 June 1898, 6.
95 Charle, Paris Fin de Siècle, 21–48.
96 Charle, Paris Fin de Siècle, 41.
Délécluze. Emmanuel Phillips Fox was the first Australian artist to be elevated to the rank of Sociétaire of the Salon des Beaux Arts. The French ‘plein air’ movement was important in the development of the Australian Heidelberg school of painters, who adapted its techniques to convey the ‘feelings’ of Australian urban and rural life to purposefully contribute to the emergence of a national art.

Although not everyone could study with the great masters or at prestigious institutions, many still sought to spend time in Paris. But the reality of daily life was often precarious for aspiring artists in the city of light, a far step away from the glamour of bohemian novels. In 1908, after returning from three years in Paris, the Australian artist Alice Foy was exasperated: ‘Everyone … expects me to have become Parisianised in some mysterious way, to have brought back “an accent,” a lot of Paris hats and gowns, and reams of experience of the “lovely time” I had,’ she asserted. Instead she told of the plainness of the garb worn by students such as herself, of the ‘poisonous air’ of Paris and the studios, and she set out to debunk the romanticized ideas people had of life of an artist in Paris:

I lived, as most students do, in a little flat in the Student’s Quarter, not the old Latin Quarter, which is not much inhabited by art students now, but in the Montparnasse Quarter, because so many of Uncle Sam’s sons and daughters are in occupation of it. Most of the students do their own housekeeping and cooking, although the restaurants are requisitioned largely; some of them being wholly given over to the students. When not at classes the students are generally to be seen in the picture galleries studying the masterpieces of the marvellous ancients and moderns. Besides the fixtures, there are always other picture-shows of different artists to be visited, some good, some poor, and some worse than anything ever known in Sydney, but all instructive and interesting. By way of extra diversion the students foregather on Sunday nights at the Trinity Club, a


98 Argus, 17 June 1911, 7.

genial little institution established by an American for all English-speaking art students. Here a religious service is held in the classroom every Sunday evening in the midst of easels, palettes, and painting paraphernalia: it was always a very short service, hustled through, I’m afraid, to give way to a social programme on Sunday nights at the trinity Club, music etc., washed down with hot chocolate and coffee.

She concluded: ‘not a Du Maurier-like notion of artistic diversion’. She deplored the popular view that Australia had nothing to offer young artists. Tuitions there were as affordable as anywhere else. What could not be found in Australia, in her view, was the ‘art atmosphere – the atmosphere of strenuous work and of association with the master minds of the old art world – that the Australian artist misses, unconsciously, of course, until one has lived in the art colony of Paris amongst teachers, students, and artists, who think and live art to the exclusion of all else’. Another artist, Mrs. E. Paul, had made almost identical remarks four years earlier, in an interview given to the Sydney Morning Herald. In that interview she praised France over London. While material conditions were better in London, she said, the method was still traditional ‘rote and rule’. In France, in contrast, individuality was encouraged: ‘there you live in an atmosphere of art: it permeates everything, while in London the true artistic element is sadly lacking’.

This enthusiasm for France and French culture was not without its opponents. As inspiring as it could be, French art remained French and neither British nor Australian. If some saw the arts as a field that needed to grow in importance in Australia, this was part of a nation-building effort, so that Australia could claim the same degree of civilisation as France rather than mimic its form. In 1891 one commentator warned that the exodus of Australian artists to France, and the French craze itself, was going to hamper the development of a unique Australian art school, not only because artists had left, but because they would become so imbued with French techniques that they would delay the organic growth of Australian art. This was a loss to be lamented as the nation came into its own, free from foreign influences. Besides, France was not seen purely as a paragon of civilised manners and arts to imitate. To many it represented a cautionary tale of the mal du siècle, of decadence.

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100 Sydney Morning Herald, 15 January 1908, 5.
101 Sydney Morning Herald, 15 January 1908, 5.
102 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 October 1904, 3.
103 Argus, 28 November 1891, 13.
Decadence and race patriotism

Modernity had a flipside. Paris had come to symbolize high art, culture and the modern world, but it was also a site of revolutions, radicalism and sexual debauchery. Visitors to France in the late-nineteenth century could not have left unaware of the turbulent events or the recent past, events that had shaken the French nation to the core. The Commune, and the civil war that followed the Franco-Prussian conflict, had left a legacy of burnt architectural ruins in many parts of the city. Until 1900 the last remaining walls of the Palais d’Orsay stood as skeletal mementoes of the events. The physical decay of the city represented an outward manifestation of inner dissolution. For many, the Prussian defeat of France marked the beginning of a descent into the abyss. Hugo called it ‘l’année terrible’ and, for Zola in 1892, it was ‘la débacle’. The fall of the Empire, the German invasion and the fratricidal disaster that followed came with an economic depression that lasted until 1896. The national birth rate was stagnant, the army defeated. France was seen as emasculated. The expression ‘fin de siècle’ came to signify not only the end of the century, but a perceived decay in moral values accompanying the profound economic, political and social mutations which followed the fall of the Empire. The French asked themselves if they had indeed fallen into decadence, if it was the end of them, and the rest of the world asked the same question. The perception of decadence was compounded by three international crises that painted the French in a negative light in the British press: the stand-off at Fashoda (1898), the French opposition to the Boer War, and the Dreyfus affair (1895-1906), which foreshadowed the official and much publicised separation of church and state in 1905.

It was a malaise that some thought could be seen in the excesses of modern French literature. An article published in the Sydney Morning Herald reproduced a study from the British Review on the ‘unreality of realism’ which compared Zola to Thackeray. While it conceded that Thackeray eluded too much for the sake of pleasantness, it asserted that the inordinate, obsessive treatment of the more gloomy aspects of human life by Zola and other realists verged on the pathological. It was symptomatic, they thought, of a self-obsessed, degenerate world. The Melbourne Argus republished an

104 Charle, Paris Fin de Siècle, 11.
106 Rioux, La France de 1900, 27.
107 Horace Marion, Il faut sauver la France: la décadence, ses causes, remèdes et moyens (Paris: J. Jeannin Trévoux, 1910); Argus, 9 August 1892, 6; Sydney Morning Herald, 26 August 1908, 8.
108 Sydney Morning Herald, 18 March 1897, 3.
article from the *British Quarterly Review* about the life of Guy de Maupassant, lingering on his suicide attempt and his death from complications of syphilis. Although it stressed that it did not want to imply that the literature of a country reflected its moral standing, it nonetheless drew strong parallels between the writers themselves and the French in general: ‘in Maupassant and his like we find evidence that the upper and middle classes of the French have fallen into an unhealthy condition’. The article condemned ‘the tribe of Zolas, Renans, Bourgets, Daudets, and Maupassants’ as ‘among the most dangerous enemies that France has nourished in her bosom’. Their perceived immorality and quest for earthly decadent pleasures hastened their deaths and brought the French closer to the abyss. Paris itself was to blame for it: ‘The sensual unbelief of the Parisian world must answer for the mental disease to which Maupassant succumbed’.109

One of the reasons for the lack of French books in Victoria, or Australia in general, in the later years of the 1900s was the gradual institution of a rigorous and complex system of censorship. The beginning of what John Williams has called Australia’s ‘quarantined culture’ started in the 1880s with the development of a complex colonial censorship network encompassing an increasing number of government departments and, in time, extending to the whole of the Commonwealth.110 With a level of general literacy never reached before, many in high places believed in the need to tighten control on what the masses could get their hands and eyes on amidst fears of moral corruption and degeneracy. Following the prosecution in 1888 of Henry Vizetelly, a British publisher of English translations of the works of Zola and Balzac, Australian authorities led similar charges against local booksellers and emerging publishers throughout the following decades. Alfred Deakin, himself very fond of French literature, went on a three-year moral crusade at the time when he was Victorian Chief Secretary, trying to find translations of Zola’s most offensive works: *Nana, Pot-Bouille* and *La Terre* published by Vizetelly. Deakin’s search for existing copies led him to a dead end, but he ensured that in the future border controls would become air-tight. In 1889 the *Victorian Customs Act* stopped a shipment of Vizetelly’s translations, which

109 *Argus*, 9 August 1892, 6.
were destroyed, and the Victorian control system was extended to the Commonwealth in 1901.\footnote{Heath, ‘Literary Censorship, Imperialism and the White Australia Policy’, 72–74; Frank Bongiorno, \textit{The Sex Lives of Australians: A History} (Collingwood, Vic: Black Inc, 2012), 81–87.}

The crusade led by Deakin and others failed to suppress public interest in French literature, perhaps unsurprisingly, but it did hinder its availability to a certain extent. In 1921 A. R. Chisolm, Professor of French at the University of Melbourne, had ordered a collection of works by Zola for the library. When he could not find them, the librarian pointed him to a dark, out of the way compartment, explaining ‘But we simply couldn’t put Zola on the open shelves!’\footnote{Chisholm, \textit{Men Were My Milestones}, 106.}

The second most widely advertised range of French items, after fashion, in the Australian press speaks of that other long-lasting image associated with the French: sex. The range of thinly disguised manhood tonics or female contraceptives promoted with French associations suggests that the French were not seen as simply more promiscuous, but truly as sexual virtuosos if not downright perverts. In the pages of \textit{Truth} in 1895, Professor Robert Herman, a ‘French specialist’, of Collins Place paid for two advertising spaces one next to the other: the first he used to promote a cure for ‘lost manhood’. The second advertised an item prudently labelled ‘woman’s salvation’. This, it was claimed, would put the ‘wife’s welfare within her own control’. Both items were to be mailed in a sealed envelope. On the same page, Madame Joubert offered a French ‘remedy’ to restore female regularity, while another specialist proposed to cure the same ailment with ‘Parisian female powders’ – both abortifacients. Monsieur Leon sold ‘Superior Elastic French Goods’ for 5s per dozen.\footnote{\textit{Truth}, 17 November 1895, 8.} ‘French Goods’, whether male or female contraceptives, fetched a higher price than their British or Australian counterparts, about twice as much.\footnote{Bongiorno, \textit{The Sex Lives of Australians}, 70–73.} And no doubt theatre-goers also enjoyed French plays because they tended to be more daring, not to say salacious.\footnote{Sowerwine and Wolf, ‘Echoes of Paris in the Antipodes’, 90–91.}

The period association of the French with an open sexuality was expressed clearly by the writers of the \textit{Lone Hand}. ‘The men look always as if they were thinking of the women, the women as if they carried the men in the corners of their eyes and all their thoughts’, wrote Green. That ‘Parisian morals’ were decidedly inferior to Anglo-Saxon morals was not, for these men, in question, but Green suggested that allowance should
be made for the fact that the French were, in fact, French, and not English. The ‘central
god’ of the British (Green interchangeably talks of the English and the Australians) was
money, while that of the French was sex. In turn, sex ‘tinges all the rest, the whole tone
and atmosphere of the national mind’. Quickly, as if to signal his Edwardian modernity,
he noted that people seemed happier and livelier in France.\footnote{Lone Hand, 1 May 1909, 12-13.}

The French and femininity

France was seen as a feminine country, and the French an effeminate people. The idea
that the French were feminine had been commonplace in British thought since the
eighteenth century. It was in part a satirical reaction directed against the French
themselves and against the ‘rampant Francophilia’ in England in the eighteenth century,
particularly among the elite, who not only imported French fashions and luxury goods,
such as \textit{articles de Paris}, but also made an important number of linguistic borrowings,
or ‘frenchisms’, as Linda Colley calls them.\footnote{Colley, \textit{Britons}, 88, 90.} The export of primarily luxury and
fashion items, and the perceived emasculation of the French military in the defeat of
1871, all further reinforced these ideas about French effeminacy. For Arthur Conan
Doyle, the fact that the French did not share the same love of sports and the outdoors as
the English was also a significant sign of their deficiency of masculinity.\footnote{Sydney Morning Herald, 11 July 1894, 6.} In the early
twentieth century, Clair de Pratz thought French culture itself was archetypally
feminine:

If England is the masculine country of the world, France is essentially the
feminine country, for the principal qualities of the French are the characteristics
which distinguish women. They have charming and graceful manners, though
they lack the strong will and indomitable energy which is the distinguishing trait
of the Anglo-Saxon races. Like women, too, they are inclined to use most of
their strength to preserve and to harbour up what they already possess, rather
than to set out upon fresh and hazardous enterprises. Even their very remarkable
habits of frugality are characteristically feminine. In all the industrial arts the
essential quality of their taste and artistic genius is feminine too, inasmuch as
they prefer delicacy and perfection of execution to strong, rough-hewn, or
merely suggestive work. Indeed, the finish which particularizes the work of the
French in all branches of arts and crafts – even in such minor arts as cooking and
needlework – is evinced by a nicety and preciseness which is more feminine
than masculine in its attention to detail. Their adaptability and power of
assimilation again are entirely feminine attributes, as are also their lack of emotional discipline and their too often excessive exuberance.  

Michèle Cohen has shown that the vogue for French culture, language and objects created anxiety about their impact on British masculinity, and on the British nation, particularly in the eighteenth century. This is best exemplified in the figure of the fop, at once an avid lover of women and an effeminate man who, through his Frenchified manner of dress destabilised and blurred established British sexual and gender boundaries.

But for H. M. Green, the perceived femininity of the French was not a threat. Like many other middle-class intellectuals in the late nineteenth century, such as Alfred Deakin, he believed that men and women both possessed male and female qualities. So while British men saw women as ‘an inevitable expense’ or as ‘necessary to complete’ oneself, he wrote, the femininity of the French, of French men at least, suggested that they were more complete individuals. Similarly, the oozing sensuality of Parisians did not offend him, on the contrary. The men might have always ‘looked as if they were thinking of the women’ and ‘the women as if they carried the men in the corners of their eyes and all their thoughts’, but to an Edwardian intellectual revolting against the prudishness of the Victorian period, such a forward approach to sensuality and the relation between the sexes showed that the French were more advanced than Anglo-Saxons.

Norman Lindsay concurred with Green’s views of Parisian mores. He saw in the free love and sensuous pleasures of the French capital echoes of ‘the Golden Age of innocence’. There was a purity in the honesty of the physical displays he saw around him that seemed to unravel the Puritan order he grew up with: ‘Half the importance that the British give to what they call vice is due to the secrecy with which they practise it. And a lack of respect for that vice is what constitutes the essential of the Parisian mind’. Although he could have done with fewer passion-consumed male lovers heavily burying their heads in their beloved’s free-flowing hair at the supper table, Lindsay struggled with a different episode which left him somewhat discomfited. He recounted the story of a couple walking into a café. The man ordered a drink for his female companion and started reading a newspaper. ‘Then arrives another lady, very tall, very dark, very

119 Clair de Pratz, France from within (London; New York; Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 8–9.  
120 Cohen, Fashioning Masculinity, 38; Lone Hand, 1 May 1909, 12–13.  
handsome, very fierce, who confronts the pair with a furious exclamation’. Lindsay’s first thought was that the man had been caught cheating by his wife, but immediately the ladies embraced each other with ‘quite an extravagant display of affection’. When the man walked out with a third woman, and the first two sat and drank a liqueur together in merry conversation, Lindsay was left (relatively) speechless: ‘you are left to puzzle it all out over a cup of coffee to the best of your ability’. First he put it down to the simplicity and *bon enfant* nature of Parisian mores: ‘They are prettily affectionate to one another, these Parisiennes. It is another effect of that age of innocence that I have remarked on before’. But he then noted that all-female sociability was fairly common, and that there were ‘more female couples dancing together than couples of assorted sex’ at several Parisian balls; Lindsay then put the practice down to a female desire to charm ‘the male observer’. Still, his need for explaining the episode away both as an inoffensive, almost child-like affection and at the same time as part of a heterosexual seduction game is perhaps revealing of the writer’s discomfort faced with the possibility of the obsolescence of ‘the male observer’ (Plate 1.6).

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\[122\] *Lone Hand*, 1 July 1912, 190–191.
Plate 1.7. Norman Lindsay, ‘The Olympia Café’, in *Lone Hand*, 1 July 1912, no page number.
A concern with sexuality indicates a broader questioning about gender roles in France and what they revealed about the nation itself. Indeed, one commentator believed that the character of a nation was ‘infallibly indicated by its distinctive ideal of women’. Particularly, concerns about the so-called New Woman in Australia and the Western world and its seeming importance over questions about national decline or race suicide meant people turned to comparative examination in order to make sense of new social developments. The New Woman was coming, but no one knew what this meant.

A recurring image of the French woman in the British and Australian press was that of the *Salonnière*. Whether of the Old Regime or under the Third Republic, she symbolized, in the English eye, behind the drawn curtains of her living room, the self-realised ‘bright consummate flower’ of the ‘French spirit’, representing wit and grace. The *Salonnières*, from Madame de Rambouillet to Juliette Adam (via Juliette Henry in Sydney), were seen to exercise an inordinate amount of influence on the men and the politics of their time. In Maupassant’s 1885 novel *Bel Ami*, the greedy and power-hungry George Duroy could only move socially upward into the literary and journalistic circles of Paris through the women in his life. But the influence that some, rare, often high-born, French women held was only deployed under the reserve of their seeming demure and traditional femininity. It by no means disrupted the established gender order, and was in direct opposition to the lack of freedom and power of the rest of their sex.

An article in *The Standard* published by the *Argus* in 1902 took stock of the situation of the New Woman in France, stating that many now study medicine, are admitted at the bar, and ‘in sufficiently large numbers, study at the academy of fine arts’. And in the preceding decade the Australian press emulated its British counterpart in duly reporting on the first woman to become a lawyer or a doctor in France. Yet, at the turn of the century, women made up an insignificant portion of law students in French faculties (0.09 per cent), and only around 10 and 9 per cent in medicine and science respectively, and almost half of those students were foreigners; by 1914 only eight women belonged

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123 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 1901, 8.
126 *Argus*, 15 February 1902, 6.
127 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 January 1898, 6; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 January 1901, 8.
to the bar. Although the Third Republic saw the creation of a few organisations promoting women’s rights, nothing in France can be compared to the English suffragette movement. As Robert Gildea puts it, ‘the peculiar nature of French feminism was its attempt to put forward the demand for civil and political rights in a language that did not depart from the cult of motherhood, the family and indeed of femininity, and femininity did not sit well with physical force’. The dominant image of French womanhood in France itself was of the wife and mother. Interviewed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the question of ‘the “New Woman”, or ‘as they call it, the “feminist”’, the French-Consul General at Sydney contentedly painted a traditional image of the French woman as that of a subdued, apolitical, God-fearing creature, who found her happiness, equipped with a decent dowry, in a good, rational marriage that would secure her position and who would be submissive to her husband. Many of these ideas had also been fixed in the British imagination for a couple of centuries. Within that imagination, each French woman, whether she was a *salonnière, a femme du monde* or a country girl, a *grande dame* or a *grisette*, knew instantly, innately, how to dress, and had a knack for matching forms, styles and colours. For Green all this was true. He thought Parisian women so feminine, in fact, that they appeared almost as a different human species capable of communicating in a second, silent language made of ‘symbolistic gesture and movement’.

The images of the French woman therefore carried some apparent contradictions. They could be seen as embodying the destabilising forces of the modern world, further encroaching on the perceived overhaul of established gender norms, or they could on the contrary represent an element of stability and traditional domestic femininity. So at the same time that Lindsay, Green and others went to Paris and were delighted by the perceived salacity of French mores, well-off and not so well-off young British and Australian girls were often sent to finishing schools in France, as we shall see in chapter five, to acquire the veneer of refinement attached to French culture, to learn the language, to play the piano and hone the art of conversation. By sending a young woman to France her family reminded her of her place in the established social and gender order; she was also being reminded not to step out of bounds, and to stay within

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129 Gildea, *Children of the Revolution*, 381.
131 *Lone Hand*, 1 May 1909, 14.
the confines dictated by a discourse of femininity in which France played a dual and contradictory role.

A new type

The question of the place of woman in society speaks of a larger concern with procreation and what the emerging Australian type was going to be. Critics or reformers in the nineteenth century often berated Britain and Anglo-Saxon cultures, such as Australia, for being too materialistic. Australia had, it was thought, for too long been focused on material wealth, ‘business and money making,’ and should actively turn its efforts and resources towards building the same love of art and science as was found in France.\textsuperscript{132} Here we find the idea that civilisation did not mean, or should not mean, simply material wealth and progress (steamships, railroad, canals, ‘business and money making’) but also the idea of enlightenment, of culture, of cultivation, of the moral and intellectual betterment of mankind. That Australians looked to France as well as England as prescriptive and normative models in matters of cultivation (on how to be or become civilised) suggests a space of possibility where Australia and Australians were imagining themselves as a cosmopolitan nation-in-the-making.\textsuperscript{133} Unsurprisingly perhaps, the idea that France had demonstrated that it held both definitions of civilisation while England – the ‘nation of shopkeepers’ – was too preoccupied with a narrow materialist understanding of civilisation came from a Frenchman – the historian and philosopher Guillaume de Guizot. It was an idea, however, that had been formidably influential in the thinking of his British contemporaries such as John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold, even though admiration was tempered by the belief that the French did seem to lack morality, particularly after the Franco-Prussian defeat.\textsuperscript{134}

In the late nineteenth century, what Australia was, or could be, was a point of contention. Politically speaking, Australia only came into existence as a nation at the time of Federation on 1 January 1901. The conditions necessary to make it ‘imaginable’

\textsuperscript{132} Sydney Morning Herald, 15 July 1912, 3.
\textsuperscript{133} Georgios Varouxakis, \textit{Victorian Political Thought on France and the French} (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 32–33.
can be seen emerging in preceding decades. Until the Act of Federation, however, nothing was certain, and the different colonies were developing distinct identities. The Australian nation was not an inevitable reality waiting to come into being, so defining the meaning of being Australian, in this context, was far from easy. Yet, as a result of discussions about the nation and Federation, as Richard White tells us, ‘some sense of national identity’ started to be articulated more clearly at the turn of the century. Underpinning those discussions was the idea of national types, or national races, not an entirely new notion but one which was now being influenced increasingly by a racialised discourse about difference. Discussions about France and its people therefore did not occur simply as a rhetorical tool, or just as the result of the long entangled history of France and Great Britain. Rather, they took place first because of a belief in the usefulness of comparative studies of national character, cultures or races for the betterment of one’s own national character or culture or race. Secondly, and importantly for what follows, they also occurred because of a belief in the complementarity of the mixing of different groups.

Naturally, the majority of Australians still looked to the ‘Mother Country’ and the idea of Britishness as a giver of identity and definer of social norms. Some also looked to other Anglo-Saxon countries such as the United States, sometimes as a political model. Both were connections underpinned by pre-war beliefs about the racial filiation of the British, Americans and Australians with Germanic Teutonic tribes. For all his avowed Francophilia, Matthew Arnold made no secret that he believed the Teutonic race still superior in many respects, for instance in terms of morality and vitality, as did Green and Lindsay. But identities ‘are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time’, as Linda Colley warns. An identification with or admiration for one

137 White, Inventing Australia, 64.
139 Ward, Australia and the British Embrace, 2.
142 Linda Colley, Britons, 6.
purported European people need not exclude an admiration for another, or what it had to offer. For Matthew Arnold, one of the reasons the French were more civilised (in the second sense, not the material, narrow sense), was precisely because they themselves were a judicious blending of different human types: Celts, Teutons, Normans, and Latins.¹⁴³

At the celebrations of Bastille Day in 1890 in Australia, the discussions about French moral and physical decay after the 1870 defeat were cast aside. A speaker told the gathered audience that proof resided in the newly strengthened military and the recent International Exhibitions. He told the crowd that Paris ‘remained indisputably the capital of the fine art world’.¹⁴⁴ Five years later during a picnic attended by Premier George Reid also celebrating the national holiday, the French were praised for the qualities they brought to the British stock. The ‘strength and determination of the English character should have blended with it the grace, the brightness and the gallantry, and chivalry of the French’.¹⁴⁵ There was an ‘element in the mental condition’ of the French which the British lacked and wished to add to their own attributes: ‘their poetry, their art, and their élan – qualities which had made the French a great and progressive nation’.¹⁴⁶

**Conclusion**

Australians were, in the nineteenth century, the inheritors of a deeply entangled and complex cross-Channel relationship. While certain French qualities could be seen as desirable and embedded in a discourse about the vital strength of the Australian type and its perceived place in the world, others also helped define what the type, the Anglo-Saxon type, was not. The French played an important role in defining the contours of what being British, Anglo-Saxon, and more particularly Australian, meant. For Australians, however, from the 1850s onwards, the French also came to represent a much more tangible and real problem as they made ventures into the Pacific and laid to rest dreams of a British lake in the region. More problematic even for the image the colonists wanted to project of themselves was the establishment of a French penitentiary in New Caledonia.

¹⁴⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 July 1890, 5.
¹⁴⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 July 1895, 4.
¹⁴⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 July 1900, 5.
Chapter 2

An Invasion Of Rascaldom

Standing at Sydney wharf on the 20 May 1879, detective W. C. Murray watched from a distance as twenty men in ‘canvas trousers and jackets’ came out of the steamer City of Melbourne. One by one they disappeared into the city, into the ‘Union Inn’ on Clarence Street and ‘Paris boarding House’ on Market. He learnt from the officers of the steamer that they were ‘pardoned political prisoners’ from New Caledonia. Six years later, another detective, Jules Pierre Roché, wrote to his superiors that he had no doubt that by now several hundreds of those French convicts lived in New South Wales and that at least some of them were escaped prisoners, illegally at large in Australia.

The French government sent more than 30,000 people into exile to its island-prison during the thirty-three years of the penal experiment in New Caledonia, between 1864 and 1897. Of these, 22,524 were hard labour convicts, 3,928 were political prisoners exiled after the civil war that followed the Franco-Prussian conflict in 1871 and the Paris Commune, and 3,796 were récidivistes, or second-time offenders, exiled after a relegation law was passed in 1885. Of the total number of convicts transported during that period, several hundreds gradually found their way to the eastern coast of Australia throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. There was nothing the detectives, their superiors or the colonial governments could do.

The Australian colonies had no authority to stop liberated French convicts from coming to their shores, and the extradition of escapees was the prerogative of the French government. But colonial governments all felt something had to be done, for the stakes were high. In the 1840s and 1850s the colonies had achieved partial self-government and had successfully campaigned for the abolition of British transportation. These intertwined and hard-earned victories had placed them, many believed, on the path to nationhood and certainly on the higher rungs of the civilising process.

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1 W. C. Murray to Inspector General of Police, 20 May 1879, SRNSW, Colonial Secretary’s Correspondance, Special Bundle, NRS 906 4/960.1.
2 Jules Pierre Roché to Inspector General of Police, 1/2, 23 July 1885, SRNSW, Colonial Secretary’s Main Section of Letters Received, NRS 905 4/887.1.
longer stand to be seen by the rest of the world as a mere receptacle for Europe’s degenerates and criminals.

Following the pioneering work of Meaney and his *The Search for Security in the Pacific*, nascent Australian nationalism has been seen by many as emerging in the context of the perceived strategic threat caused by France, Russia or Germany in the Pacific against the backdrop of imperial rivalries shaped by the scramble for empire in the 1870s and 1880s. Eventually, the scholarship tells us, this was largely replaced in the 1890s by a fear of Asian invasions, a fear of the ‘racial other’ based on theories of evolutionary biology and the pseudo-science of social Darwinism whose impact can be traced back from the early Chinese immigration laws in Victoria and New South Wales in the 1850s and 60s all the way through to the federal White Australia policy in 1901.6 Throughout this extended period the ‘other’, whether the European powers or the racial other, represented a crucial external threat against which national unity could be fostered - and it was fostered actively by statesmen and newspaper editors. However, in examining the creation of the nation in its relationship with external threats, the existing scholarship jumps from the failed first attempt at federation in 1883–1885, to the second successful attempt in 1901, when anxieties about imperial rivalries in the Pacific were replaced by a prevailing fear of the ‘awakening east’.7

Within this scholarship, the question of French transportation to New Caledonia, and more specifically the issue of the constant arrival of French convicts to the eastern coast of Australia, has been neglected or has been subsumed within seemingly more important problems of realpolitik, of the conflicts between nations and empires.8 Yet there is evidence that the flow of French convicts into Australia played a more

important role in the stirrings of national consciousness than has been acknowledged. Recognising this role helps us to situate the formation of Australian nationalism in a longer history of tensions with both Great Britain and France relating to both the colonies’ territorial anxieties and questions about their moral culture. For the colonies, one manifestation of the ‘other’, in the guise of the immoral criminal, was to be found both without and within. If we reject the teleology of nationalism and agree that nations and national sentiment are relational and historically contingent, we must ask how those sentiments came into being. The convicts from New Caledonia, and the inability of the Australian colonies to directly deal with the matter, played a part in the imagining of the Australian nation, both as a community of interest, increasingly aware of its discrete needs in a frontier ocean, and as a community of sentiment, gradually forged through the denial of its convict past, a process the French convicts both disrupted and intensified.

This chapter begins by examining the ways in which the Australian colonies perceived the French geopolitical presence in the Pacific in the mid-nineteenth century. The French menace in the Pacific was felt particularly acutely within sections of the Australian religious community that had a long history of strong opposition to Catholicism. It highlights a period of transition (roughly the 1870s) when the colonies stopped fearing the French as a possible a military threat and instead started worrying about the French penal settlement in New Caledonia and how it might influence the colonies’ claims to moral respectability, of being a civilised people, that is, one free of the convict element that was embedded in colonial foundation and development. The arrival of French ex-convicts generated important questions about territorial sovereignty for the colonial authorities. The issues they raised informed emerging discourses about Australian nationhood and Australian federation by linking them to concerns regarding moral purity and global respectability. The second and third parts of this chapter therefore examine changing political and popular discussions about French convicts. They examine the differences Australians established between the Communards, as political exiles, and the récidivistes as true and immoral criminals, and the role these

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10 I borrow the phrasing for this particular dialectic between material environment and sentiment from Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific*, 1901–14.
discussions played in the ways colonists envisioned the French and in the definition of an Australian self-image.

**An invasion of the ‘moustachioed sons of Gaul’**

The French had made cursory ventures into the Pacific since the late eighteenth century, in the age of discovery voyages. The explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville had claimed several possessions in the name of France during the nine months he spent in the region in 1768 on board his ships *Boudeuse* and *l’Etoile*. These claims included, among others, the *Grandes Cyclades* - the New Hebrides. But France’s aspirations lacked a decisive vision and all claims in the region remained largely perfunctory.\(^{11}\) Her colonial ambitions had been thwarted by the loss of most of her first empire in the Seven Years War, and the defeat of 1815 only made matters worse. Neither the Restoration regime nor that of the July Monarchy wanted to arouse the lion’s wrath by venturing deeper into the South Seas.\(^{12}\) Still, permanent consular representation was established in Sydney in 1839 (it took three years for the consul to arrive), and although the French presence in the South Pacific was still limited to a handful of administrators, adventurers, entrepreneurs and many Catholic missionaries, the French kept a watchful eye on the region.\(^{13}\)

Particularly, the strongest elements of the French presence in the Pacific in the nineteenth century were French Catholic missionaries. Even in Australia and New Zealand the first priests were French. And although they came to evangelise the savages of heathen lands, they were still largely representatives of the interests of France and were perceived as such. As Robert Aldrich put it, ‘Catholic and French were almost synonymous, just as were Protestant and Anglo-Saxon’. The French menace in the Pacific was therefore felt particularly acutely within sections of the Australian religious

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community which associated the French with Catholicism. In particular, several attempts from the 1830s to establish a Marist base in the New Hebrides, which had been and largely remained a protestant outpost, left a lingering tension in Australia which would translate into strong Presbyterian support for an Australian takeover of the islands to put an end to the Marist menace in the last decades of the century.\textsuperscript{14}

Aside from relying on the work of missionaries, the French had, since the beginning of white settlement in Sydney, looked to the British penal colonies as a possible model for their own imperial designs in the region and as a way of dealing with their own social and penal difficulties.\textsuperscript{15} In the early decades of the nineteenth century southwest Australia and the South Island of New Zealand were considered briefly; New Zealand’s climate in particular seemed well-suited, and French economic interests in the South Pacific had recently grown due to the rapid depopulation of whales in the South Atlantic due to over whaling.\textsuperscript{16} Plans, however, were slow to crystallise. Only in the 1840s did French policies become better defined and articulated following Prime Minister Guizot’s directive of establishing ports-of-call in order to gradually strengthen France’s imperial arms away from the immediate vicinity of Great Britain.\textsuperscript{17} The objective was to create anchors from which a gradual, insidious colonisation \textit{à l’anglaise} could operate without raising too many eyebrows.\textsuperscript{18} So the French attempted to colonise the South Island of New Zealand through a private venture, the Nanto-Bordelaise Company, using land bought by a French whaling captain in 1838 from local Maori at Akaroa, rather than through direct state action.\textsuperscript{19} The French failure in that venture led to a \textit{prise de possession} of the Marquesas in 1842, which was considered the second most adequate site for a possible penitentiary.\textsuperscript{20}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{14} Aldrich, \textit{The French Presence in the South Pacific}, 34, 34–68.
\bibitem{17} Aldrich, \textit{The French Presence in the South Pacific}, 18; Merle, \textit{Expériences Coloniales}, 35.
\bibitem{18} Tremewan, ‘La France Australe’.
\bibitem{19} Tremewan, \textit{French Akaroa}, xv; Tremewan, ‘La France Australe’; Faivre, \textit{L’expansion Française dans le Pacifique}, 443–461.
\bibitem{20} Tremewan, ‘La France Australe’; Marchant, \textit{France Australe}, particularly chapters 8 and 9.
\end{thebibliography}
As tottering and slow as France’s expansion in the Pacific was, it made the Australian colonies uncomfortable. They resented France’s establishment of protectorates over the Marquesas and exotic Tahiti two years later as well as its looming shadow over the New Hebrides throughout the period and the formal annexation of New Caledonia in 1853. These islands were important for the regional trade in sandalwood, bêche-de-mer and eventually labour, but they also formed, along with Fiji and New Guinea, part of what the Australian colonies gradually came to see as an Anglo-Saxon mare nostrum, imagined as stretching all the way to Australia’s transpacific cousins in America.  

Stuart Ward has noted that if the construction of Fort Denison in Sydney Harbour was undertaken, in part, to answer colonists’ paranoid fears of a Russian invasion during the distant Crimean War in 1854, it was much more realistically built to fortify Sydney’s defences in anticipation of future possible military threats from America or France.  

Even the French annexation of the small and distant Alaskan island of St Paul in 1892 caused alarm in reputable Australian newspapers. The Melbourne Argus for instance reasoned that the island was of high strategic importance for, should the Suez Canal be closed in the event of war, the French would then be in control of all communications routes between the colonies and the Mother Country.  

The desire of the colonies to secure their pre-eminence in the Pacific led to what Roger C. Thompson called Australia’s ‘sub-imperialism’. An ardent desire to see the Pacific becoming a ‘British Lake’ sometimes led the colonies to try forcing Britain’s hand: they convinced the imperial power to annex the Fiji islands in 1874 and, in 1883, the Queensland government unilaterally took possession of the eastern half of New Guinea in the name of the British Empire, fearing the Germans would beat them to it. The British government, significantly, refused to support the annexation. This disavowal of the Queensland move by the Gladstone government marked the beginning of a rift.  

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23 Argus, 6 September 1892, 5; the skeptical French consul in Melbourne dismissed the idea as a distraction by the press from domestic problems and to revive the Federal impulse, see Déjardin to Ribot, 17 August 1892, MAE, 2CPC/94.  
between the Britain and the colonies. Following this first thwarted colonial ambition, the colonies decided to hold an Intercolonial Convention in Sydney in November and December 1883 to put plans in motion to set up a Federal Council of Australasia to impress their strong shared belief to the Home Government ‘that further acquisition of dominion in the Pacific, south of the Equator, by any foreign power, would be highly detrimental to the safety and well-being of the British possessions in Australasia, and injurious to the interests of the Empire’. It was already becoming apparent that the expansionist impulses of the Australian colonies were exceeded only by Britain’s lack of interest.

When it came to the French, the question of the status of the New Hebrides and the takeover of New Caledonia raised the most serious concerns. In 1920 the French Consul General in Australia was able to look back on the preceding decades in a convivial atmosphere of friendship between France and the island continent. He thought that the anxieties expressed in Australia, fanned by a sensationalist press, about the undecided status of the New Hebrides had come largely as a result of the vested interests of some of those great newspapers in companies operating in the Pacific, such as Burns Philip & Co which had a shipping monopoly to the New Hebrides. He also pointed to the strong influence of the Presbyterian lobby in the colony of Victoria. It is certainly the case that in the late nineteenth century, neither Great Britain nor France had strong views about the group of islands. Their policy was to avoid creating complications in the far-away Pacific that could have ramifications in European diplomacy. France was looking to Britain to support its claims over Morocco. Britain hoped France would recognise its interests in Egypt.

The islands, however, were contested territory and their undefined status always loomed large in the minds of Australian colonists. Entrepreneur and naturalised French citizen John Higginson wished to turn the islands into a great plantation of coffee and cotton and created a company in 1882 to colonise the New Hebrides in the name of the French government. A handful of Australian planters, English citizens, and the vocal Australian Presbyterian clergyman John G. Paton, whose headquarters had been based

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26 Consul General to French Ambassador in London, 28 February 1920, MAE, 378/CH/78; the company is mentioned briefly in Robert Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Gender, Race, and Nation in Anglo-Australian Popular Fiction, 1875–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 121-123.
in the New Hebrides since 1857, wanted Britain to claim the islands for the Empire, but neither great powers moved. When Queensland seized part of New Guinea, the Government of Victoria, and particularly the anti-Catholic Premier James Service, under the influence of Presbyterian lobbies, tried to build on the momentum to call for a wholesale annexation of all the islands of the Pacific.  

In 1887 France and Britain established a joint naval tribunal, which slowly moved to establish a condominium over the New Hebrides in 1906, through which the two powers shared judicial control. But in the interregnum the problem of the New Hebrides resurfaced time and again in the Australian press. And more often than not the arguments in favour of a British takeover were animated by the fear of French convictism. Julian Thomas, the Australian journalist known as ‘The Vagabond,’ thus wrote that ‘this annexation of the New Hebrides is not a question of the missionaries. It is a question of the récidivistes, which is a question international for Australia, of far more account to them than as to whether a few savages are Protestant or Marist’.  

The political and public conversations in Australia about New Caledonia were rooted in the same admixture of competing interest groups and colonial expansionist drives, but they were also complicated and made far more tangible by the fact that the French did send convicts there. Convictism, indeed, had become the preeminent fear linked to the French presence in the Pacific. When France claimed New Caledonia in 1853, as Elizabeth Rechniewski has shown, some believed the move to be only the first step in a crafty invasion of the Pacific by Napoleon III. The Moreton Bay Courier explained that New Caledonia was so close to the eastern coast of Australia that an invasion by ‘swarms of the moustachioed sons of Gaul’ was only a few days away. But the idea that France could invade Australia from New Caledonia, or anywhere else for that matter, largely dissipated after the Franco-Prussian conflict in 1871. That humiliating

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31 Queenslander, 18 August 1883, 37; Sydney Morning Herald, 18 August 1877, 5; Queensland Figaro and Punch, 26 February 1887, 2. It is worth noting that the worry that France might turn the New Hebrides into another penal station might not have been completely unfounded, despite Franco-British agreement prohibiting such an initiative. A year before France closed its penitentiary in New Caledonia in 1897, the Minister for Colonies told the French Consul General at Sydney that he was still considering it as an option: he hesitated, he said, only because of the protests of the Société Française des Nouvelles Hébrides and did not mention the protests of the British government or that of the Australian colonies, which is some indication of the distance between some French officials’ minds and the concerns of the Australian colonies. See Biard d’Aunet to Hanotaux, 21 November 1896, MAE, Série Océanie.
defeat, as we have seen, fostered a perception that France was socially, morally and militarily emasculated and incapacitated. Only few voices, such as that of the liberal Charles H. Pearson, future author of the influential *National Life and Character* (1893), tried to raise the spectre of a French invasion from New Caledonia. To borrow *The Queenslander*’s apposite terms, by the 1870s the idea of a French assault belonged only in the ‘depth of an alarmist imagination’. Even for Pearson, however, the possibility of invasion was linked to transportation. It was the bodies of the convicts he feared, the bodies of men who had once served in the army and could again be used in a military attack.

The strongest indication that France was no longer perceived as a military threat but that its convicts were still feared can perhaps be found in the burgeoning literary genre of invasion narratives. From the 1880s the genre became immensely popular, and it remained so until its subject matter became too close to the horrors of the Great War. In Britain the novels focused primarily on plots in which England was invaded either by the French, the Russians or, closer to the war, by the Germans, reflecting the evolving anxieties of nations already almost on the brink of war. While those British novels tended to focus on imagined military conflicts between European powers in a not-too-distant dystopian future, in Australia, more often than not, the genre took the form of invasion stories depicting attacks by hordes of Chinese or Japanese. These hordes, if they did not come through the so-called ‘empty-north’, used New Caledonia as a springboard for invasion. This genre was very prolific in Australia, but it is striking that, unlike their British counterparts, none of these novels sees the French as a military threat. Significantly, the only two novels I have found whose primary plot centres on the French and New Caledonia, published respectively in 1891 and 1895, are centred upon French recidivists. I will return to these novels below when discussing the changing Australian discourse about convicts and the focus on recidivists as a moral.

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34 Queensland, 15 August 1874, 8.
threat. The French presence in the Pacific nonetheless continued to play a significant role in the federation debates due to the fear of convict taint and the lingering anxiety associated with that taint in colonial collective memory. Histories that see Australian consciousness or nationalism emerging as a reaction solely to the presence of European military powers is but incomplete as long as they ignore the ongoing need of the colonies to distance themselves from Australia’s convict past. And it is this past that entangles Australia into different overlapping Pacific worlds: Pacific worlds that were at the same time British, but also French, and Pacific worlds that were increasingly showcased on a global stage where questions about respectability and civilisation were paramount.\(^{38}\)

Ironically, the idea of civilisation – both in the ‘narrow’ definition of material expansion and the larger definition of human progress – which aroused such strong anti-convict feelings in Australia was also at the heart of the conception of the French penal settlement in New Caledonia. Taking its cue from the British experiment in Australia, the penal colony was intended to further French colonial expansion in the South Seas through the labour of convicts, while offering them a chance at redemption through the regenerative powers of transportation.\(^{39}\) Although the British government ended transportation to the eastern coast of Australia after fierce local and global campaigns by anti-transportation movements in the 1850s (and 1867 for Western Australia), the French still judged the system a resounding success.\(^{40}\) They sought not only to emulate it, but to better it. New Caledonia would become the site for a new type of colonisation, mixing criminal transportation and free settlement; the work of convicts would pave the way for free migrants who would find in the southern colonies the necessary infrastructure and the nucleus of what would become a hardworking, healthy, white

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\(^{39}\) On the debates about the idea of transportation as regeneration in France see Toth, ‘Colonisation or Incarceration?’; Stephen A. Toth, *Beyond Papillon: The French Overseas*; Neilson, ‘The Paradox of Penal Colonization’.

society which would advance the cause of French civilisation. In a country deeply anxious about the profound mutations brought by the industrial revolution, the uprooting of a newly mobile population from the country to the city and the creation of a much-feared urban proletariat, the experiment was imagined as a social laboratory that would morally redeem the fallen criminals and place them once again on the map of the civilised world.

Since the French borrowed heavily from the Australian example, Australian colonists could have looked at what the French were doing in New Caledonia with pride: were the colonies not the irrefutable proof that the redemptive and regenerative properties of transportation could produce thriving, civilised, politically mature burgeoning nations? But they did not. The stench of transportation lingered too heavily over the colonies for them to find the French experiment palatable; many argued that transportation as a means of colonisation did not work and that the success of the Australian colonies came precisely from their political unity against transportation. This was one way of looking back at the past and selecting a comforting, positive history for the young colonies. But as convicts started arriving on Australian shores the reassuring stories the colonists told themselves and the world came under greater scrutiny. Not only did the arrival of convicts demonstrate the limits of colonists’ sway over control of migration, they also endangered their claims to moral respectability in the eyes of the world by thwarting their active forgetting of their convict past.

A confusing mixture of convicts, 1853-1885

Not all Australians opposed French colonisation in the South Seas. One commentator in the Sydney Morning Herald explained that, although people might not like the idea of having the French so close at hand, it was the right of the French to claim empty land in the name of civilisation. Besides, the article argued, the mixing of people was a positive

41 The Neo-Caledonian bagne was first only opened to white convicts as those of Arab descent were said to be able to survive the Guiana climate better. In 1887 when the experiment of the ‘new society’ was deemed a failure by French authorities European convicts were once again sent to Guiana, and Arab convicts to New Caledonia. In 1868, the indigenous Kanak were relegated to reserves. Convicts were once again all sent to Guiana after the end of transportation to New Caledonia in 1897, despite the known insalubrious conditions and grisly death toll, to what was then seen as a purely repressive system, until 1946. Merle, Expériences Coloniales, 16–18.
43 Queenslander, 8 August 1874, 7.
influence that could ‘overpower the bad of all nations’. That is, the mixing of European peoples – the idea that the isles of the Pacific, including Australia, were unpopulated before European settlement was such a strong building block of settler colonialism it went without saying. Taking the logic a notch further, the author also argued that should the overbearing leaders of that most centralised of nations see the light, they would allow the French people of New Caledonia to discover the individual freedom already familiar to the British. The political and religious excesses of recent years would lose their potency in the process. New Caledonia could become a stepping stone to the betterment of the French. This South Sea island, it was hoped, could teach the politically backward French how to be that little bit more British.  

French culture in the Pacific was one thing. It could contribute in manifold ways to the betterment of mankind and further the quest for civilisation, provided French excesses were corrected in the process. The problem for the Australian colonies was that those new Frenchmen, and later women, were convicts. This led to an outburst in the colonial press at the news of the takeover of New Caledonia:

No sooner … have we got rid of British convictism, that we are threatened with French convictism. An unlimited collection of Parisian brigands within a short and easy voyage from our northern coasts, will tend as little to the security and happiness of the colonists as a similar collection of English outcasts in Van Diemen’s Land.

Indeed, Victoria had only just passed two Acts, in 1852 and 1854, to prevent Vandemonian convicts crossing the Bass Strait. The anti-transportation campaigns that led to the passing of the two Acts had hinged on the fear of moral pollution. In this context, it comes as no surprise that the Melbourne Argus greeted the French move by using the same imagery of contagion. ‘Cholera was merely a physical evil’, but ‘the evil of convictism affected both body and soul’, it proclaimed.

The French were, however, slow to develop their scheme and it took another eleven years for the first group of convicts to be sent to New Caledonia. In the interval the issue faded from public debates and when it resurfaced, some of the momentum of

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44 Sydney Morning Herald, 7 October 1873, 4.
45 Sydney Morning Herald, 3 November 1853. This article is quoted both by Foster and Zaidman to underline the discontent of the colonies. Colin Forster, France and Botany Bay, 168; Zaidman, ‘Les condamnés de Nouvelle-Calédonie en Australie et en Nouvelle-Zélande’.
47 Argus reproduced in Sydney Morning Herald, 28 October 1854, 2.
earlier anti-transportation campaigns had been lost. But questions were raised, both in the colonial press and in government circles, about the legal powers of the local parliaments in such matters of international law. These, in turn, led to reflections about the nature of the French convicts and what they represented for the future prospects of Australia.

In 1867, when the last British convict ship left Western Australia, one of the first French convoys lay in harbour in Sydney on its way to the island-prison. Three men escaped. To everyone’s relief they were quickly captured again by the French on Parramatta road and they were unceremoniously shuffled back onto the boat taking them to the penal station. The event, however, raised important questions about the legal ambiguity in which the convicts stood in Australia: the treaty for the mutual extradition of criminals between Britain and France had recently expired, the prisoners had committed no crime under British law, and it therefore seemed that they should be considered free men once they were ‘beyond the shadow of the ship in which they were imprisoned’. Had they sought asylum, would the colonists have had to oblige? Was their arrest on shore by the French not a violation, if a fortunate one, of British sovereignty?  

About ten years later, in 1876, when it became known that the French government was going to allow 600 Communards to petition for a remission of their sentence, the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales urgently telegraphed his counterparts in New Zealand, Queensland, Tasmania and the Chief Secretaries of Victoria and South Australia to see if any of the colonies had legislation in place to prevent them from coming to Australia. He suggested an objection could be addressed to the Imperial Government. New Zealand, Queensland and Tasmania heartily wished to join the protest and authorised New South Wales to speak on their behalf. Victoria, however, could see no ‘grounds on which we could reasonably base such remonstrance’. Significantly, South Australia raised the point that the Communards were political offenders rather than common criminals and should thus be offered protection under British law. Still, if the French intended ‘to release criminals’, South Australia would

48 Davison, Hirst, Macintyre, eds., The Oxford Companion to Australian History, 649; Sydney Morning Herald, 4 July 1866, 4.
49 Colonial Secretary of New Zealand to Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, 21 August 1876; Colonial Secretary of Queensland to Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, 16 August 1876; Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, 1878–9, Influx of convicts from New Caledonia, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.
50 Chief Secretary of Victoria to Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, 17 August 1876, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1
‘heartily join in the protest’.\textsuperscript{51} We see here the beginning of a more complex view about the nature of the criminals, with a clear distinction emerging between political prisoners and common criminals. As we shall explore in more detail below, the distinction had little to do with the convicts themselves. It had a lot to do with the self-perception, and the international projection, of the colonies as free and civilised societies.

The colonies took some swift actions and referred the problem both to London and to the French. The Governor of New South Wales, Sir Hercules Robinson wrote to the French consul in Sydney, Eugène Simon, and the Government of Queensland wrote directly to London, objecting at having ‘pardoned convicts’ coming to their territory.\textsuperscript{52} The French ambassador in London, the Duc Decaze and the French consul in Sydney professed the good faith of their government and passed on the reclaims, while carefully reminding the British and Australian authorities that if granted, pardon would restore the full rights of the Communards as French citizens and that no coercive measures could be used to curb their movements.\textsuperscript{53} On 29 August 1876 a small notice appeared in a corner of the \textit{Journal Officiel} (the official journal of the French Republic), telling its readership of Australian animosity towards the \textit{déportés}, and advising their families to kindly redirect them somewhere else, if they could.\textsuperscript{54}

After a general amnesty was granted to the majority of the Communards in 1879, most elected to go back to France.\textsuperscript{55} But they were not the only convicts the Australian authorities worried over. From the early 1870s more and more convicts began to arrive on Australian shores.\textsuperscript{56} These were, to the colonists, a confusing admixture of amnestied Communards, liberated hard-labour convicts who had served their sentence, partly pardoned convicts on tickets of leave and a number of escaped convicts – of all ilk –

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Chief Secretary of South Australia to Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, 18 August 1876, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1; \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 24 April 1879, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Colonial Secretary of New South Wales to Colonial Secretary of Queensland, 31 August 1876; Circular from Downing Street, 1 January 1877; Lord Lyons to Duc Decazes, 13 December 1876; Duc Decazes to Lord Lyons, 13 February 1877, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Duc Decazes to Lord Lyons, 13 February 1877; Colonial Secretary of New South Wales to Colonial Secretary of Queensland, August 1876; Simon to Hercules Robinson, 12 September 1876; Earl of Derby to Lord Lyons, 8 December 1876, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Journal Officiel, 29 August 1876, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Alice Bullard, \textit{Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific, 1790-1900} (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000), 236–238.
\item \textsuperscript{56} See the chronological list and appendixes in Zaidman.
\end{itemize}
who came to Australia hidden on commercial liners or having survived the perilous ten-day sea journey on stolen boats or makeshift rafts.\textsuperscript{57}

\textbf{A taste of ‘la vie Austral’}

It is impossible to know how many ex-convicts stayed in or even transited through Australia. The penal system in New Caledonia applied different sentences to different convicts. Common criminals sentenced to five years or less of hard labour were, under the \textit{système du doublage}, meant to stay on the island once ‘liberated’ for a length of time equal to the duration of their sentence. Those condemned to eight years or more (the greater majority: eighty per cent) could never leave the colony, except if a leave of absence of up to three years were granted to them in situations where they could not find work on the island.\textsuperscript{58} How many liberated convicts and ticket-of-leavers found their way to Australia is impossible to know. Some could have gone to another French colony such as Algeria, the biggest settler colony of the growing French empire, or to the United States or South America, where burgeoning French communities thrived in the second half of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{59} One liberated convict known as ‘Trottet’ obtained a ticket of leave to go to Buenos Aires to find work. He had been formally forbidden from setting foot on Australian soil. But since all steamship lines transited via Australia, temptation must have been hard to resist. In 1886 the Victorian authorities intercepted a letter he wrote to a friend still in New Caledonia. He had remained in Australia, despite the legal restrictions, and was working as a kitchen porter at the Grand Hotel in Melbourne. He still intended to go to the Americas, eventually, but for now he wanted to have a taste of what he called ‘la vie Austral’\textsuperscript{60}. Trottet’s story was probably more the norm than the exception. His experience highlights the impracticality of a regulatory system devised by a distant government in the French \textit{metropole} which provided little if any measures of enforcement. In 1889 the New South Wales government estimated the number of liberated convicts in the colony at 800, an increase

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\textsuperscript{58} Merle, \textit{ExpériencesColoniales}, 126, 194–198.


\textsuperscript{60} Trottet to Grattepin, undated c1886, MAE, 428PO/1/2.
of 300 in just two years. In Victoria the police calculated their number at only 62. How many are unaccounted for? How many escaped convicts masqueraded as pardoned prisoners or even as free French citizens?

Estimates of the number of convicts who managed to escape the bagne vary, but between 1864 and 1913 we can venture that between 675 and 720 men actually succeeded. Many likely sought refuge in New Caledonia itself, with friends or hidden away in indigenous villages. Still, attempts to reach Australia were very frequent. In memoirs of his deportation, Jean Allemane, a Communard who had served in the Parisian Guard during the Commune, explained that he himself had made several attempts – he almost let himself drown on one occasion, overcome by the desolation of never being able to leave. He also witnessed the death of several of his companions who perished at sea in their desperate bid for freedom. One of them was Dr. Paul Rastoul, whose de facto wife Juliette we encountered briefly in chapter one, the conférencière and host of the Cercle littéraire in Sydney. Not only did many try to leave New Caledonia, but some were repeat offenders. When three men, Ernest Laurent, François Roca and Antoine Vernay, were apprehended in 1898 in the Papua New Guinea island of Samarai, the authorities were convinced they were on their way to Queensland. Roca had already been extradited once, Laurent twice, and then again a third time under the name Louis Chrétien. It was Vernay’s first attempt. It is unknown if he managed to stay at large, but one of his tattoos augured nothing good, it said ‘pas de chance’ - no luck.

Colonial governments had taken the goodwill and positive replies of the French ambassador in London and the French consul in Sydney about the 600 Communards as a binding guarantee that no convicts from New Caledonia, of any ilk, would set foot in Australia. But despite that initial appeal to the French and the British governments, the trickle of convicts did not stop, and kept growing. When twenty Frenchmen in ‘destitute condition’, eight of whom were believed to be pardoned convicts, applied for free passes to go work on the railway line at Orange, the inability of colonial authorities to

61 Verleye to MAE, 3 July 1889, MAE, 2CPC/101.
62 French Consulate in Melbourne to MAE, 1887, MAE, 378PO/K/680.
63 Zaidman gives the figure of 570 between 1866 and 1913 while Merle estimates that of the total number of convicts sent to New Caledonia during the bagne, 2.4% managed to escape between 1864 and 1912, or 720. See Merle, Expériences Coloniales, 135–137.
65 Biard d’Aunet to Forrest, 1 September 1898, MAE, 662PO/1/1-3; Signalement de Vernay Antoine, 1898, MAE, 662PO/1/1–3.
prevent the migration of former convicts was well exposed. By November 1878 fifty Frenchmen had applied for railway passes. Most were suspected of being ‘ex-convicts’.

The failures of colonial legislation and the first Federal Council.

The French government’s lack of concern for colonial sensibilities regarding transportation forced the colonies to try to deal with the situation using the existing legal means at their disposal, but they found them wanting. This had an impact on the ways the colonies looked to France and Great Britain, as well as on the convicts themselves. On 14 August 1876 France and Great Britain signed a new agreement for the reciprocal extradition of criminals (excluding political prisoners). Article 16 outlined the measures in place for the extradition of criminals in colonies or possessions of the two imperial powers. It stated that proceedings should be started by representatives of the government from the colony or possession from which the criminals had escaped. This did not give the Australian colonies much to work with. Owing to a small technicality in wording, the Attorney General in Sydney suggested the treaty could be reinterpreted to turn the meaning on its head to give the colony or possession in which the criminals were found the right to start the extradition process. This, he admitted, was not the spirit in which the treaty had been written, but the measure could be justified ‘in light of the great dangers to which this Colony is exposed from its proximity to the French penal settlement in New Caledonia’. But this was not enough. Even read in this way, the Extradition Treaty could only apply to escaped convicts. Liberated convicts would retain their freedom of movement – bar returning to France, and this was a problem.

For the colonies to realise the society they wanted, free of the moral stain of convictism, the legal rights of movement that pertained to French ex-convicts had to be negated. Henry Parkes, the NSW premier, understood this. On 11 June 1879 he attempted to

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66 Inspector General of Police to Under Secretary in the Colonial Secretary’s Department, 10 September 1878; Consul General to the Inspector General of Police, 10 September 1878; The Under Secretary, Colonial Secretary’s Department to the Inspector General of Police, 16 September 1878, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.

67 Inspector General of Police to the Under Secretary, 30 November 1878, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.


introduce a bill in Parliament ‘to make provision against the Influx of certain Foreign Criminals into New South Wales’. Significantly, ‘Foreign Criminals’ referred to both escapees and freed convicts, who were all ‘coming into New South Wales in numbers sufficient to cause alarm to Her Majesty’s subjects in the said Colony’. Queensland attempted to pass a similar Criminals Expulsion Act in 1881, which was disallowed by the Colonial Office. Important as well, resolutions 6 and 7 of the Intercolonial Convention in 1883, which set up the groundwork for the creation of the Australian Federal Council, protested against France’s transporting of relapsed criminals to the Pacific and expressed the hope that the region would no longer be host to any penal settlements in the future. In 1887 the Federal Council (which never included the largest colony of New South Wales) itself made an unequivocal address to the Imperial Government about what it now called ‘this grave and national evil and wrong’:

It is now several years since the Colonies of Australasia first asked the good offices of your Majesty’s Imperial Government with the government of France to secure the cessation of the evil [of convictism]; and Your Majesty’s imperial Government has, we are informed, made from time to time representations to the government of France accordingly, but not apparently with any effect.

The Council warned the Home Government that they would be forced to take ‘measures of self-defence’.

Through their repeated complaints, both to the Imperial Government and the French representatives, the Australian colonies did achieve some level of success. A ministerial despatch on 10 September 1880 reduced the number of tickets-of-leave and in 1884 ticket-of-leavers were forbidden to set foot on Australian soil. The length of leave was reduced from three years to one in 1887 and the scheme was abandoned altogether in 1889. As we saw, Trottet and others were already enjoying what ‘la vie Austral’ had to offer, so these measures came too late and did too little. By the late 1880s, with the constant arrival of convicts from New Caledonia, the problem had snowballed from a point of international relations between the colonies, London and Paris, to a full-blown domestic political scare campaign about the threat of convictism. The idea of convictism tapped into the fear of moral contamination which itself dovetailed with

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70 A Bill to make provision against the Influx of certain Foreign Criminals into New South Wales, Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, 1879, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.
71 The Queenslander, 20 October 1883, 642.
broader anxieties about immigration restrictions that were becoming a growing preoccupation as the nineteenth century came to its end.\footnote{74}{Alison Bashford, \textit{Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism, and Public Health} (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).}

The crux of the matter was that colonial governments wanted the power to keep all convicts from New Caledonia from entering their territories. At the Bastille Day celebrations in Melbourne in 1890 one of the attendees, Mr. Patterson, expressed the idea unequivocally. He first proclaimed Australia’s strong affinities with the political ideals of the French republic, ‘Fraternity and equality are equally with liberty our proud distinction’, he said. But putting aside the diplomatic decorum the occasion called for, he suggested an exception to ‘the motto of the Great Republic’ should be made in order to exclude French convicts from enacting their rights as citizens, for the greater good (of Australia). He told the gathered crowd that Australians ‘do not deny the legal right [of convict mobility], but gentlemen, few individuals in this world desire to, or can, act up to their full legal rights. If we all attempted to enact our utmost dues from every person we came in contact with, the world would not be worth living in’, the \textit{Argus} reported him saying.\footnote{75}{\textit{Argus}, 15 July 1890, 6.}

The broad level of support in the various colonies against French convictism is telling of the scale of convict fear in Australia. This fear is evident, as Stefan Petrow notes, with the ‘inclusion of the words “prevention of the influx of criminals”’ in the Intercolonial Convention, the discussions of the Federal Council of Australasia in 1885 and, ‘more emphatically by their inclusion in the Australian Constitution section 51 (xxviii)’.\footnote{76}{Petrow, ‘Convict-Phobia’; See also G. Parsons, ‘New Caledonian Convicts in New South Wales, 1876-1884’, \textit{Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society} 52, no.1 (1966): 3-27.} In the historiography of Australian nationalism the question of French transportation to the Pacific has been subsumed within discussions about Australian sub-imperialism in the region.\footnote{77}{Manning Clark, \textit{A Short History of Australia} (New York, 1980), 160–161; Meaney, \textit{The Search for Security in the Pacific}, 16–19; Thompson, \textit{Australian Imperialism in the Pacific}, 107–132; Atkinson, \textit{The Europeans in Australia}, vol. 3, 174-175.} But the broad-ranging and ongoing campaigns against French transportation illustrate that the question was not just one of geopolitics and expansionism. It spoke to deeper fears about convict infestation. The colonies’ attempts to enact laws to stop the arrival of New Caledonian convicts cast the early stirrings of Federation in a different light. The Federal Council of Australasia has generally been regarded as the ‘ill-fated’ attempt at federation.\footnote{78}{Ward, ‘Security: Defending Australia’s Empire’, 239.} Because it did not achieve a level of
unity that would see through a viable political project, contemporaries and historians have seen it as a testament to the strength of colonial differences (over border disputes, tariffs, etc.). The Federal Council was, indeed, a ‘very weak coordinating body’. The Imperial Act that gave it form was non-binding, the Council had no power of taxation, no legislation passed by it could come into effect without the assent of the legislature of each colony, and, crucially, only Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia adhered to it. It was, in the indignant words of Alex Stuart, the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, more a ‘Federal Council of part of Australasia’. However, New Zealand and New South Wales both sent delegates to the conferences and meetings leading up to the formation of the Council since the Intercolonial Conference in 1883, and the proposals of the Federal Council were only defeated by a small margin in the legislative assembly of the ‘Mother Colony’. And while New South Wales and Victoria disagreed about the extent to which the colonies had or should have power over ‘the relations of Australasia with the islands of the Pacific’, particularly over Victoria’s proposed wholesale annexation of the New Hebrides, the importance of the ‘prevention of the influx of criminals’ met no opposition.

For all their alleged failures, the Intercolonial Convention and the first Federal Council created a space where the common interests of the colonies, including their common anxiety about convictism, could be articulated. They provided a platform from which to communicate with the Home Government and the French. It would be erroneous to suggest that the issue of the French convicts and the tensions that arose between the colonies and the Home Government provided a catalyst for federation or created a unified national consciousness. Certainly the issue heightened separatist passions. One commentator expressed the point bluntly:

We have had too much neglect and supercilious disregard of our legitimate rights and interests, and our welfare as a community, on the part of both the Foreign and Colonial Offices. So much so, indeed, as to induce the belief that England does not care for the connection. There is a strong spirit of healthy

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80 Colonial Secretary of New South Wales to Premier of Victoria, Sydney 6 August 1885, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.
nationality growing up in Australia, and with it a proper pride that will not permit us to stay where we are not wanted.\textsuperscript{83}

But the issue could equally intensify more local affiliations. Another commentator in Queensland professed that his loyalty to his colony’s interests trumped his loyalty to England.\textsuperscript{84} The Imperial Government’s seeming lack of interest simultaneously heightened colonial nationalism and contributed to the growth of Australian-wide national consciousness.\textsuperscript{85} There should be no doubt, nevertheless, that the French presence in the South Seas and the convicts of New Caledonia contributed politically and emotively to the gradual process through which the Australian nation emerged.

The convicts caught between two imperial systems

The repeated failure of extradition procedures, along with the apparent lack of French interest in curbing the problem, led colonists to believe that France had washed her hands of the convicts altogether once they left New Caledonia and arrived in Australia. The French consul in Sydney between 1889 and 1892, Henri Verleye, repeatedly asked Paris for more financial means and more personnel to deal with the problem, to no avail.\textsuperscript{86} He called for a warden from New Caledonia, who knew the convicts well, to be dispatched to Australia on a permanent basis to identify captured convicts and seek out those in hiding. This, he argued, would bring much needed proof to the Australian authorities that the French were taking the matter seriously.\textsuperscript{87} His calls fell upon deaf ears.

In the absence of such measures, the colonies were left to their own devices to deal with an increasing number of New Caledonian convicts. Many of those came to the attention

\textsuperscript{83} Australian Town and Country Journal, 1 May 1886, 10.
\textsuperscript{84} Queensland Figaro and Punch, 6 February 1886, 2.
\textsuperscript{86} MAE to Déjardin, 11 October 1889; Verleye to MAE, 25 April 1889; Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat des Colonies to MAE, 18 Septembre 1889, MAE, 428PO/1/8.
\textsuperscript{87} Verleye to MAE, 25 April 1889, MAE, Consulat de France à Melbourne, 428PO/1/8.
of the authorities because of their entanglement with the law. Felix Schoppel from Alsace, for instance, was tried for burglary while Peter Gerhsning stole two loaves of bread and a tin of sardines from the Railway Station Master at Homebush, near Sydney. Some who did not commit crimes were often arrested under the Vagrant Act, typically on suspicion of being escaped convicts alone. Article 10 of the Extradition treaty specified that if prisoners were not extradited within two months they should be released. But the extradition process was onerous and excruciatingly slow and often the convicts were left languishing in gaol much longer. This left the colonies with little faith in the existing framework. It reinforced their impression of the disdain the French held for the convicts and, it was thought, for the colonies themselves. Long delays were common. On 2 November 1896 five ‘French escapees from New Caledonia’ were arrested at Cape Tribulation in North Queensland. The Chief Secretary’s Office in Queensland complained to the French vice-consul in Brisbane that they had been remanded in the Brisbane gaol for nearly five months. The Police Magistrate himself strongly felt that being ‘kept languishing in prison on mere suspicion’ was ‘not in accordance with British conceptions of justice’. Material difficulties in communication and the process of identification of suspects took time, and sometimes searches had to be carried out over the whole of New Caledonia to certify that convicts were unaccounted for. Once the photos and descriptions of the suspected convicts were sent to New Caledonia, via the consular agencies in Australia, only then would the French authorities in New Caledonia (in theory) dispatch an agent to personally identify and extradite the suspected convicts.

Despite the strong stance of the colonial authorities against French convicts, and a series of outrages in the press, individual convicts were sometimes welcomed by colonists they encountered in Australia. Indeed, we can find numerous examples in the historical record of sympathy and generosity extended to the bagnards, whether they were Communards or common criminals. Michel Seringue, for instance, a Communard, escaped the transport vessel L’Orne in 1873 and made his way to Melbourne, in the

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88 Police Department in Sydney NSW, 24 March 1879; Report, Concord Police Station, 22 April 1879, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.
89 The Queenslander, 9 April 1881, 470; The Queenslander, 17 December 1881, 787; Sydney Morning Herald, 26 January 1884, 8; Cairns Post, 14 August 1884, 3; Brisbane Courier, 14 May 1890, 6; Sydney Morning Herald, 2 February 1892, 4; for a history of vagrancy laws in Australia see Julie Kimber, ‘Poor Laws: A Historiography of Vagrancy in Australia’, History Compass 11, no. 8 (2013): 537–50.
90 Morning Bulletin, 3 August 1883, 1.
91 Chief Secretary’s Office to Forrest, 22 March 1897, MAE, 662PO/1/1-3.
92 Biard d’Aunet to Forrest, 31 August 1896, MAE, Consulat de France à Sydney, 662PO/1/1–3; Biard d’Aunet to Forrest, 30 March 1897, MAE, 662PO/1/1-3.
belief that he would be free on British soil. The author Marcus Clarke who only one year later would publish the novel *For the Term of his natural life* (1874) was taken to see Seringue in his hiding place and wrote an emphatic account of his tribulations in the *Argus*. He described him as a victim of fate rather than ‘the ferocious being painted by the police *affiche*’, and expressed the hope that ‘the poor devil has seen the last of his troubles’.93 In 1883 five convicts escaped from New Caledonia and landed near Langham cattle station about 100 miles north of Rockhampton. The Collins family who owned the station cared for the sunburnt, dehydrated men. One was in such a terrible state that he could no longer walk, but they nursed him back to health. Eventually, the authorities caught up with them and extradited them to the island-prison. Distraught, Mrs. Collins wrote letters to the French Consul in Sydney pleading for their release, but the letters remained unanswered.94 In 1879 fifty ‘Communists’, as the Australian newspapers persisted in confusingly calling anyone from New Caledonia, were residing in George Street North in Sydney. They were, as the article in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* explained, expiree common law criminals who had finished serving their *doublage* and were lawfully seeking employment. Some were ‘carpenters, masons, hatters, butchers, and ordinary labourers. One or two are men of good education, and many of them appear to be of high intelligence’. At the time the article was written, five had found employment, and the only problem the others faced was that they did not speak ‘a word of English’. In conclusion the writer appealed to the sympathy of the Australian population, explaining how the former convicts could serve the greater purpose of colonisation:

> As it would appear that the arrival of the men exposes the community to no special danger, we hope that the public will give them a fair chance, and that the French authorities will not find themselves under the necessity of sending back men who, in this free country, may prove themselves excellent colonists.95

The range of responses to the French convicts was not unlike the range of responses to refugee arrivals by boat nowadays. Individual empathy, humanitarian stances and arguments for their social and economic potential were juxtaposed with fears about ‘border control’ and threats to public culture. Within a context of heightened imperialism and developing nationalisms, and when the possibility of the colonies

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federating in the near future was under discussion, the arrival of the French convicts underlined the porosity of the colonies’ borders and the limited powers of colonial governments dependent on the decisions of a distant imperial authority. The stringent measures New South Wales tried to put in place and the broad agreement of all colonies, including those, like South Australia, which did not seem to have to deal with the problem directly, suggests that the issue was not simply about stopping human bodies at the border but about the assertion of more abstract ideas about a projected collective identity.

**Growing aspirations bring growing fear**

The French convict problem united the colonies in a ‘search for security’ in the Pacific that was not solely about defence, but also about a common search for moral respectability. Both the political and public conversations about the convicts throughout the second half of the century hardened over time. After the relegation law was passed in 1885, a clear distinction was increasingly drawn between the Communards, as political exiles, and the *récidivistes*. As this section will show this was done with the aim of distancing Australian colonists from their own convict past. Politicians, in turn, saw in the popular outcry that was gaining momentum a chance to further their own political agenda.

Some convicts were more undesirable than others. Despite alarmist reports in the press when France decided to transport 4,000 Communards in 1871, with some warning of the danger of twenty thousand ‘turbulent revolutionists, imbued with the principles of the Internationale’ who would soon infect the Pacific, Australian attitudes with regard to the Communards were not generally hyperbolic. In France, as Alice Bullard has shown, the shaky new regime of the Third Republic, which emerged after the Paris Commune, represented the political exiles as savages and cannibals in order to assert its political legitimacy. In Australia, however, the discussion was rather different. In 1873 an article in the *Illustrated Sydney News* described the languishing spectacle of the Communards on-board the transport vessel *L’Orne* (Plate 2.1), the same vessel from which Michel Seringue had escaped. The men and women were depicted as caged.

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96 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 July 1872, 5.
animals, not ‘wild beasts, but human creatures’ whose humanity has been denied them by their gaolers and countrymen through the degrading conditions of their vile accommodation. ‘The first thing that strikes the visitor is, that he is about to inspect a menagerie, for his eyes take in nothing but a long row of iron-barred cages with which his walks in the “Zoo” have made him familiar.’ In each cage were cramped eight or nine Communards, said the author. They were allowed to wear their own clothes rather than ‘the badge of the convict’ but it could not compensate for ‘the degradation of being treated like the brute creation’. The Communards were further described as innocent victims by comparing them to the cold-hearted guard watching them ‘who, accustomed to the sight, sees nothing extraordinary in the caged humanity, in the sickness and despair, in the desponding misery, dreadful monotony, and forced resignation which made up the scene our artist has depicted’. 98

In the same newspaper sixteen years later, the Communard artist Lucien Henry, whom Juliette Rastoul married, would be featured as a ‘Sydney Celebrity’. Exiled at only twenty-one, Henry chose to settle in Sydney after the amnesty, unlike most of his Communard compatriots. During his twelve years in Australia (1879–1891) he became a well-known artist and intellectual. One of the first art teachers appointed at the Technical College in Sydney, he was an early champion of a distinct Australian art based on native flora and fauna. His only work to remain on permanent display consists of two stained-glass windows in the Main Hall of the Sydney Town Hall. One is an allegorical figure of New South Wales, as a young woman, which strongly recalls republican Marianne. The other represents Captain James Cook as an explorer. Along with a rather suave portrait of the artist, the Illustrated Sydney News rejoiced in his exile from France. It was one of ‘the glorious privileges of a young and free country’ to receive ‘the impress of advanced thinkers whose far-seeing originality has secured their banishment from the older lands of beaten tracks and conventional hedgerows’. 99 His republican, socialist and cosmopolitan views of art dovetailed with a romantic understanding of the emerging national sentiment in Australia for which he was greatly admired. 100 This support for some of the Communards so annoyed the French consul, Eugène Simon, that in ‘the interest of truth and justice’, he wrote to the editors of the

98 Illustrated Sydney News, 10 June 1873, 6.
99 Illustrated Sydney News, 4 April 1889, 19.
Sydney Morning Herald to try to explain that Communards were not just political prisoners, but also common-law prisoners, judged by a military tribunal not only for their involvement in the civil war but for all the ‘crimes of plunder, arson, [and] murder of hostages’ committed during the interim Commune rule. 101 But the consul’s position, which mirrored that of the Third Republic until the amnesty, was not heeded.

Plate 2.1. ‘The French transport ship L’Orne – Caged prisoners’, Illustrated Sydney News, 10 June 1873, 5

By the 1870s emphasising the nature of the crimes committed by convicts (downplaying them, if they had to talk about them at all) had become a familiar trope in former convict colonies in an attempt to lessen the perceived taint on respectability. 102 Discussions about the differences between the Communards, common-law criminals and later, recidivists, served to frame the colonies’ self-image. The public attitude in the colonies towards the Communards as political prisoners was thus placed in sharp relief by the presence of common convicts and

101 Sydney Morning Herald, 3 April 1874, 5.
102 Smith, Australia’s Birthstain, 9.
recidivists. And the idea that the Australian colonies might become an offshoot of ‘the penal settlement of some other country,’ was too much for the Sydney Morning Herald to bear, and the colonists felt they had ‘vigorously protested against … being any longer regarded as a penal settlement’ themselves.104

Unfortunately, the subtleties of such distinctions were lost on the British and French authorities, neither of whom gave the colonies the approval they seemed to so ardently desire. An article in the English Pall Mall Gazette, republished in the Queenslander, scolded Australian colonists, telling them they ‘should look at home and see whether Sydney and Brisbane are not now nourishing a whole class of ruffians of the very worst order’ before they protest ‘against the possible infection which French criminals may communicate to their society’.105 The Governor of New Caledonia could not quite understand why the Australian colonies were questioning him about what the six hundred Communards might decide to do were they allowed to leave the French island prison. To him it would have been a simple ‘mark of kind and neighbourly feeling, for reciprocity to be shown’. Australia should simply take in liberated French convicts as New Caledonia was doing with Australians, the implication being that, one way or another, Australians were also, and still, liberated convicts.106 He then went on a bit further by vehemently asserting that the Communards would surely be ‘much less objectionable’ to Australians than Australians were in New Caledonia, many of whom were ‘addicted to drink’ and had ‘more than once caused difficulties with the native tribes’. Scorned, the New South Wales Colonial Secretary replied that Australians ‘may possibly be drunkards … but they are not criminals … they are free citizens’.107 But the shadow of convictism loomed large over the colonies’ bid for self-definition.

The fear of a new form of convict taint became even more prevalent by the mid-1880s when the French government decided to pass a law for the transportation for life of second-time offenders, or récidivistes.108 This process was followed closely by the colonial authorities who tried to stay up to date with the debates of the French

103 Simon to Robinson, Sydney 12 September 1876, SRNSW, NRS 4/896.1; Sydney Morning Herald, 24 April 1879, 7.
104 Sydney Morning Herald, 18 September 1872.
105 Queenslander, 12 August 1871, 8.
107 Sydney Morning Herald, 24 April 1879, 7; Castelnau to Robinson, 31 January 1878, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.
108 Merle, Expériences Coloniales, 118.
Chamber of Deputes and Legislative Assembly.\textsuperscript{109} As Isabelle Merle has shown, the greater majority of recidivists (eighty per cent) were transported for minor larceny and the other twenty per cent for vagrancy.\textsuperscript{110} But unlike the Communards, they were described in the Australian press as pure ‘moral rubbish’, ‘men and women who are villainous by training, habit, and by nature’ and ‘skilful in murder, burglary, forgery, and fraud’.\textsuperscript{111} By the time the \textit{récidivistes} bill was passed, it was common knowledge that convicts could escape the penal settlement easily, that the Extradition Treaty was ineffective and that neither Britain nor France thought the matter a diplomatic priority.

The image of the \textit{recidiviste}, the true criminal, the epitome of the worst woes of convictism, became a haunting figure in the press. A serialised story of escape, lust, deceit and murder published in 1907, written with all the romantic verve characteristic of the period, exemplifies this representation well.\textsuperscript{112} In the story, the swindling ways of the false Count de Nerac, in reality a relegated convict of the name of Cricquet (cricket), were eventually exposed, not by the police, but by the greed of a liberated convict, a former prison fellow who went by the name Bismark, and whose attempts at blackmailing the count had repeatedly failed. Still uncertain of the true identity of the Count, Bismark needed to confirm his suspicions before being able to denounce him and exact his revenge. At this point the author of the story tells us that ‘it is well to state that Bismark was tattooed all over his body’. The tattoos, the self-fashioning markers of a sinful and devious life, were ‘so elaborate’, the article went on, that ‘hardly a blank space was left large enough to place a finger tip on’. And here lies the easy \textit{dénouement} of the story. A waiter in the hotel in which the Count resided remarked on Bismark’s tattoos and told him that, though impressive they may be, they were nothing compared to the ones Nerac hid under his clothes, which he per chance glimpsed when the Count was asleep. These tattoos took the shape of a ‘huge serpent’, the tail beginning around the Count’s neck, making ‘the entire circle of his body; while the head…’. In suspense the description ends, leaving the reader to imagine the magnitude of Nerac’s ignominy. This was all the proof Bismark needed; swiftly, he went to the police, told what he knew, and together they confronted the false Count who ended in solitary confinement.

\textsuperscript{109} ‘Further correspondence respecting New Guinea and other islands of the Western Pacific Ocean’, 1885, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/865.
\textsuperscript{110} Merle, \textit{Expériences Coloniales}, 125.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Australian Town and Country Journal}, 4 December 1886, 18.
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Australian Town and Country Journal}, 27 March 1907, 51.
Bismark’s tattoos, the tattoos of a liberated convict, were exceeded in artfulness and sinfulness only by those of the escaped convict Criquet.\textsuperscript{113}

With the issue of the récidivistes public discussion once again took on the colours of the discourse about moral hygiene as it had during the earlier anti-transportation and anti-convict demonstrations of the 1840s and 1850s. In 1886 the \textit{Queensland Figaro and Punch} once again admonished that the ‘pestilence of criminals is worse than cholera’.\textsuperscript{114} This time around, the concern did raise some anti-French rhetoric. The author added that ‘France is doing her best to break the camel’s back and to ensure for herself such a thrashing in the Pacific as she had 140 years ago in America’.\textsuperscript{115}

The story of the Count de Nerac was part of the growing genre of war fantasy literature discussed earlier, a genre which reached its apex between the 1880s and the Great War. For Robert Dixon, these novels were particularly popular in Australia because they responded to and fed into dominant social anxieties. They could be read as an ‘antidote’ to the perceived degeneration of the Anglo-Saxon race, its feminisation in a ‘world turned upside down’. They allowed a rewriting or a narrating of the emerging story of the nation freed of the taint of British convictism and moral contamination.\textsuperscript{116} They also allowed not just for the resolution of the thorny problem of convictism, but also created a space where jingoistic Australian desires could be realised by displacing the French through displacing their convicts.

The second novel I mentioned earlier exemplifies this argument well. Published in 1895, \textit{Oscar: a Romance of Australia and New Caledonia}, displays the major tropes of Australian anxieties about race, masculinity and decadence and attempts to resolve them through its (somewhat shaky) narration and plot. It uses as its background and narrative strategies all the classic topoi of Australian imperial fiction: bushranging, pastoral and bush station idylls, espionage, mistaken identities, crime – and a \textit{soupçon} of cathartic cross-dressing. The main protagonist, Oscar, is a virile Australian male who falls in love

\textsuperscript{113} The story appears to be based on a real convict. In his account of his visit to New Caledonia in the 1880s, the French traveler Verschuur reports that he was shown a convict named Frollet, ‘who had escaped, and contrived to remain hidden for some time in Nouméa itself. Some convicts, who had previously escaped provided him with a suit of fashionable clothes, and in the disguise of a tourist, under the name of Comte de Nérac, he gained admission to some of the best families of the capital. He acted as groomsman at a marriage, and even presented himself at a ball in Government house; there, however, he was accidentally recognized and arrested’. G. Verschuur, \textit{At the Antipodes: Travels in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji Islands, the New Hebrides, New Caledonia and South America 1888-1889} (London: S. Low, Marston, 1891), 194.

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Queensland Figaro and Punch}, 6 February 1886, 2.

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Queensland Figaro and Punch}, 6 February 1886, 2.

\textsuperscript{116} Dixon, \textit{Writing the Colonial Adventure}, 5.
with the pure Blanche d’Esterre, the Franco-Australian daughter of a French Commandant of the penal station in New Caledonia. Blanche is quite the transparent, one-dimensional allegory for a greater (pure, white) Australia (her mother was Australian), with her blonde sunny hair and pearly white skin. As the voice and the symbol of an imperial Anglo-Saxon Australia, Blanche constantly admonishes her fat, moustachoed cigar smoking papa that French convicts really should not be allowed to go to Australia under any circumstances. After being chased by simian-like French escaped convicts and almost coerced into marriage by a devious and effeminate récidiviste, the balance of life is finally restored as the two main characters marry, setting up house in Oscar’s ancestral cattle station in Queensland. Blanche finds fulfilment in subdued maternity and the procreation of the new Australian type.

The characters that are conspicuous by their absence, of whom no mention is made at all in either novel, are British convicts. The novels could not accommodate them as they would have disrupted the narration of the story as well as that of the nation. Within that narrative, the final exclusion of the French convict element restores the balance of an ideal Australian masculine society: one expanding beyond the borders of the Australian continent and into the Pacific, to include New Caledonia in its fold. Symbolically, marriage and birth answer Australian imperial and racial angst in a disputed Pacific where the emerging nation was seeking more room and was seeking to assert its own self-image of masculine respectability in contradistinction to the feminine and savage French neighbours in New Caledonia.

Handy scapegoats

Public ideas about the recidivists were politically infectious. They had the potential to build on the anti-transportation campaigns of the preceding decades against British convicts. In 1887 Parkes attempted to pass another bill to deal with so-called ‘foreign criminals’, but this bill did not pass its second reading either. It resembled the first bill but was more extreme in its drafting. Article 8 stipulated that the captains of vessels on which convicts were found would be considered accomplices and could be sentenced to up to five years imprisonment; additionally, the vessel and its cargo were to be

117 Agents-General for the Australian Colonies and New Zealand to Colonial Office, 25 February 1885, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/960.1.
118 A bill to prevent the introduction of foreign criminals into New South Wales, March 1887, MAE, 378PO/K/680; Stuer, The French in Australia, 131–136.
confiscated. A list of all passengers needed to be produced, and if the customs officer suspected that a name on the list or a passenger on the ship were a ‘foreign criminal’ the ship would be prohibited from any ‘communication with the shore’ until the authorities were certain that no such criminal could land. The list was to include the names and occupations of all passengers. For each passenger that was unaccounted for, the master of the ship would be liable of a £100 fine. The new Bill was so extreme that the director of the French steamer company the Messageries Maritimes, thought the measure a thinly disguised attempt to disrupt French commerce in the region and an added incentive to force his government to relinquish their rights over the New Hebrides.

Yet the provision for fines to vessels harbouring unwanted migrants were not uncommon. It was part of a larger process of social and, increasingly, racial quarantine where people deemed objectionable to the colonies were progressively prohibited through the regulation of colonial borders. As Alison Bashford has shown, financial deterrents against shipping companies bringing in prohibited migrants were a well-established practice not only in Australia, but equally in Canada and the US (although only in Australia would the shipping companies be fined for attempting to land the unwanted migrant: in the United States and Canada they would ‘merely be responsible for their return’). In Australia the *Immigration Restriction Act* in 1901 made the owners of vessels transporting unwanted immigrants liable for a fine of £100. The fine proposed by Parkes for vessels transporting relapsed criminals would indeed have served as an effective deterrent to French commerce in the region, but it also speaks to the enduring potency of the issue of convictism in the Australian colonies in the 1880s and continuing efforts throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century to enforce a peculiar vision for Australia through the exclusion of unwanted migrants.

Threats to the moral respectability of the community touched a sensitive chord with the colonists. They were employed to rally opinion against the French presence in the Pacific and for support of Federation in Victoria. Popular opposition to British transportation had been particularly strong in Port Phillip District in the 1840s and 1850s in order to keep out Vandemonian absconders, and in the 1860s to end the

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119 Deputy Administrator Girette to General Director, 27 August 1887, MAE, 378PO/K/680.  
120 Directeur Général des Postes et des Télégraphes to MAE, 1 September 1887, MAE, 378PO/K/680.  
Western Australian convict system. The Victorian Premier James Service, a strong anti-Catholic and nationalistic liberal who believed in a united Australia within the British Empire, was quick to capitalise on the anti-convict, and anti-récidiviste mood. In a resounding speech at the Intercolonial Trade Union Conference in Melbourne in 1884, he addressed his audience with all his oratorical might, pleading for the unity of the Australian colonies on the back of the vilified French convicts whom he compared to the smallpox. ‘On this question of the influx of convictism, the colonies have only one heart, one soul, and one mind’ he told his audience. The only measure that could stand between the colonies and the moral threat would be political unity. Convictism, said Service, would ‘taint the present generation and our posterity for all time to come’, and all that could stop this scourge would be the creation of an executive body with legislative powers. Framed as a labour problem, convictism was a very powerful tool.

At the time of the general elections in 1889, the French consul reported that the Melbourne Trades Hall Council demanded its candidates swear to pass a bill prohibiting the import of ‘criminal, native, and asiatic’ labour into the colony. ‘Concerning the criminals, they all agree’ the consul declared ‘they are only hesitant as to the natives and asiatics’. By the 1880s in Victoria, it seems, the increasingly racialised discourse of exclusion did not yet completely trump moral prejudices against convictism. In many ways the two were mutually-defining anxieties which were increasingly expressed through a common discourse about exclusion.

Unification and anti-convictism were in this manner understood as natural steps towards national maturity and, importantly, civilisation, so that Australia would ‘command the respect of the whole civilised world’. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the number of New Caledonian convicts in Victoria was in fact but a fraction of the number in New South Wales. This makes clear how much Service was using the issue for political gain. Eight years after his speech, in 1892, the Consul for France in Melbourne complained to his superiors that this continuing rhetoric about the ‘danger of moral contamination … to the virtuous population of Victoria’ was nothing but ‘exaggerated.

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125 French consul to MAE, 31 March 1889, MAE, 378PO/K/680.
126 Queenslander, 10 May 1884, 746.
lies’. Over the past seven years he had himself overseen the extradition of just one convict.¹²⁷

Relentless since early French ventures in the Pacific earlier in the century, Presbyterians also saw here an opportunity to make their voice heard again. It was also not difficult for the strong Presbyterian lobby, which still had vested interests in the New Hebrides and the ear of the Victorian Premier, to rally middle-class support against French transportation and French imperialism in the region. In 1885 the global networks of that Church were deployed in support of annexation of the New Hebrides. Telegrams, petitions, memorandums and letters from Presbyterian churches in Ireland, New Zealand, Geelong, South Australia, the Foreign Mission Board of the United Presbyterian Church as well as the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria were sent in that sense and to express their strong opposition to French transportation to the Pacific.¹²⁸

The issue had gradually aroused a measure of anti-French sentiment. Service reminded his cheering crowd that the idea had even been raised in recent years that all French people should be prohibited from entering the colony to curb the convict problem.¹²⁹ For some, the French nation fused with the récidiviste crisis such that one came to signify the other. The French nation and the French were sometimes construed as a national problem that ought to be dealt with as had the ‘Chinese question’, through exclusion. The danger was extended from the convicts to the French nation in general, conjuring up negative stereotypes. An unsigned opinion piece in The Australian, Windsor, Richmond, and Hawkesbury Advertiser conflated the convicts with the French nation and linked them all to sexual depravity: ‘We have just finished a good work in preventing the influx of Chinese to this colony, but a far greater danger now threatens us from New Caledonia [for] we know the licentious character of the French nation as a body.’¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Maistre to MAE, 29 March 1892, MAE, 2CPC/94.
¹²⁸ Secretary of the Stawell Branch of the Australian Natives Association to Premier Victoria, 5 February 1885; Colonial Office to General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 14 February 1885; Foreign Mission Board of the United Presbyterian Church to Foreign Office, 21 March 1885; Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Otago to Premier of New Zealand, 9 May 1885; Petition from the Presbytery of Geelong, 20 March 1885; Petition from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, 15 April 1885; Robinson to Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of South Australia, 21 April 1885, in ‘Further correspondence respecting New Guinea and other islands of the Western Pacific Ocean’, 1885, SRNSW, NRS 906 4/865.
¹²⁹ Queensland, 10 May 1884, 746.
¹³₀ The Australian, Windsor, Richmond, and Hawkesbury Advertiser, 22 April 1882, 2.
Yet much of this anti-French rhetoric needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. If the French were hated or looked down upon, it was largely because they were convicts, particularly if they were not political prisoners. They were not particularly resented as Frenchmen. The rhetoric of exclusion did not manifest itself in the form of physical attacks against French nationals. They were not rounded up and interned in camps, nor was there any serious attempt to restrict French migration to Australia.\(^{131}\) If people suspected French natives of being escaped or liberated convicts, they may well have kept it to themselves or whispered it behind their backs. The convict known as ‘Trottet’ that we encountered earlier was doing well in Melbourne. His first couple of weeks were difficult, for he had little food and no money, but he found employment quickly enough. This was despite his speaking only French; he was enjoying the possibility of freedom offered by a colonial society where one’s moral credentials as a white man were judged on behaviour alone. He flirted freely with ‘les Anglaises’: ‘Ah! There are some pretty English ladies here, there are … a few where I work and who have very pretty eyes.’ Being French was not a problem. In his letter, the only directive he gave his friend still in New Caledonia was to avoid mention of the island prison altogether; that alone would have been enough to see him arrested.\(^{132}\)

**Conclusion**

Transportation to New Caledonia ceased in 1897. With that development the issue of French convicts coming to Australia waned. Australian imperial aspirations towards the Pacific islands and the idea of British hegemony in the Pacific, however, did not. As Australians could finally move forward with forgetting their convict past, freed from the unwelcome nudging of their French neighbours, the perceived danger coming from the islands shifted from the French convicts, and focused solely on the so-called ‘yellow peril’ of neighbouring Asia. From this era New Caledonia and the New Hebrides were increasingly portrayed as strategic soft spots from which hordes of Japanese might plot the invasion of the nation continent.

For a time, however, the issue of French convicts in the Pacific had been a major concern across the colonies. Politically, the issue might have failed to rally the wholesale adhesion of all the colonies to the early Federal project, perhaps because it


\(^{132}\) Trottet\(^*\) to Grattepin, undated c1886, MAE, 428PO/1/2.
was too soon, colonial rivalries too strong and the issue itself not important enough to alone warrant political organisation. Yet the problem had been a pressing one. It crystallized, for many, the apathy of the Home Government in relation to the colonies. For that reason, it became one catalyst amongst others for the gradual realisation by isolated colonies of their common interests and perceived vulnerability in the Pacific region. Through the narration of fiction, through telling themselves tales about themselves, whether in the press, public meetings or in colonial literature, the colonists placed themselves at a specific point on the spectrum of savagery and civilisation, a step above their rejected convict past and sometimes a step above the French.
In 1923 Georges M. Crivelli co-authored a short run book entitled *L’Australie et le Pacifique*. In a chapter devoted to the French presence in Australia, he deplored the uncouth, working-class background of the French nationals who came to the island-continent. To him, these people of low socio-economic status were responsible for what he thought to be a broad animosity of Australians towards France and towards the French:

The French colony in Australia numbers a couple of hundred individuals disseminated over the land, most of them are not worth knowing: often they are escapees from New Caledonia. We can list also deserters, a few hairdressers and cooks, and that’s it! The actions and gestures of these compatriots reinforce rather than disprove the malevolent prejudices against our country.¹

The Crivelis themselves were a cut above the mark, or at least Georges certainly thought so. They were a prominent family in *le-tout* Francophone Melbourne in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. George’s father, Marcel Crivelli, had been a renowned doctor, dubbed ‘the mender of ministers’, a sobriquet he earned for looking after both Alfred Deakin’s and Austin Chapman’s ‘nerves’ – a typical nineteenth century catch-all ailment.² His wife Charlotte, who had come to Australia as an infant with her parents, was an important actor in the local Francophone community, and, as we will see in the final chapter, she played an important role in the early life of the Melbourne branch of the *Alliance Française* and contributed greatly to fundraising efforts for France during the Great War.³ The Crivelis were proud of their status in Melbourne society, and their connection to France played an important role in this. To Georges, it was thus left to a few respectable families like his own, ‘helped by occasional wool buyers or some rare travellers of renown’, to counterbalance ‘the general preconceptions of public opinion towards us’.⁴ Yet, French nationals constituted part of the landscape in Australia in the nineteenth century. It is therefore important to go beyond George’s prejudices against those who did not meet his bourgeois social

² *Punch*, 29 October 1908, 6
⁴ Crivelli and Louvet*, *L’Australie et le Pacifique*, 182.
expectations, and to ask who the French in Australia were, why they came, and what their experiences might have been.

As we saw in the Introduction, the French have received comparatively little attention in Australian history as an immigrant group. They never formed a clearly distinguishable national or ‘ethnic’ community in the same way as the Germans or the Greeks. The French presence in Australia was indeed largely a product of individual rather than chain migration. Hence, this chapter contributes to, and elaborates upon, the existing scholarship on that migration by exploring individual narratives, male and female, of people who migrated or contemplated migration. It sheds new light on the aggregate picture of French migration that has already reached us by underlining the high mobility of French migrants and by questioning an accepted narrative of the ‘good’ assimilating migrant to reveal a rich and diverse collection of individual stories.

‘They are loth to leave their native land’

It has become a cliché to say that the French do not migrate, that love of patrie, good food and good wine stops them from leaving their native land, or beckons them to come back. But clichés do come from somewhere. Indeed, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, an average of 200,000 to 230,000 British migrants left their island every single year compared with only 10,000 of their Gallic neighbours. A traditional understanding of this comparatively low mobility is that few reasons incited what was a predominantly rural population, culturally attached to the soil and economically entrenched in its modes of production, to leave their country. The vast majority of those who did leave went to neighbouring countries. Those who ventured further than Europe tended to favour migration outside the French Empire. In preference to Algeria and Tunisia, they went to the United States, Argentina, Brazil or Chile. Not until the 1890s did colonial lobbies and the Government start promoting French migration to its

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5 Aldrich, The French Presence in the South Pacific, 199.
7 Verschuur, At the Antipodes, 121.
8 Isabelle Merle, Expériences coloniales, 57.
growing empire in a more energetic and organised manner. Contemporary social theorists like the eminent Eugène Poiré have lamented this sad state of affairs. He, like others before and after him, attributed it first and foremost to that tenacious, unflinching, home-loving quality of the Frenchman. More objectively, Poiré also pointed to deeper structural problems in French society, including the weight of its institutions and its massive and still expanding national and colonial administrations. He saw these as sapping national vitality, in sharp contrast with the opportunities offered by the liberal British Empire, which encouraged private and individual ventures.

Despite recent studies qualifying such perceptions of France’s relationship with its own Empire, it is widely accepted that the French Empire itself had little bearing on the national popular imagination until at least the First World War, or even later. Promoting emigration to the Empire was no easy task. As a gauge of popular opinion, Gustave Flaubert wrote of the colonies in the 1870s, in what would later be published as his satirical Dictionary of Accepted Ideas, that one should ‘register sadness when talking of them’. This might have been the train of thought of a forty-year old ship broker, writing from Ismaïla in Egypt in 1910. Enthusiastically, this broker told the consul in Australia: ‘My love for the more extensive life of the English colonies has had my heart set on Australia, whose immense progress I admire.’ Others were already in British colonies when they considered moving to Australia. A group of four French friends and their families, for example, could no longer stand the ‘harshness of winter’ in British Canada and dreamed of the warmer southern continent. Marie le Callee, to whom we will return later, had been teaching French in Cork, Ireland and was, in 1905, similarly seeking a warmer, dryer – and Anglo-Saxon – climate for her health.

The history of emigration and immigration was, until the 1960s and 70s, a scholarly phenomenon contained and constrained by the nation-state. People left or arrived and

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12 Poiré, L’émigration Française aux colonies, 50; See also Gaston Rousset, Des écoles de colons: La colonisation pratique (Place, 1899).
13 See the introduction in Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, eds., Promoting the Colonial Idea, particularly 4–5.
14 Merle, ‘Drawing setters to New Caledonia’.
16 Unknown* to Consul Melbourne, 25 February 1910, MAE, 428PO/1/36.
17 Clément Trouillas* to Consul Melbourne, 17 July 1913, MAE, 428PO/1/42.
18 Marie le Callee to Consul Melbourne, 9 May 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/30.
movement was explained through a push/pull mechanisms positing a rational actor theory and embracing a statistical and economic framework.\textsuperscript{19} The promise of better socio-economic prospects in the new country, together with events in France (successive revolutions, wars, phylloxera outbreaks) were seen as many factors contributing to migration. No doubt these factors played their part. As early as 1947, however, Louis Chevalier warned historians that the number of people leaving France in the nineteenth century was too low to see a direct correlation between one single domestic crisis in France (such as a fall in wheat prices, for instance) and mass international migration. Such events might have been contributing factors in individual decisions, but the temptation to see clear economic push/pull factors as a direct reason for migration should be resisted.\textsuperscript{20}

The only book-length study on French migration to Australia was largely framed through that dominant socio-economic model. Anny Stuer’s \textit{The French in Australia} was, like other such studies, in part a response to the social needs of the time in Australia. Building on the methodology of her mentor Charles Price, using naturalization records and colonial and Commonwealth censuses, Stuer was able to build a convincing aggregate picture of French migrants in Australia. Part of the exercise was to identify a ‘representative’ migrant, that is, a representative French man.\textsuperscript{21}

For the pre-gold rush era, Stuer found, only a handful of French migrants moved to Australia, mainly through their contacts with Great Britain, either as convicts, political refugees, entrepreneurs, ship deserters (more and more whaling ships came to the region, we remember), wine growers or contract workers. Few settled outside of Sydney and, if they did, they moved to the outback.\textsuperscript{22}


\textsuperscript{20} Chevalier, ‘L’émigration française au XIX siècle’, 127.

\textsuperscript{21} Charles Price, \textit{The Method and Statistics of Southern Europeans in Australia} (Canberra: Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 1963); Stuer, \textit{The French in Australia}; Stuer does however provide figures for both male and female migrants, when the record allows, and since she supplemented her demographic work with numerous life stories, women are also represented. However the avowed aim of the study was to unearth general patterns of migration for a ‘representative’ subject, and given the data set Stuer was working with, he was male. See especially Stuer, 9, 111, 141.

\textsuperscript{22} Stuer, \textit{The French in Australia}, 40–66.
Some presented great entrepreneurial skills. Jules Joubert, one of the founders of the Hunter’s Hill district in Sydney, is a well known case in point. Jules came to Sydney in 1839 following his brother Didier who had come as a wine and spirit merchant. He wasted no time in establishing himself. He first worked as a merchant in Sydney, during which time he had traded with the Nanto-Bordelaise Company, the French company that attempted to colonise the Banks Peninsula in New Zealand. He then worked as Chancellor at the French consulate from 1841 but resigned in protest at the Revolution of 1848. Like a number of people, he was lured to the gold fields in Victoria at mid-century, but eventually came back to Sydney to further develop the Hunter’s Hill suburb with his brother and family. Later in life he became a sort of international authority in organising International Exhibitions in Australia and abroad. At the back of the official catalogue for the Australian Federal International Exhibition held in the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne in 1902–3, we can see a photograph of a shop or warehouse belonging to ‘Joubert & Joubert’, describing them as ‘general agents’ (Plate 3.1). Jules died in Melbourne in 1907.23

But larger than life characters like Jules Joubert are colourful exceptions, not the rule, of French migration to Australia. From the early 1850s to 1871 the majority of French migrants, most of whom first had a stint on the gold fields, were in ‘lower status occupations’: salesmen, tradesmen, farmers, and winegrowers, with a fair representation of restaurant and fashion workers as well as teachers. In those early days, most seemed to come from Aquitaine and Normandy, regions linked to major sea routes, but generally they arrived from all over France.24 By 1871 there were just over one thousand of them in Victoria, under a thousand in New South Wales, and perhaps a couple of hundreds in both Queensland and South Australia.25

Plate 3.2. J. Baptiste, Hair cutting, shaving and shampooing salon, Hill End, NSW, 1870-1875 (detail), SLNSW, ON 4 Box 9 No. 70020

Plate 3.3. J. Baptiste, Paris hair cutting, shaving and shampooing salon, Hill End, NSW, 1870-1875 (detail), SLNSW, ON 4 Box 8 No. 18819
Later in the century, from 1872 until 1891, the number of French migrants grew, with most of them also working in agriculture, trade and services. Farmers outnumbered winegrowers and, reportedly, the first successful, systematic attempt at cultivating asparagus in Australia was the feat of one Frenchman in Geelong. The plants themselves were brought out of France with financing from the French bank in Melbourne, and ‘Geelong has ever since been the recognised centre for the raising of that vegetable’ – or at least it was.26 Many made a living as cooks or hairdressers or worked in restaurants, likely making the most of a national link connecting them to a culture which commanded a certain cachet in the British world in matters of taste; J. Baptiste met success with his ‘shaving and shampooing’ Paris saloon, going from working from a small precarious shelter to a solid brick building (Plate 3.2 and 3.3). Others scraped together a living by giving French lessons.27 Anny Stuer suggests that the only notable difference between this period and the gold rushes is that we can find a slightly higher number of service workers and labourers. She explains this as a result of the revolt ‘against the government of 1871’.28 It is likely that many of those coming after the bloody civil war and the Paris Commune came not directly from France but via New Caledonia. In other words, the former convicts from the island prison, whether they were liberated or escaped convicts, swelled the ranks of free French migrants. Certainly the story of Trottet and of many others we saw in the previous chapter confirm Stuer’s intimation about their socio-economic positions. Trottet worked at a hotel in Melbourne and others found work as ‘carpenters, masons, hatters, butchers, and ordinary labourers’.29 But others still had more creative responses and capitalised on the prestige their Frenchness could provide if it was used in the right way.

Baron Emile Charmier de Chastel had held a number of professions in Alton Downs in Queensland. He had been a labourer, a gardener, a licence-holder in a hotel, and a teacher. In 1882 he was offering private tuitions in French at his home, giving his qualifications as ‘Professor from the Besançon Academy of the French University’. He was also an active member of the local community. For instance, he gave a recitation during a musical fair raising funds for the local hall, school and cemetery. When he died in Rockhampton in 1919, at the respectable age of seventy-four and leaving behind four living sons, Monsieur de Chastel died a ‘gentleman’. But if he was a gentleman, that

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was in all but name, for the de Chastels did not exist as a noble family. Emile Charmier was not a baron, but an escaped convict from New Caledonia. He had been sentenced to fifteen years for ‘indecent assault’ in 1874. He slipped the leash with nine others and landed in Moreton Bay in 1879.\(^\text{30}\)

The name change was a necessity to escape the authorities. At least one of his fellow absconders was arrested and extradition procedures were started in 1884.\(^\text{31}\) But the nobiliary particle de was a nice touch. An invented pedigree could have helped de Chastel put some distance between himself and the island prison and make a new life for himself. Still, it was probably just compensation for being banished to the far reaches of the earth, for the five years he spent in the New Caledonian gaol, and the five days languishing on the open ocean.\(^\text{32}\) The trick worked, however, and only in recent years have the de Chastel descendants discovered the extraordinary past of their swindler ancestor.\(^\text{33}\) How many more descendants of French migrants in Australia share a similarly repressed connection to France’s infamous penal station in the Pacific?

Later in the century, these skilled and semi-skilled workers were joined by the small group of wool-buyers and their families who ranked higher in Crivelli’s esteem. They came from the highly industrialised northern cities of Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing and were followed by bank clerks and men whose professions linked them to the wool trade. Together this group formed a relatively well-off and cloistered network of commerce, kith and kin, first in Melbourne, and then, following capital and wool in the 1890s, in Sydney (see chapter four).\(^\text{34}\) By 1914 the Sands Directory listed no fewer than thirty-four French or Belgian wool-buying firms in the New South Wales capital.\(^\text{35}\) Trade activities meant that by the turn of the nineteenth century, half of Australia’s French migrants lived in New South Wales and a quarter in Victoria, and by 1911 more than half lived in urban areas.\(^\text{36}\) At the peak of their presence in 1891, according to Stuer’s calculations, French-born immigrants numbered 4,261, or 4,526 counting those born in

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\(^{30}\) *Morning Bulletin*, 28 June 1882, 1; 6 April 1912, 7; *Brisbane Courier*, 6 March 1879, 3. All the information about Emile Charmier de Chastel was provided by his descendants. Emile’s death certificate listed his occupation as ‘gentleman’.

\(^{31}\) *Argus*, 10 May 1884, 5.

\(^{32}\) *Brisbane Courier*, 8 March 1879, 3.


\(^{35}\) Dwyer, *Flanders in Australia*, 32, 207–8.

French overseas territories. These numbers would not be reached again until after the Second World War.\(^{37}\) To offer a comparison, during the same year there were 20,797 French people in Britain, including 12,834 in London alone.\(^{38}\)

The aggregate – and yet very detailed – picture depicted in Anny Stuer’s work is illuminating in several ways. The low socio-economic background and professions of the majority of French migrants – coupled with the negative perceptions linked to New Caledonia and its convicts – goes a long way to explain the generally negative attitude towards the French that Crivelli was still lamenting in 1923. But statistical analyses for the nineteenth century present major difficulties, and although those that exist are a testament to historians’ resourcefulness, they can be misleading.

First, those aggregate analyses are based on incomplete sources that were initially designed for altogether different purposes. From 1860 to 1920, as Nancy L. Green tells us, fewer and less systematic national border controls meant that the nineteenth century was indeed a liberal era with respect to international migration.\(^{39}\) Yet the period also saw an unprecedented spread in identity documents as nation-states solidified their monopoly over what John Torpey calls the ‘means of movement’.\(^{40}\) Before becoming a ubiquitous control apparatus embracing everyone living within a state’s territory, border and national identification were first concerned with the exclusion of specific outsider groups. As a consequence not everyone was excluded – and therefore accounted for – in the same way.\(^{41}\) This poses problems for reading colonial and commonwealth censuses, as they were primarily designed to account for the non-white (i.e: non-European) element in the country. Thus the first Commonwealth census grouped all Europeans together.\(^{42}\)

Ideas about race were, moreover, still fluid and it is not impossible that non-white migrants from the French empire, giving their nationality as ‘French’, might have passed through the immigration net. Indeed, as David Dutton has noted, as late as 1933 immigration officers had to be ‘instructed to bear in mind that a person’s name might not reveal their race, particularly people of French, American or Portuguese

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37 Stuer, *The French in Australia*, 110, 139.
39 Green, *Repenser les migrations*, 82–84.
41 Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*, 93.
nationality’. Another problem with the census from this era is the representation of women: the *Naturalization Act* 1903, in particular, meant that women automatically acquired their husbands’ citizenship and lost their own upon marriage. Yet women did not just follow their husbands, and more migrated alone in the nineteenth century than was once assumed. This, too, increases the potential for individual stories lost to a collective picture derived from aggregate analyses.

Secondly, although general pictures are an important foundation block to understand migration patterns, they fail to illuminate the personal stories and unique individual choices people made. Indeed, as David Fitzpatrick writes, ‘migration is a universal human experience so vast and complex it defies satisfactory representation.’ Collective profiles derived from official records are of necessity limited, and can only provide a ‘snapshot’ of a particular type of migrant, most often male. In contribution history, only those who stayed are deemed important, because they or their children gave their life force to the new nation. Yet the lives of those who did not stay, or did not leave an official record, or who, one way or another, ‘failed’ the integration challenge, are also an integral part of the story of migration. They can illuminate broader processes of decision-making and international movement. Letters gathered from the French consular archives offer a unique, albeit small, palliative for some of the problems listed above for they allow us precisely to glimpse the lives and minds of a number of migrants or prospective migrants whose decisions to migrate are were a reflection of their diverse, sometimes unique, personal circumstances.

**Of migrant letters**

Only a small proportion of letters written by migrants from the colonial era has survived into our own time. Such letters that were written are usually accessible to the historian only if they have made it into a public archive, perhaps if they were donated upon the death of their author(s), or through sheer luck. Sometimes we can gain access to privately held collections, but they are difficult to locate and often their owners are unaware of the potential interest they hold. Consider how many letters and memoirs of

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43 Dutton, *One of Us?*, 42.
44 Dutton, *One of Us?*, 13.
45 Green, *Repenser les migrations*, 112.
ordinary people still linger in old attics, collecting the dust of time, or have been destroyed, stolen or lost. Besides, many simply did not write, or did so rarely.

According to Wolfgang Helbich and Walter D. Kamphoefner, non-writing migrants could include ‘those who died soon after arrival, the illiterates, entire families that left no close relatives behind, individuals who deliberately broke off contact with home, and a considerable portion of those who failed in one way or another’. 47 Many migrants did not write, could not write, or chose not to write. Letters sent to the French consuls in Australia indeed highlight in harrowing ways the silence into which many fell once they had left home, family and friends. Painful letters sent by family members who had sometimes been decades without news paint an upsetting picture of loss and powerlessness. In Brooklyn in the United States, for instance, a French migrant called Sylvain d’Héron, who must have been living abroad for a long time for his French was deeply Anglicised, wrote to the consul in Melbourne in 1886 as a last resort. He had not heard from his brother in twenty-nine years. Someone from Melbourne had recently tried to call on him in Brooklyn but he had been out. He did not know if it had been his long-estranged brother or perhaps, he feared, someone come to announce his passing. Everybody else in their family had died, and he did not know if he had anyone left.48 Another example is that of Emile Dennemont who had not given his brother in Algiers any sign of life for two years. The latter narrowed his angst to the most simple yet distressing question, asking the consul if his brother ‘still exists’. 49 Some could not remain inactive and went looking for their missing relatives. Pierre Marie Guillerie, a fifty-four year old man working for the steamer company the Messageries Maritimes, tried to extend his stay in Sydney so he could keep looking for his missing brother.50 Meanwhile, Victor Paysan’s own brother in Calvados tried to garner any piece of information he could about his sibling’s whereabouts. After two or three years of roving and questioning, years of uncertainty, he finally found out from sailors in the port of Le Havre that his brother had been spotted navigating along the Melbourne coastline.51

The vast majority of the private queries received at the consulates in Australia were about missing people. These letters, according to the consul, generally led to

48 Silvain d’Héron to Consul Melbourne, 24 May 1886, MAE, 428PO/1/1.
49 A. Dennemont9 to Consul Melbourne, 7 July 1886, MAE, 428PO/1/1.
50 Pierre Guillerie to Consul Sydney, 8 May 1888, MAE, 662/PO/1/3.
51 M. Paysan to Consul Melbourne, 26 November 1888, MAE, 428PO/1/3.
unsuccessful search missions, both because of a lack of information about the missing persons and the lapse of time between their disappearance and the requests from family or friends for help.\textsuperscript{52} In what remains of the consular records, only on one single occasion did a search for a missing person yield results. Dumas Eugène William had not heard from his father in two years, but the latter was found working as a cook at the Hotel Lennon in Brisbane.\textsuperscript{53}

The fact that many immigrants mentioned in the consular files did not communicate with home begs the question of how representative the corpus of letters should be considered to be. A short answer is that it simply is not, for the letters allow only for the smallest glimpse into people’s minds: one, two, perhaps three letters at best from an enquiring prospective migrant or the family left behind, and one or two letters for answer from an official administrator of the French government. These letters are further mediated by their interaction with state power. This limits what is discussed and the manner in which it is discussed. Migrants did not write to the consul to explain how well they were doing. They wrote for assistance. Of course, only a few of the letters received by the consulates survive. To give an order of scale about the corpus, in the archives of the consulates of Melbourne and Sydney I have found 69 letters produced during the period between 1860 and 1914. Yet we know that, for just one year in 1909, the consulate in Melbourne received 169 letters from private individuals (135 from French nationals and 34 from ‘foreigners’). In 1910 it received 159 (112 from French nationals and 47 from ‘foreigners’).\textsuperscript{54} So for a period of about fifty-five years, the corpus represents roughly just over a third of the letters that each consulate would have received for any given year. Since the sample is rather small I do not make claims that the corpus is representative of French emigration in general.

For all their limitations, however, the letters found scattered amidst administrative documents, official letters, yearly reports, and commercial correspondence represent a rare and crucial point of entry into these immigrants’ minds, desires, hopes, longings and pains in ways that no other extant sources allow. The letters also speak more largely of the nature of French migration to Australia, and they enrich and make more complex our understanding of the gendered and racial composition of the migrant networks between France, Australia and the rest of the world. They tell other stories than those of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Pigeonneau to MAE, \textit{Rapport sur l’activité du poste en 1910}, 20 January 1911, MAE, 428PO/1/37.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Rigoreau to Forrest, 18 April 1893, MAE, 662PO/1/2.
\item \textsuperscript{54} I have excluded from my corpus letters that had no information about their senders or the missing people other than their names.
\end{itemize}
the successful male migrant from mainland France who has acclimatized and contributed to his new country. They record voices of those, male and female, who came, but in one way or another ‘failed’ the challenge of integration.

Migrating to Australia

How did prospective French migrants think about moving to the ends of the earth? Although it was a far away destination, of which little was known in France, the idea of the antipodes, a land of inversion on the other side of the world, had existed in the European imagination for about two thousand years before the beginning of white settlement in 1788. All but a figment of the imagination at first, it was an idea and a scientific theory (a large land mass to counter balance the weight of Europe) that mattered greatly, for it set the mental framework through which Australia later came to be perceived. It set the trope of inversion through which early European explorers saw the worlds and peoples they encountered.55 And it was those same explorers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who matched the geographical land mass of Australia and the islands of the Pacific onto this existing European mental map.56

Relatively little was known in France about Australia, and it was not an obvious choice for migration. The voyage accounts of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville and James Cook went through many successive editions in the late-eighteenth century in France and promoted interest in the mysterious and exotic Pacific region. The establishment of the British settlement at Sydney in 1788 fascinated the French for many reasons and a number of books on the topic, scientific and fictional, had been published as early as 1789.57 So from the beginning of European settlement Australia came to be associated with the idea of political exile in French minds. The first play to have Australia as a setting, Les émigrés aux terres australes, was a one-act drama depicting the ordeals of exiled enemies of the Revolution as they strived to rebuild their lives in the antipodes.58

As Jennifer Génion has shown, by 1903, the date of the publication of the third volume

57 Colin Forster, France and Botany Bay, 8.
of Jules Verne’s *Les Frères Kip*, tropes of Australia as a place of banishment had become fixed: in the novel, the main protagonists are sent to life imprisonment in Port Arthur in 1885, despite the penitentiary having closed eight years earlier. Verne also relied on descriptions of Hobart written by Durmont d’Urville in the 1820s and 1830s. Similarly, in the iconography of mass publications such as *Le Tour du Monde* and *L’Illustration*, depictions of the Australian environment remained largely unchanged through the nineteenth century. It was depicted as luxuriant and abounding, whilst the Indigenous population fell prey to the marriage of social Darwinism and the advent of modern anthropology, being gradually demoted from the status of good savage to that of an anthropophagic dying race. Australia was a masculine space of adventure evolving ‘from penal settlement to frontier society’. But the recently settled colonies also gradually came under scrutiny as a fast-developing part of the British Empire where the progress of its rapidly urbanising towns served as a commentary on the superiority of the British colonial empire and a critique of the failings of the French.

Outside popular literature, however, information about Australia was hard to come by. Antoine Fauchery’s *Letters from a Miner in Australia* and C. Brout’s *Guide des émigrants aux mines d’or* were replete with otherwise scarce information (in French) about life in the gold fields, but also warned of its dangers and pitfalls. Around the same period, however, the Countess de Chabrillan’s fictionalised account of the crudeness of the goldfields would also have given many food for thought. She was a celebrated Parisian demi-mondaine – a successful and acclaimed high end courtesan – known as ‘La Mogadore’. Despite being married to the consul of France in Victoria, she found herself ostracised for her scandalous background. *The Gold Robbers* was her revenge.

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Indeed, literature was probably the most liberally available repository of information about Australia. Fictionalised publications that took Australia as a setting were not numerous during the nineteenth century but they would have contributed to refining a certain view of the ‘ends of the world’. Jules Verne’s *In Search of the Castaways* or Alexandre Dumas’ *Journal of Madame Giovanni* are prime examples of books that crystalized visions of Australia as a land of exile and exoticism to a French audience in the late nineteenth century. But Verne and Dumas never set foot in Australia. In fact only four French fiction writers in the nineteenth century are known to have travelled there. The others were armchair travellers who relied on second-hand information, borrowing liberally from the growing volume of publications from various geographical societies, feeding from and responding to an expanding market for the exotic and the unknown.

Public talks and conferences could also motivate some to leave. The journalist and writer Tasma (Jessie Couvreur) gave a number of talks about the Australian colonies during her time in France and Belgium to promote migration. At the *Société de Géographie Commerciale* on 20 July 1880 she discussed the advantages of her great and beautiful native land ‘almost as beautiful as Paris’ and with a population of only three million. Tongue in cheek, she teased her Parisian audience for whom, she knew, ‘to leave Paris is to leave the world’. She taunted them with the suggestion that so little was known in France about Australia that some, in fact, thought it part of California (Was it not where gold came from?). She perorated that nothing was lacking in the beautiful cities of the east coast ‘except that artistic talent which you would be so apt to provide’. Reportedly it was after hearing Tasma holding forth on Australia that Monsieur and Madame Berthe Mouchette, the latter of whom would become the celebrated founder of the *Alliance Française* in Melbourne, made their way to the

64 Chabrillan de, *The Gold Robbers*, ix; Génion has identified sixty three texts - novels, short stories or plays - wholly or partly set in Australia, a relatively small corpus compared to the mass publication market of the nineteenth century. She added seven texts to the checklist established by Patricia Clancy and Colin Thornton-Smith, but left out the novels of Paul Wenz, see her introduction in particular. See also Patricia Clancy and Colin Thornton-Smith, *Analytical Checklist of French Fiction and Pseudo-Memoirs Set in Colonial Australia* (Melbourne: ISFAR, 1991).


antipodes. There were no great preparations, no careful planning. Leaving the conference, Monsieur Mouchette turned to his wife and her sister, Mlle Lion and said, half in jest, ‘Shall we go to Australia?’ She acquiesced: ‘Why not?’ and, her sister having no objections either, their fate was decided on that leisurely evening.\textsuperscript{69} We will encounter Madame Mouchette again in Chapter Six.

Despite the fact that many knew little about Australia, they were intrigued by the possibilities. In this spirit many prospective migrants wrote to the consuls, the only port-of-call they had to express their desire to migrate, but admitting to their utter lack of knowledge about their place of choice. Henriette Repiquete from the Saône et Loire, with her ‘primary school teacher diploma’ wrote to the Consul, explaining she could play the piano, give singing lessons, and sing in soirées. She wanted to know if she could honourably earn a living in Melbourne. ‘If you cannot give me this information’ she wrote, ‘to whom should I turn?’\textsuperscript{70} A recent graduate from the French medical faculty in Beyrouth wrote to the Consul telling him he did not want to stay in Syria, was contemplating migration to Australia but admittedly knew next to nothing about the country.\textsuperscript{71}

The rational actor theory in immigration history posits that people made a conscious choice to move to better their lot in life. Indeed, many imagined, simply, that the grass was greener elsewhere and Australia could lead to better opportunities. A Parisian dressmaker was told that hers was a good profession over there. Would she encounter success with her ‘mode de Paris’ if she chose to migrate?\textsuperscript{72} From Monte Carlo, a croupier wanted a full-time job.\textsuperscript{73} A French cook in Chicago, already on his way to Boston, wanted any information he could get should he not strike his luck soon.\textsuperscript{74} Many students also thought of migration to better their chances: with a child-like handwriting a third year student at the Ecole Nationale d’Agriculture in Montpellier anticipated soon completing his degree and, though he had no contacts in the colonies, he wondered if his knowledge of English could help him make a living in Australia.\textsuperscript{75} At twenty-five Henri Lecomte, who had just completed his military service, was undertaking studies in

\textsuperscript{69} Oscar Comettant*, Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or (Paris: Fischbacher, 1890), 210–211, Comettant writes that the party of three left France for Australia in the middle of 1881 after hearing a public talk by Tasma at the Société de Géographie. Given the time necessary to make preparations it is possible that the conference they attended was the one quoted here and delivered on 20 July 1880.

\textsuperscript{70} Henriette Repiquet* to Consul Melbourne, 29 April 1899, MAE, 428PO/1/12.

\textsuperscript{71} Dr. Essely to Consul Melbourne, 1892, MAE, 428PO/1/11.

\textsuperscript{72} Mme Laborie to Consul Melbourne, 28 May 1891, MAE, 428PO/1/10.

\textsuperscript{73} Pierre Gavi to Consul Melbourne, 19 Novembre 1918, MAE, 428PO/1/42.

\textsuperscript{74} Clément Adrien to Consul Melbourne, 12 August 1893, MAE, 428PO/1/12.

\textsuperscript{75} Victor Crémieux to Consul Melbourne, 1 November 1891, MAE, 428PO/1/10.
agriculture and viticulture at the *Ecole Nationale*. Straight to the point, he wanted to know if he could rise through the ranks faster in the antipodes. For Marie Reynand, a thirty-year old piano and mandolin teacher from Marseille, it was hearsay that sparked her interest. She was told by several ship captains anchoring at the city-port that she would be very successful there as a pianist.

**Unfulfilled dreams**

Hopes were many and the stakes were high. But for some who took the plunge, Australia was not the economic *El Dorado* they had hoped to find. In 1886 George Henri d’Alphonse, the son of an army officer now retired in Madrid, wrote to the consul from the American Bar in Melbourne where he had been working, asking to be repatriated: ‘here in this country, in Melbourne, I scarcely make a living in a hotel with 12 shillings per week which is not enough for all my needs, and I have neither friends nor acquaintances.’

Marie Coing, after four years in Melbourne, also wrote requesting repatriation to France a year before the outbreak of the First World War. She had come to Australia on a one year contract with her journey paid for as a furrier. But as she found that ‘the work conditions were the complete opposite of what I was promised, I left and stayed in Sydney for two and a half years’. When employment also became scarce in Sydney she moved back to Melbourne where she worked from her rented bedroom ‘lining fur’ but the season for fur was coming to an end so, she wrote, ‘If I am to be destitute, I might as well be destitute in my country.’ She did not think she would ever manage to save enough money to buy her passage back, and her father in France had just died. ‘I am ready to leave, Australia is a beautiful country, but poverty is hard.’ After ascertaining the veracity of her story the consulate paid for her passage back to France.

Many other stories of failure and unfullfiled aspirations stand out in the consular archives. Some were given by the consul himself as a warning to others. Indeed, although very few replies have survived, it is striking that of the ones that have, all of them, uncompromisingly, tried to deter migrants. The consul wrote back in haste to

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76 Henry Lecomte to Consul Melbourne, 12 Octobre 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/30.
77 Marie Reynand to Consul Melbourne, 6 October 1900, MAE, 428PO/1/23.
78 George Henri d’Alphonse* to Consul Melbourne, 2 November 1886, MAE 428PO/1/1.
79 Marie Coing* to Consul Melbourne, 14 July 1913, MAE, 428PO/1/42.
80 Internal note, 21 July 1913, MAE, 428PO/1/42.
Marie le Callee, the teacher of French in Cork: ‘hasten … to dissuade you, if possible, from coming to Australia to seek, not even fortune, but a modest affluence’. The consul’s advice came in contrast to Tasma’s enthusiastic promotion of Australia as a country in need of migrants of the artistic and intellectual bent: ‘Unfortunately for you there are already too many teachers of French in this country, where, in order to eke out a living, they are reduced to giving lessons at ridiculously low prices.’

Similarly, in response to queries about wine manufacturing in Victoria, the same consul retorted that the industry was not doing well, and that migrant labour would face many obstacles, including a rather acute crisis which will not facilitate your placement in a country where foreigners are looked upon suspiciously by a working class very hostile to immigration.

He tried to redirect his correspondent to the French Empire, where he would easily, the consul claimed, find the position and prosperity he desired with ‘the advantage of living in a national, that is to say, a favourable, environment’.

There is no indication of an official policy from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that French citizens should be prevented to move to non-French colonies but word was nonetheless sent out that they should be strongly discouraged. In December 1906, in response to an advertisement from the Victorian state government trying to recruit French or Algerian wine-growers, the Consul in Melbourne, Paul Maistre, asked the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to circulate a dispatch to the Ministry of Agriculture and to the Government office in Algeria to dissuade his compatriots from giving any credence to the advertised offers, and warning that nothing but misery awaited them:

Completely ignorant of the language, the habits and customs of the country and consequently obliged to accept any offer, they are in general intentionally exploited until the day when their Australian employer, having amply profited from their specialised knowledge and experienced labour, dismisses them and they then realise they have lost their quarry in the shadows, and toiled for others.

To illustrate his remarks he gave the cautionary tale of three brothers, ‘good wine-growers, with all kinds of excellent certificates, and who left good positions in Algeria for the vagaries of Victoria following a speech of Lord Jersey and the information they were given by the British Consul in Algiers!’ He believed it a ‘humanitarian’ and ‘national’ duty to stop the migration of French growers ‘to that same Australia that was...’

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81 Consul Melbourne* to Marie le Callee, 15 June 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/30.
82 Consul Melbourne* to Henry Lecomte, 15 December 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/30.
so delighted, fifteen years ago, by the destruction of our vineyards by phylloxera outbreaks, and whose wines come in direct competition with ours’.

Not all migrants were primarily concerned with improved economic opportunities. For some Australia was tempting because it offered a prospect of escape from the reaches of the law. A distraught father sent a photograph of his sixteen year old son, whose ‘love of travel and mainly for distant lands makes me think he might have fled to Australia’. He had stolen a large sum of money from the bank, and Australia was one of the furthest places to which he could escape. Some were indeed not attracted to the lush Australian bush of the novels of Jules Verne, but to the legal opportunities, and the possibility to start anew, and to forget poor choices. Writing from Latin America, Dannie Favre wanted to know if a woman ‘separated from bread, board and assets’ from her husband could be remarried immediately in Australia. In France she would have had to wait for three years to have the separation commuted into a divorce. Writing from Burma in 1891, Madame Lusanne Chalauser was trying to find her missing newlywed. They had only just tied the knot, but he was nowhere to be found, and she heard rumours he might have married a German woman in Australia. Suzanna Thibault in Scotland also thought her husband might be in Australia: he had left her seven years earlier and had not given her any news in the past three. She enclosed a photograph. In 1886 Monsieur Borelle wrote from Saïgon about his wife who left him seven years earlier to take up a position working for an architect in Melbourne. When she refused to come back, his lawyer took over and threatened her, via the consul in Melbourne, with a divorce. Perhaps Borelle should have known better at this point. She asked the consul to ‘please inform him that I am very happy where I am, and I engage him to always respect my peace of mind’, she signed with her maiden name. The divorce was pronounced on 19 December 1887; he wrote a last letter telling her ‘you are the author of my ruin’.

Despite the emphasis amongst historians on economic motivations for migration, we should not forget that Australia was, from the beginning of white settlement, associated in French minds with the idea of exile and that not all who went there did so of their

83 Consul Melbourne* to MAE, 11 December 1906, MAE, 139CPCOM/13.
84 Fernand Gracin* to Consul Melbourne, 14 July 1914, MAE, 428PO/1/44.
85 Dannie Favre* to Consul Melbourne, 2 February 1888, MAE, 428PO/1/3.
86 Madame Lusanne Chalauser to Consul Melbourne, 1891, MAE, 428PO/1/11.
87 Suzanne Thibault to Consul Melbourne, 191?, MAE, 428PO/1/38.
88 M. Borelle to Consul Melbourne, 12 January 1886; M. Guiniac to Consul Melbourne, 15 May 1886; Mme Borelle* to Consul Melbourne, 22 February 1886; M. Borelle to Consul Melbourne, 20 December 1887; M. Borelle* to Mademoiselle Isoline Pédron, 20 December 1887, MAE, 428PO/1/3.
own volition. Aside from New Caledonian convicts passing through or seeking opportunities in Australia, others found themselves exiled, one way or another, to the far reaches of the earth. One example is Henri Bocquet. His family had contracted him for seven years to the French army in an attempt to be rid of him. Their reasons are unknown: perhaps they had hoped the military stint would help him mature, or possibly make him into a more responsible man, a more trustworthy person, the son they wanted rather than the one they had. What we do know is that, as soon as he returned from the army they immediately sent him away again, this time to Cairns in far north Queensland to work in the sugar industry. He made his way to Melbourne as soon as he could. Along the way he was reported to have been sponging off anyone who fell for his charms, for he seemed to have plenty. When the consulate made enquiries to his family, his mother retorted that ‘neither she nor her husband wished to hear about their son, that they did not want to do anything more for him and did not wish for his return to France’. After being rejected by his family we find a small trail of Henri’s passage in the Melbourne newspapers. For a time he worked as a tutor in English and arithmetic and then, in late July 1886, he walked into a pawnshop on Elizabeth Street and threatened to kill himself. Allegedly, this was after a woman, Dolly Hickson, refused to marry him. He was remanded by the bench for medical treatment and discharged. Perhaps his love object changed her mind, or perhaps he got ahead of himself, but enquiries were made to France to have his papers forwarded so a marriage could be contracted. Yet his family’s reach and hold over his life never wavered, even in his forced exile. Australia was far away, too far for his family to know anything about the girl’s reputation, but not far enough to lessen the fear of a damaging social connection. They refused to send him his papers.

Conclusion

Egypt, Brooklyn, Algiers, the Saône et Loire, Syria, Paris, Monte Carlo, Chicago, Montpellier, Marseille, Canada, Cork, Madrid, Latin America, Burma, Scotland and Saïgon: one is struck by the diversity of places prospective migrants wrote from. The consular letters emphasize the high level of mobility of many migrants and their diverse points of origin, writing from inside as well as outside the French mainland. They show

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89 Dossier Boucquet (Henri)*, July 1886, MAE, 428PO/1/1.
90 Age, 26 July 1886, 7; Argus, 26 July 1886, 6; 7 August 1886, 5.
91 Madame Bocquet to Consul Melbourne, 30 January 1887, MAE, 428PO/1/1.
complex and multidirectional networks extending not only throughout but also well beyond the French Empire. They highlight the successes as well as the failures of some of the men and women who contemplated undertaking the long journey to the antipodes. And while they do not tell the whole story, they still illuminate the sheer scope of the diversity of human experiences composing the tapestry of French migration.

Although Georges Crivelli thought the negative opinion of Australians towards the French was a reaction to those migrants, other factors, such as France’s involvement in the South Pacific, probably had more weight. Indeed, it is unlikely that French migrants had very much of an impact on general perceptions of France and the French considering how deeply rooted such perceptions were in the millennium-long relationship between France and Britain, a relationship to which Australia was the heir. Indeed, precisely because French culture had a long-established place in the cultural landscape of the Anglo-Saxon world, it is easy to see that the French themselves were often not an essential vehicle for the dissemination of that culture abroad. Certainly individuals could play a role, but as a migrant group the French presence was not necessary to bring French culture to British settler colonies. Had these French men and women never come to Australia, Australian visions of France might have remained largely unchanged. But then, if Frenchness was not the prerogative of the French to define, what meaning did it hold, and for whom? The following three chapters move from the realm of public images and what informed them to considerations about the meaning of Frenchness for different groups and individuals: for French expatriates, for a migrant family, and for Anglo-Australians. Those chapters consider questions about self-definition but also about instrumentality, what Frenchness meant and what it could do. The first of these three chapters takes us to Sydney and Melbourne, and to the elite and elitist male microcosms of the French businessmen Georges Crivelli admired. For the men within those little worlds, being French was not just a nationality, but an intrinsic component of their status and their honour as gentlemen, both in relation to each other and to the Australian nation.
Chapter 4

Frenchmen On The Boil

In the years after the Great War, Georges M. Crivelli spoke of a ‘French colony’ in Australia composed of about 200 individuals, of whom only a handful he deemed worth knowing. The word ‘colony’ was not meant in a strict sense as a formal settlement. Rather, it should be understood as a changing social space whose fluid borders evolved with the course of time and the arrival and departure of migrants. Both in Sydney and Melbourne these little worlds were constituted by networks formed around webs of commerce, kith and kin, and an attachment to, or identification with, the French nation. They were not closed off national enclaves but rather networks of people sharing a similar habitus that brought them together.

In light of the fluid nature of these communities, considering ‘the French’ in Australia as an analytical category raises problematic questions about belonging and nationality. It risks the creation of a false dichotomy between an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’ of the group. Indeed, thinking in terms of groupings begs questions about the way historians project contemporary political identities onto a complex, contested and changing past. In their different ways, both Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, amongst others, have advanced useful theories of ‘practice’ that permit a focus on the processes by which actors formulate strategies to navigate the social world. These theories help us to recognise that groups are not homogenous and identity is not a given but rather that both are underwritten by complex relations of power. Indeed, identities are often built in a game of contextual definition that involves both collectives and individuals. Solidarity and difference are two sides of a coin: people, when they can, will choose from different options available to them to serve their interests within existing social structures. To be French in that sense reflects more than a word on the page of a passport: it is performative, a doing.

1 Crivelli and Louvet, L’Australie et le Pacifique, 186.

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That French colony is easier to locate in Sydney than in Melbourne, for it was anchored in a physical location. From the 1850s, a number of French and francophone settlers elected to live in the northern district of Hunter’s Hill. As time went on, they were joined by a large number of French and Belgian wool-buyers and their families who added another layer to a protean world revolving largely, as we will see in the first part of this chapter, around the official representatives of France in Australia.

In what follows I seek to illustrate the complexity of the interpersonal relations of French men in Australia, both with the host Australian community and amongst themselves. Unlike the preceding chapter, the focus here is on the people Crivelli did consider worth knowing. The focus is on these smaller, elite and elitist, networks of people because they constituted a self-selected group that loosely considered its members to be le-tout Sydney and Melbourne. As such they serve as an appropriate focus for examining the relations of power at play in the interconnected space between individual and group identity.

In the second and third parts of this chapter, I consider two case studies of events that took place in Sydney and Melbourne during the late 1890s. I use these to flesh out the ways in which group and personal identities were performed in relation to concepts of nationality and honour and with what aims. The first story takes us to Sydney in 1898, during the time of the Dreyfus affair, when the young Governor of New South Wales, William Lygon, the seventh Earl of Beauchamp, insulted the French nation during an unfortunate speech delivered in the small mining town of Cobar. The speech earned him the ire of the patriotic French business community and further eroded his already shaky reputation amongst Australian colonists. We then move on to Victoria where we will consider an internecine conflict that gripped the Melbourne French colony for a number of years during a series of libel cases involving Dr. Marcel Crivelli (George Crivelli’s father) and other prominent French notables. The divisive cases – to the bewildered Australian court, judges and the local press – amalgamated questions about personal reputation, nationality, shares in a fraudulent mining company in Western Australia, and a flower pot that may or may not have been thrown across a table.

4 Crivelli and Louvet, L’Australie et le Pacifique, 186.
5 Recent scholarship on honour codes has challenged the idea of the neat separation of public and private spheres between men and women. Andrea Mansker in particular has demonstrated the porosity of male codes of honour and their uses by women to redefine both the private and public relationships between the sexes and women’s gendered and political place in the French Republic. However, because the arenas in which the action of this chapter took place were inhabited by men, this chapter is concerned with male behaviours. See William M. Reddy, The Invisible Code: Honor and Sentiment in Postrevolutionary
A French village

In the 1970s the suburb of Hunter’s Hill in Sydney’s north was lauded by one observer for the charm of its quaint sandstone houses built in the second half of the nineteenth century. Despite the newer 1940s and 1950s red-brick constructions, the suburb still maintained:

something of the atmosphere of a French provincial town: settled, reclusive, standing apart. One strolls along shady, secluded streets with stone fences, wrought-iron gates, and tantalising glimpses of creamy shutters and colonnaded porches.\(^6\)

This architecture stands as a reminder that the district was, for a generation or two in the 1850s, known in Sydney as the ‘French village’.\(^7\)

The land of Hunter’s Hill had been bought and subdivided between 1847 and the 1880s by the two entrepreneurial Joubert brothers we encountered briefly in the last chapter. Didier Joubert was largely responsible for the brothers’ project, which turned what had been a rather insalubrious area into an exclusive and sought-after location. Historians have tended to give Jules Joubert most of the credit for the successful venture, perhaps because Jules did not shy away from putting himself in the limelight – indeed, he entirely omitted his brother from his autobiography.\(^8\)

During the second half of the century the brothers built at least thirteen houses in the area, all but one made of the local sandstone. According to Jules’s own biography, construction was undertaken by about seventy contracted Italian masons and carpenters who had been brought in for this express purpose and who were paid less than the local workforce.\(^9\)

The brothers and their respective children improved on the cachet and practicality of the area by building competitive steamship lines between Hunter’s Hill and the rest of Sydney, breaking into the monopoly of Edye Manning’s ferry company, whose only competition thus far had been ‘French Louis’, an old drunken runaway whaler who made a living by selling oysters and carrying passengers to and fro in an outrigger.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) Joubert, *Shavings and Scrapes in Many Parts*; on Jules Joubert see also Douglas, ‘Jules Joubert, Australia’s Nineteenth-Century Exhibition Impresario’.


By the mid 1850s, more French and francophone settlers joined the Joubert brothers and built their own houses in the district. These included the Baron de Milhau, who came to Australia following the upheavals of 1848 in France, the French-speaking Swiss Leonard Bordier, and the Australian-born Edward Jeanneret, who had French Huguenot ancestry. Soon more French-sounding names followed: Du Boisé, Vernay, Doublet, Boileau, and the Delarue family, who will be the focus of the next chapter. On the southern shore, the French Marist brothers established themselves at the aptly named Villa Maria. They huddled around Passy, the residence of the French consul François Sentis, built by the Joubert brothers in 1855–6, upon whose roof the tricolour flag could be seen floating proudly.

It is useful to think of these people, with their various levels of social standing, claims to aristocratic or religious lineages and entrepreneurial fervour not as a clearly defined group, but rather as a community of feeling, or, as Barbara Rosenwein has expressed it, an ‘emotional community’:

> These are precisely the same as social communities – families, neighborhoods, parliaments, guilds, monasteries, parish church memberships – but the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others’ emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.

From the 1870s, as commerce between France and Australia increased, these French and francophone settlers were joined by a small but fast-growing number of wool buyers and later their families. Before a telegraph line accelerated communication between Europe and Australia in 1872, Belgian and northern French wool-buying firms sent lone buyers out to Australia, with power to act on their own authority and with hard cash in their luggage. As this commerce became more important, and communication and transport easier, companies opened offices in Melbourne and Sydney with permanent representatives. As a strong network based on ties of commerce and family, as well as by their numbers and economic and social status, the little wool-buying

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community quickly came to dominate the higher social strata of the Francophone world of Sydney.

The wool-buying businessmen formed a relatively insular group that hinged on several French societies that they either directly helped to create or in which they played key roles. One was the *French Chamber of Commerce*, created in 1899. Its first president, Georges Playoust, was a short, congenial, cigar-smoking Frenchman who indulged in what Norman Linsday called ‘the national prejudice in favour of whiskers’. He had arrived with his young family and his brother ten years earlier from the northern French city of Tourcoing, settling first in Melbourne, then in Sydney. Another society, the *Comptoir National d’Escompte de Paris* in Melbourne was specifically created to help with the trade of wool between France and Australia. These two institutions added to the already existing *Courrier Australien* (1892), the *Société de Bienfaisance* (1891) and the *Alliance Française* of Sydney (1899). The *Alliance* in Melbourne had opened almost a decade earlier, but as we will see in Chapter Six, its purpose within the French community was very much contested until the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. The wool-buyers divided their lives between the wool stores and the Wool Exchange on Macquarie Place, with frequent trips back to France as transport improved. They also developed close bonds with the official representatives of the French government in Sydney, and the network of bankers and navigators who were the fulcrum of their commercial ventures. In addition to the possibilities offered by the telegraph, the opening in 1882 of a Messagerie Maritime line, whose steamships could now avoid the long haul around the Cape by going through the recently opened Suez Canal, allowed the creation of a francophone world in Sydney directly connected to France, a world-within-a-world that operated within and parallel to the greater routes of the British Empire.

The strength of the wool-buying community, as a tightly-knit national and commercial network in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sydney, should not overshadow the cosmopolitan meaning still attached to French culture by many others. The *Courrier Australien* was, for instance, founded by a Polish nobleman. The francophone Count Charles Wroblewski, who had married a year earlier the granddaughter of a French

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15 *The Lone Hand*, 1 July 1912, 188.
16 Dwyer, *Flanders in Australia*, 24.
count guillotined during the Revolution, intended the paper to be a weekly ‘cosmopolitan’ journal, published in French, the *Journal Cosmopolitain du Samedi*. The very first number explained the expansiveness of the word *cosmopolitain*: the journal sought to cover subjects as diverse as politics, literature, sciences, the arts, commerce and fashion. It targeted an Anglo-Saxon readership as well as a French one, and it reported on world and local news alike.

The choice of the French language for the publication rested in the quiet confidence of its owner and staff that it was the language of diplomacy and would soon be that of commerce. From its second issue it even offered French lessons, positing with self-assurance – in English – that

No education is considered complete *anywhere* which does not include French as one of its principal elements; no person can travel outside the purely English-speaking world and wish to secure the entry into cultivated society who is not able to converse in French.

Wroblewki’s ambitions for the journal, and perhaps for the French language, did not, however, match the mood in the colonies. The journal was in financial difficulty almost from its inception. In 1896 the owner admitted the paper was, and had been for some time, in a dire situation, and that it was losing its limited readership quickly to what he thought to be a fiercely nationalist and jingoistic Australian press.

In 1898 the paper was bought by a group of French notables and given a decidedly more nationalist tone. It served to consolidate the work of the *Alliance Française*, the *French Benevolent Society* and the *French Chamber of Commerce*. The newspaper had been assisted from the outset with an injection of 3,000 francs from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, in addition to revenue from advertising, it still relied on subsidies until those were stopped in 1908–9. By 1912 the board of directors estimated that the weekly paper sold only about 200 copies, and once again had to ask for subsidies. As Ivan Barko points out in his overview of the first years of the *Courrier*, there was a clear perception in Sydney that the French newspaper was very much influenced, if not

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20 *Courrier Australien*, 30 April 1892, 1.
21 *Courrier Australien*, 7 May 1892, 1.
22 Déjardin to Hanotaux, 20 April 1896, MAE, 139CPCOM/21.
24 Consul General to MAE, 25 February 1913, MAE, 139CPCOM/21.
officially run, by the consul general, Georges Biard d’Aunet. In 1896 the newspaper’s offices moved to 2 Bond Street in the same building that already housed the Consulate General, the Benevolent Society, and the Library of the Alliance Française. Three years later the Alliance proper and the French Chamber of Commerce relocated there as well. Biard d’Aunet was a ubiquitous figure at all these institutions, and it is easy to see how the French colony ordered itself in a neat hierarchy around the highest-ranked representative of the French government in Australia, much as they had done since the 1850s. One of the board members suggested in 1912 that it was indeed Georges Biard d’Aunet who had pushed for the creation of the paper, henceforth acting as an *eminence grise*, and that as such the newspaper represented as much his interests as those of the French community. But if the consul was a key figure around which this small Gallic world revolved, the inner workings of this expatriate community were complex and fraught with conflict. As much as their Frenchness brought them together, it could also divide them.

**An indivisible people**

Some of the core dynamics at play within the French colony in Australia at the close of the nineteenth century become apparent when we consider a series of incidents that took place in the shadow of the Dreyfus Affair – a scandal that deeply shook France and was avidly followed and scrutinised across the world. In 1894 the French state condemned the Jewish artillery officer Captain Alfred Dreyfus for high treason for allegedly selling military secrets to Germany. Dreyfus was demoted and deported to Devil’s Island, off French Guiana, after a rigged and expedited first trial. Few could have imagined then how long the Affair would last and the social and political ramifications it would have for the cultural fabric of the Third Republic. The Affair became a world-wide *cause célèbre* two years after Dreyfus’s exile when his family, with the support of leading liberal and left-leaning intellectuals, publicly denounced the real traitor as well as the state and army conspiracy that had victimised the innocent captain. For the French, the Affair forced heated debates about politics and society, national decline, the body politic and anti-Semitism. It touched the home, affecting people in a personal as well as a public manner, deeply dividing families and friends between *Dreyfusards* and *anti-

26 Consul General to MAE, 25 February 1913, MAE, 139CPCOM/21.
27 *Argus*, 26 November 1898, 13.
In Australia tensions were also felt amongst the French colonists but were in part overcome when the Frenchmen united against strong criticism from foreigners. Their projected common identity as Frenchmen encouraged them to assert their own collective status and honour in their own eyes and in the eyes of the population of New South Wales.

In the years prior to the Dreyfus affair, several international crises had given British and Australian newspapers fodder to rail against the French: the Fashoda stand-off in Egypt, France’s position in the Boer War, and of course the question over the undefined status of the New Hebrides and the French penal settlement in New Caledonia. But the Dreyfus Affair was different because it was a Franco-French crisis. It was an internal affair that divided the country in half, and it was precisely this schism that attracted commentary on the other side of the Channel, much as it did in the rest of the world. In the colonies in the South Seas, many press reports condemning France and its judicial process were reprinted directly from the British papers or largely plagiarised. And although the Evening News, for instance, called for calm and a dispassionate understanding of what was ‘an exceedingly complicated trial in a distant country’, many reports and editorials were incendiary. To British observers, the second condemnation of Dreyfus at his second trial at Rennes in August and September 1899, even more than the first, seemed a symptom of the inferiority of a bigoted, belligerent and degenerating Latin race, and highlighted the failures of the French republican model, its institutions and its authoritarian army.

Surprisingly perhaps, considering the intense polarisation of debate around this affair, the French Courrier Australien chose to remain impartial, staying true to its founding principles. That is, it chose not to declare itself in favour of, or against, Dreyfus. It still defended the French nation with a certain patriotic verve when it reacted against slurs.

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29 Signed protest letter from the French notables of Sydney to the Consul-General in reaction to the Cobar incident, undated, MAE, 139CPCOM/9.
30 Courrier Australien, 13 December 1902, 2.
31 Argus, 26 November 1898, 13; The Evening News, 5 October 1899, 4.
33 Courrier Australien, 30 April 1892, 1.
thrown in the direction of the French Government and its judicial process.\textsuperscript{34} Perhaps it saw its role to serve as a unifying, rather than a dividing force, for the local French community; and many amongst that community felt they were facing a constant volley of attacks from the local press. Editorials, notices and private letters to the \textit{Courrier} were candid about the proliferation of what their authors’ thought to be gross and gratuitous misrepresentations of France and the French, irrespective of what was happening in the trials. They were critical of British newspapers such as the \textit{Times}, the \textit{Standard}, and the \textit{Daily Telegraph}. And they extended similar condemnation to the Australian press which, writers in the \textit{Courrier} believed, was going on about Dreyfus \textit{ad nauseam} because the affair served as a vehicle for venting pre-existing Gallophobic sentiments. The \textit{Courrier} deplored these attacks, lamenting that news coverage in Australia had ‘offended a great number of people’ in the local French community.\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, the pages of the French weekly give a strong sense that the French felt victimised and disrespected by the Australian population. When Dreyfus was finally declared innocent, the \textit{Courrier} welcomed the decision not just for the man himself but for the peace of the French residents in Australia. The pardon ‘puts a stop’, it said, to the ‘outburst’ in the press, ‘the main object of which, in the minds of those who were the most indignant, was to be disagreeable to us’.\textsuperscript{36}

More than just words on paper, the Affair also kindled existing sectarian animosity against the French. Several events took place that singled out the French and laid opprobrium upon them, diminishing their status and standing in the colony. A rabbi in distant Perth in Western Australia summoned his congregation in 1898 to lament the anti-Semitism that had taken a grip of the French judicial and political system and which showed to the rest of the world that ‘France has fallen to the last rung of civilised nations’.\textsuperscript{37} Closer, in Sydney, at a meeting at the Protestant Hall a minister made a show of sending a letter of sympathy to Dreyfus and his wife, explicitly attacking the French army – based on a dubious past experience in France – by linking the perceived anti-Semitism of its officers to their greed, happy to borrow from Jewish lenders but not keen to repay them.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Courrier Australien}, 20 May 1899, 2.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Courrier Australien}, 4 November 1899, 3; 12 March 1898, 1; 9 June 1900, 4.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Courrier Australien}, 23 September 1899, 3.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Courrier Australien*}, 3 September 1898, 2.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Evening News}, 5 October 1899, 4.
The incident that aggrieved most French colonists during the Affair, however, was a speech delivered at Cobar by the haughty and blunder-prone Lord Beauchamp, the last Governor of New South Wales before Federation. During his visit to the small mining town, a twenty-hour train trip from Sydney, the twenty-seven year old earl held forth at length on the Dreyfus case during a public speech. The Governor first opened his speech to the seventy invited guests by expressing how pleased he was that neither the town Mayor nor the aldermen, all present on that day, had embezzled any money from the profits of the mines. After insulting the Australian colonists, he then moved on to the French by calling the Dreyfus trial ‘a hideous travesty of justice’ and expressed his pride in being an Englishman rather than a Frenchman.39

The Australian press was either bemused by this diplomatic faux-pas or too embarrassed even to acknowledge it. The Evening News light-heartedly pointed to the Governor’s official function as being so profoundly pointless and perfunctory in these times of political change that he was fulfilling his mission well by at least giving ‘loyal subjects something to talk about’. The Australian Star tried to defend the Governor, but omitted reference to what he had said.40 The speech was reported by other newspapers in full or in part. The Daily Telegraph paraphrased the Governor’s insult to France thus:

he said that it was all very well to speak of liberty, equality, and fraternity in France. But there was certainly no freedom or equality, as the soldier was distinguished from the man, and fraternity excluded the Jew. He described the trial as a hideous travesty of justice. The way that the officials tried to bolster up the case against Dreyfus made him feel glad that he was an Englishman, and not a Frenchman.41

This, as Ivan Barko has pointed out, was what irked the French expatriates. Beauchamp was not simply siding with Dreyfus, he was insulting both his supporters and detractors.42 More than that, he was attacking the very fabric of the French Republic, the foundational principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. As such, this was an assault on the collective honour of all French citizens. But to better understand the Cobar affair, we need to take a step back and consider the feud that had been raging for some time already between the twenty-seven year old William Lygon, the seventh Earl of Beauchamp and the French consul general.

40 Biard d’Aunet to Delcassé, 3 October 1899, MAE, 139CPCOM/9; Evening News, 28 September 1899, 6; Australian Star reproduced in Courrier Australien, 14 October 1899, 3.
A personal quarrel

The dispute had its roots in years of spite and conflict between two larger than life characters. On each side of the growing chasm that separated them, both men were probably more alike than they realised. Both found themselves at odds, not only with one another, but with many in the community during a period of increasing nationalism and assertive egalitarian rhetoric.

By all accounts Beauchamp was ill-fitted for his appointment. He himself confessed that at the time he was offered the role he ‘scarcely knew where was the colony & certainly nothing about it’. Worse than his geography, however, was his lack of understanding regarding the social mores of the colonists. Beauchamp had put the proverbial foot deep in the social mire by touching on the taboo of convictism as soon as he arrived in Australia. Disembarking in Freemantle, he spoke to the gathered press and made an attempt at a tribute to the progress of the colonies by adapting a verse from Kipling’s Songs of the Cities: ‘Greeting! Your birthstain have you turned to good,’ which did not go down well.

In an era in which the position he held was heavily scrutinized, he came under fire for insisting that his rank should give him precedence over his female companions when climbing into carriages, and for demanding that his own sister should curtsey to him and leave the room backwards at public functions. Beauchamp, with his over-emphasis on courtly etiquette, could ironically have found an ally in George Biard d’Aunet, had the two men not found themselves on opposite sides of the punctilio that they both clung to so dearly.

George Biard d’Aunet himself was a man greatly attached to status, which equally antagonised the colonists. In early 1901 in Melbourne, amidst the protocol confusion and mishaps that an event like the opening of the first Parliament of the Commonwealth

of Australia could generate, he was proud to inform his Ministry that he had been
placed in the first rank, although the official Tom Roberts painting shows him in the
third or fourth rank (Plate 4.1). He insisted on using his mother’s noble surname (she
was the author Léonie d’Aunet – renowned for her long-lasting affair with Victor Hugo)
though the practice was repeatedly denounced by his colleagues and the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs systematically referred to him in official correspondence simply as
George Biard. He was instrumental in suggesting and implementing changes to French
consular representation in Australia, downgrading the Melbourne Consulate to a Vice-
Consulate and seeing his own position henceforth greatly enhanced as the French
government’s representative for the whole of Australia.

Ironically, it is the things that made Beauchamp and Biard so similar that pitted them
against one another. Repeatedly, their respective senses of entitlement were at odds. In
the uncomfortably ill-defined social hierarchies of the British colonies they clashed over
protocol again and again. What distinction was to be drawn in the order of precedence
between overseas consular representatives and consuls who lived in Australia? Did
Consuls General have the same rank as Rear Admirals of her Majesty’s Naval and
Military Services? Matters reached a new low when the Governor made a point of not
attending the foundation dinner of the newly created French Chamber of Commerce in
Sydney at the Australia Hotel. In retaliation Biard d’Aunet made his presence scarce at
functions held at Government House, until a point was reached where both men
admitted the état de fait that they had reached a stalemate.

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46 Biard d’Aunet to Delcassé, 15 May 1901, MAE, 139CPCOM/2.
47 Barko, ‘The Courrier Australien and French-Australian Relations during the Biard d’Aunet Years
(1892–1905)’; François Lapeyre, Léonie d’Aunet: L’autre Passion de Victor Hugo (JC Lattès, 2005). See also
the personal file of Biard, d’Aunet Georges, MAE, Personnel, Deuxième Série, 168.
48 Ivan Barko, ‘The Closing down of the Melbourne French Consulate General (1900 and 2000)’,
Explorations, no. 28 (June 2010): 10.
d’Aunet see Colin Nettlebeck, ‘Looking Ahead: An 1898 French View of Australian Federation’,
Establishment of the French Chamber of Commerce’, Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society
Barko, ‘The Currier Australien and French-Australian Relations during the Biard d’Aunet Years (1892–
Plate 4.1. Tom Roberts, *Opening of the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia by H.R.H. The Duke of Cornwall and York (Later King George V)*, 9 May 1901, 1903, oil on canvas, on permanent loan to the Parliament of Australia from the British Royal Collection. George Biard d’Aunet is the second man from the bottom left, his head can just be seen popping out, turned slightly towards us.
Unity in adversity

The accumulating pressures felt by the French community stemming from the Australian press and from some in religious sects, as well as the long spat between the larger-than-life Consul General and the Governor, provide a context in which to gauge the level of mounting unease and tension that would be released following Cobar. But Cobar was also different from previous slurs, and it provided a catalyst for those tensions, for it came from a representative of the British government, attacking the values of the Republic itself. The speech, in the eyes of the editors of the Courrier, ‘denied to our country not only the sentiment of justice, but those of liberty, equality and fraternity’. As a consequence, the journal claimed, ‘there is no longer question here of Dreyfus, but a matter of a national character’. 51 One ‘very proud’ French expatriate, Eugène Langier, published a seething open letter to Beauchamp in the pages of Truth in defence of those very values. As ‘an Englishman’ he wrote, ‘notwithstanding your gross ignorance, your incapacity, and your madness, you have got the situation of Governor … never such a thing would have occurred [in France], as in my country favoritism and titles count for nothing; and there, to obtain the same situation as you have got, a man must possess learning, talent, experience, dignity, and self-respect’. He called him a tartufe, a fake. 52

In the heated atmosphere immediately after the Cobar speech was reported by the press, on the afternoon of 3 October 1899, the most prominent French notables in Sydney met in the building of the French Chamber of Commerce in Bond Street – where the Alliance, the Courrier, and the Benevolent Society also had offices. Together they drafted a letter of protest, addressed to Lord Beauchamp, but which the President of the Chamber, George Playoust, handed to the Consul General. The latter was to use the letter as he saw fit, to preserve the honour of the French colony. 53

The letter acknowledged that, even amongst the French colonists in Australia, opinions had differed greatly about the trials and culpability of Dreyfus. It asserted, however, that all now rallied, united, around the national flag in their indignation at the gratuitous attacks made against French institutions and, indeed, against the ideological fabric of the Republic by an official representative of the Queen during an official function. In particular, they rejected the idea that the army – ‘this outstanding national institution

51 Courrier Australien, 14 October 1899, 3.
52 Truth, 15 October 1899, 8.
53 Signed protest letter from the French notables of Sydney to the Consul-General in reaction to the Cobar incident, no date, MAE, 139CPCOM/9.
where all French families, rich or poor, are represented regardless of their religious beliefs’ – could be corrupt. The ultimate proof that Beauchamp was wrong and that France was great, they believed, lay in the second condemnation of Dreyfus in Rennes by the French Government which had taken place just two months beforehand.\footnote{Signed protest letter from the French notables of Sydney to Consul-General in reaction to the Cobar incident*, no date, MAE, 139CPCOM/9.}

Reading this letter with the benefit of hindsight is a strange exercise. On one hand the patriotic indignation and genuine pain cannot be denied. On the other hand, every point offered in defence of the Republic and its institutions by the outraged Frenchmen advanced has been disproved over the past century. The verdict at Rennes had been a stage in a clever piece of political manoeuvring by a new, moderate republican government. It was part of a plan to pardon Dreyfus gradually (and eventually to reinstate him) while allowing the Republic and the army to save face.\footnote{Duclert, \textit{L'affaire Dreyfus}, 57–64.} As for the army itself, ‘this outstanding national institution’, though it might have been the pride of French citizens, it was far from democratic or secular. It had in fact been one of the last bastions for the social and political reproduction of the aristocracy of the ancien regime and of the Empire.\footnote{Maurice Agulhon, \textit{The French Republic, 1879-1992} (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: B. Blackwell, 1993).} But these details do not much matter much for our purposes. What does matter is that the letter was signed by sixty-six men, including the President of the Chamber of Commerce, Georges Playoust, the Director of the Pasteur Institute, Dr Rougier, the physician of the French community, Dr Laure, the Director of the Comptoir d'Escompte, M. d’Orgeval and the Director of the Messagerie Maritime. All the remaining signatories had direct links to the wool trade or French commerce in Australia.\footnote{See the detailed list annexed to the letter sent by Biard d’Aunet to MAE, 7 October 1899, MAE, 139CPCOM/9.} Insofar as the protest letter signatories claimed to represent the French colony in Sydney, it is worth underlining that they were all men, and almost all linked to the business sector.

In his correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Georges Biard d’Aunet was eager to emphasise that the letter of protest was a spontaneous expression of the outrage felt by French expatriates. He was careful, as a professional, he claimed, to keep his distance from it. He had, for instance, asked his staff to abstain from signing the letter. Yet, such precaution on the part of Biard d’Aunet to distance himself from an incident that had already been publicised in the press is rather curious. The wording of his letter...
to the Ministry bears more than a passing resemblance to the protest letter itself.\textsuperscript{58} Besides, for an episode Biard d’Aunet dismissed as ‘minor’ to his superior, the lengths to which he went to obtain reparation, and the impressive correspondence he entered into with the Ministry and with Beauchamp himself about the speech, suggest that, contrary to his claims, he attached great importance to the incident, and to seeing that reparation be made.\textsuperscript{59} One possible way of viewing his role is to suggest that Biard d’Aunet probably aroused the feelings of pride and honour of his compatriots, or at the very least capitalised on them as a means of then unleashing them on Beauchamp. Was the residents’ letter an arrow for his vengeful bow? Could the Cobar speech itself have been aimed at Biard d’Aunet?

\textit{Honour restored, and a chastised Governor}

The Australian press was amenable to the cause of the French. Newspapers either reproduced a translation of the letter, or explicitly sided with the French colonists against the unpopular Governor. It was one thing to attack the French themselves, point out how their civilisation was falling behind, but attacking the sacrosanct nation itself directly was going too far. With Australia on the cusp of federating, we can read in the Australian rejection of the Cobar speech and of Beauchamp himself a manifestation of the nationalist fervour of the time. Advocates for a more independent Australia recalled Beauchamp’s first insult to the colonies before he came to Sydney, and suggested he now be recalled before he inflict some new ‘birthstains’ on Australians. Much of it had to do with the much despised and maligned Governor himself, however, rather than the Crown. Some called the Governor little short of stupid.\textsuperscript{60} One commentator turned Beauchamp’s own insult and pedigree against him. He suggested the haughty aristocrat should not be too hasty in proclaiming his pride in being an Englishman, pointing out the Gallic tones of his noble surname, which was, after all, not Lord Fairfield, but Lord Beau Champ.\textsuperscript{61}

Eventually, Beauchamp was urged by the British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, to diffuse the tension at the earliest opportunity and publicly. A few days later a reluctant Beauchamp gave in to the injunction of his superiors, but without

\textsuperscript{58} Biard d’Aunet to Delcassé, 3 October 1899, MAE, 139CPCOM/9.
\textsuperscript{59} Aldrich, \textit{The French Presence in the South Pacific}, 201.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Truth}, 15 October 1899, 1; \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 5 October 1899, 5; \textit{Argus}, 5 October 1899, 4.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Truth}, 15 October 1899, 1.
conceding an inch of his own pride, apologising for the hurt he may have caused, rather than for the substance of the slur. Reparation was not made public, but he wrote back to Chamberlain:

Pray express my regret for any unwarranted impressions caused by my speech at Cobar. Have already informed French Consul here of my regret if feelings of French residents were wounded.⁶²

In this way, six months after the start in September, the Cobar incident was finally laid to rest. There were other opportunities when the Frenchmen might have risen up against what they felt were unjust calumnies against them. Liberté, égalité and fraternité, however, were the values that bound them together as a people. The disparaging comments of the Governor that attacked the very ideology of the French republic were perceived as officially sanctioned and so hurt more than others. Ideas about nationality and personal honour were so intricately linked that an attack on the former was seen as an attack on the latter and thus demanded swift reparation. It was the collective honour and the status of the French in the colony that were at stake. A result of the agitation it caused, the incident helped heal some of the wounds that had been inflicted by what had been a uniquely divisive affair.

**An indivisible people divided**

The Cobar incident might have helped to consolidate a projected common identity in the face of adversity. Yet it would be incorrect to consider that the French in Australia, even such a small and self-selected group of individuals as we are considering here, presented a constant united front. The social hodgepodge of exiled aristocrats, Orleanists, and entrepreuneurs that composed the early settlement of Hunter’s Hill shows the patchwork nature of the French community. And by the French notables’ own admission, the Dreyfus affair had revealed divisions amongst the French colonists. If their Frenchness could bring them together in the face of affront, it could also be a divisive tool. In the case that follows we will see how the social structure of the French community was, at times, affected by greed and jealousy, and how Frenchness could be mobilized in an attempt to disrupt the established hierarchy in pursuit of personal gains.

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While the social transformations affecting France during the Dreyfus Affair attracted enormous commentary in Australia, the 1890s were also a decade of deep tumult locally, particularly in the finance sector. By the mid-1890s, the fever for speculation was reaching new heights. And it affected the French businessmen of Melbourne as well. Mines were daily being floated on the London Stock Exchange, creating colossal fortunes overnight, and the craze for shares and profits whetted the appetite of bankers and farmers alike. For Australians, the new gold rush had shifted from east to west and anything West Australian sold fast and well on the London market. One mine 115 miles from Coolgardie, it was said, had recently floated 100,000 shares at £1 each: ‘it went off like smoke’, and was subscribed for six times over.63 These were exciting times and everyone wanted their share, including the French expatriates. Much like everyone else, the French businessmen in Australia were enticed by the prospect of untold riches made overnight in the antipodes. In 1893 about twenty of them, including Dr. Crivelli himself, the physician of the French colony, Georges Playoust and his brother (who moved to Sydney in 1895), Charles Phalempin, the director of the Comptoir, and Leonce Cayron and Adolphe de la Cour Russell, both city merchants, formed a mining syndicate ‘to take up mining leases’ in Western Australia called the French Mining Syndicate.64 But things did not go according to plan and instead of untold riches the partners were left only with widely publicised law suits fought between themselves. The cases bring to light fractures within the French community of Melbourne. These fractures had a range of causes, from concerns about money to more abstract ideas about status and prestige. Taken together, they allow us to see how concepts of nationality and personal honour were bound together to delineate the contours of respectability within this little, male Gallic world.

A Dickensian affair

To Sydney’s Evening News, the trials and seemingly interminable skirmishes amongst these French investors recalled Dickens’ infamous ‘Jarndyce and Jarndyce’ law suit in Bleak House.65 Indeed, three of the original defendants died before the cases were

63 Age, 7 December 1895, 4.
64 Argus, 9 February 1899, 7; Champion, 4 July 1896, 4; Age, 26 June 1896, 6.
65 Evening News, 15 August 1898, 5.
concluded. But the undertones of these cases were comical rather than tragic for the observer. In an article retracing the life of Dr. Crivelli, the Melbourne paper *Punch* recalled wryly the lawsuits in which he had become embroiled: ‘the mercurial Frenchmen were all certain that in a few days, or at least weeks or months, they would all be millionaires’. In the end, after seven years of seemingly endless brawls, winners and losers had to pay for the trials from their own pockets, and no profit came out of the mines themselves. ‘He would be a brave man who would propose gold mining either to Dr. Crivelli or to the French colony now’, concluded *Punch*.66 The cases reinforced Australian perceptions of the nature of the ‘little French colony’ in Melbourne. Much as in Sydney, the members of this colony ‘range[d] themselves below [the consul] in order of strict social precedence’.67 The lawsuits also confirmed, to the readers of the Melbourne papers, long-held ideas about the French who were depicted as emotional, histrionic, and volatile. ‘Although this little French group of citizens is small, it is always full of intrigue and excitement,’ *Punch* explained. The French are ‘continually on the boil’, and seething with ‘gossip and quarrels’. This was, after all, the ‘nature of the Frenchman’: ‘he screams when he gets angry. He weeps when he can no longer scream’.68

Yet screams and tears could have been avoided, had matters gone according to plan. The mine leases had been registered under the name of Russell, on behalf of all the partners. One of them, Leonce Cayron, was charged with selling the leases on the Stock Exchange during a personal trip to London. His mission was to do what everybody else was doing: sell the mines and make a fortune. Easy enough. When he arrived on the old continent, Cayron quickly found himself in the thick of it. Promoters would not have been hard to find. This was the beating heart that made capital flow throughout the British world and beyond, this was where fortunes were made. Unfortunately, the crowd he fell in with was, by all accounts, of a shady type. All relatives, and all but bankrupt, the five men he entered into business with accepted to float the shares and purchase parts of them through their companies. The amount of money they had tantalized Cayron with was an enormous £225,000, partly in cash, partly in paid up shares: £40,000 would go to the Syndicate, a portion would serve to develop the mines and whatever was left, presumably a large sum, would pay the commission fees of the London entrepreneurs. All the while Russell and Cayron remained in touch through

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66 *Punch*, 29 October 1908, 648.
67 *Punch*, 29 October 1908, 648.
mail and by telegraph. But on the day of the sale Cayron’s contacts each only bought shares for £1 and the public only bought £9,100 worth of shares, which was not enough to carry out the rest of the enterprise (such as developing the mines). Left with few options, prior to leaving London Cayron signed an agreement to sell the rest of the shares to his purchasers for a mere to £2000, allegedly without consulting with his partners. Back in Victoria, Russell was fuming and sent a series of telegrams to Cayron repudiating the deal. When Cayron came back to Australia in 1895, he sued Russell and others in the name of the two London companies for performance of the sale, but lost.\textsuperscript{69} He was not welcomed back and found himself isolated from his friends and partners who held him responsible for failing to secure the sale they had hoped for.\textsuperscript{70}

Cayron reported to his lawyer, Joseph Woolf – the lawyer of the French consulate – that his erstwhile partners had accused him of having invented the names of the buyers, of writing a fake contract and of unashamedly pocketing a large commission as an intermediary.\textsuperscript{71} In court, testimonies varied greatly as to who said what, but Cayron was offended, his honour slighted. He took offence to the ‘most audacious calumnies’ that were said against his honour and the sullying of his reputation in the French community.\textsuperscript{72} To defend himself against the abuse, he sued Marcel Crivelli and the two Playoust brothers for slander. The trial took a year. On 3 July 1896 the Victorian court found in Cayron’s favour and the defendants were made to pay £250. In addition, a formal apology was issued by Crivelli and the Playousts. The four men met in mid-July at the French consulate where the apology was delivered in the presence of the consul and vice-consul, after which the reconciled party left together to celebrate with a well-deserved drink.\textsuperscript{73} This did not, however, assuage tensions among all involved. About six months later, at a meeting of the Syndicate on 27 January 1897 Cayron was still furious with Russell and objected to his chairing the session. He could not, according to some reports, contain his disdain for the man. When George Playoust’s lawyer tried to get involved, Cayron became violent and reportedly attempted to throw a flower pot at him. More heated words were exchanged.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{69} Age, 1 September 1898, 5.
\textsuperscript{70} Paul Maistre, Note pour Monsieur Joseph Woolf, avocat du Consulat Général de France. Affaire Cayron c/ Crivelli, 7 August 1896, MAE, 428PO/1/21.
\textsuperscript{71} Cayron to MAE, 30 January 1897, MAE, 428PO/1/21.
\textsuperscript{72} Cayron* to MAE, 30 January 1897, MAE, 428PO/1/21.
\textsuperscript{73} Woolf to Déjardin, 27 May 1898; 1 June 1898; 6 June 1898; MAE to Déjardin, 27 March 1897, MAE, 428PO/1/21.
\textsuperscript{74} Age, 17 August 1898, 6.
The apparent reconciliation at the consulate did not hold. Cayron now sued Russell and the others to obtain dissolution of the Syndicate, to prevent Russell from selling the mines and excluding him from the business. In the end the court found in favour of the defendants, and Cayron appealed the decision but lost again, one of the Justices specifying that he had ‘not acted bona-fide bringing the action’. How the trial evolved is of particular interest. It shows the importance, for the Frenchmen, of their nationality as a marker of status, among themselves and within the colony. It also, to an extent, demonstrates the cultural gulf that could exist between that small expatriate community and the Australian colonists.

**Frenchness on trial**

During the trials, Cayron’s stratagem was to throw his former friends’ own names into disrepute. To undermine the Syndicate and its shareholders, his first line of action was to suggest that the partners often acted illegally: recently he had received a request to pay £50 fees into the Syndicate. He suggested the action was shady because the deed under which the provisions were found was a fraudulent document; the last signature – belonging to the now deceased Louis Gerschel – was a forgery. Cayron claimed Russell had forged the signature. The accusation did not stand scrutiny: Gerschel himself had paid the £50 fees, there were several witnesses who saw him signing the deed before he died, and his own son testified that his father’s signature had much changed in his old age. When Cayron was prompted to elaborate why he still maintained that Russell had committed forgery, he flatly accused him of being ‘the only man in our syndicate capable of doing such a thing’. He was adamant that Russell was ‘the most immoral man in Australia’. In the same breath he added, ‘but I am glad to say, although he pretends to be a Frenchman, he is not’. This occasioned laughter in the courtroom, and the slightly bemused lawyer for the defendants observed, ‘Well, I don’t know much about it, but it seems to me he has a strong French accent.’ ‘With polite vehemence’ Cayron corrected him ‘oh, no, pardon me. It is a Dutch accent’. More laughter came from the benches.

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75 *Argus*, 9 February 1899, 7.
76 *Age*, 24 August 1898, 5.
77 *Argus*, 13 August 1898, 11; *Age*, 13 August 1898, 9.
78 *Argus*, 13 August 1898, 11.
At the following sitting, Cayron clarified that he was not saying that Russell was Dutch, but rather that ‘I do not consider him a Frenchman.’ In the context of escalating tensions between the British Empire and Dutch-Afrikaners in South Africa, which would lead to war just one year later, Cayron’s comments were not innocent. He actively sought to throw Russell into disrepute, to cast a shadow over his respectability by questioning his nationality. If the strategy might have had an effect on some, the intimation that because Russell was not a Frenchman he was not honourable did not carry as much weight in the courtroom as Cayron had hoped. He did not count, perhaps, on the engrained cultural prejudices many Anglo-Saxons harboured towards the French themselves, embodied in commonly accepted jibes and comments about the cowardice of the French.

The heart of the matter was that Cayron felt defamed, and wanted to restore his reputation through legal action. As his arguments unravelled in the laughter of the audience, Cayron bluntly asserted to the defence attorney that it was Russell who had ‘started the whole affair by his lies about me’. He agreed that the mines were not worth more than £50. So it became quickly clear that the trials were not about money, but about revenge and restoring his honour. Recent scholarship on honour codes, and specifically male honour, has shown how the concept played an important role in informing individual and group behaviour, in France and elsewhere. In the French case, Robert Nye and William Reddy have both shown how nineteenth-century ideas about honour had their genealogy in noble practices of the ancien régime. These ideas held until at least the end of the First World War in various forms, Nye argues, because they ‘provided bourgeois men both with the basis for claims of individual distinction and a collective warrant for certifying the superiority and exclusiveness of their class’. The code served to regulate the social relations of men and settle disputes between them. Insults and slurs, attacks on one’s honour, were central to defining group and individual behaviours because a slight on honour was a threat to social status. This is not to say that ideas about honour mattered only to Frenchmen, they mattered to Australian colonists as well, and in various ways across social class and gender. But what is particularly crucial here is the unintelligibility of Cayron’s tactics for the Australian

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70 Argus, 16 August 1898, 11; a different report has Cayron saying Russell was French-Canadian rather than Dutch, see: Age, 16 August 1898, 6.
80 Argus, 13 August 1898, 11.
81 Age, 23 August 1898, 5.
82 Nye, Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France, 8.
83 Penny Russell, Savage or Civilised?, see in particular 165–192.
court and the audience. His ‘feel for the game’, as it were, was off. Calling into question Russell’s reputation by attempting to cast a shadow of doubt over his nationality as a Frenchman did not have the intended effect.

At the following two sittings, both Cayron and Russell accused each other of corrupt behaviour. Cayron had to defend himself against accusations of bribing British newspapers like the Financial Times to float the mines on the market. In turn, he accused Russell of seeking to bribe a mining expert to produce a positive report on the Western Australian possessions. Evidence provided by each party was scrutinised down to the last comma but intent of misconduct was never convincingly proven. There was a lot of debate, for instance, about whether the French saying ‘graisser la patte’ (grease the paw) had been intended to mean ‘bribe’ or simply offer a (legal) commission. Local papers were quick to draw parallels between accusations of bribery and the ‘Hooley revelations’. The revelations had been the most widely discussed case of fraudulent mine promoting of the time which had seen the promoter par excellence, Ernest Hooley, fall from the highest of social heights that money and prestige could buy to the shadowy depths of bankruptcy, social shame and, eventually, prison. The revelations had incriminated large sections of the financial press in London, which were said to be taking bribes from promoters to facilitate their sales. But the comic twist in this Australian pastiche was that the two Frenchmen were accusing each other of the same misconduct, for a Syndicate in which they both were shareholders, and that no longer held the promise of a quick fortune.

Outside the courtroom Cayron tried to amass as much material evidence as he could to throw the character of his opponents into disrepute, but in so doing he only further damaged the personal reputation he was trying to salvage. Following his apparent reconciliation with Crivelli and the Playousts after the meeting at the consulate, Cayron almost immediately sought a written statement from the consul summarising the exchange. Had the personal apology not been enough? Or had Cayron always intended to use it as another proof of the calumnious treatment he had received from his compatriots in order to further his interest in the slander case? The consul, Leon Déjardin, refused to produce the document in an attempt to calm the furore engulfing

84 Evening News, 19 August 1898, 3.
85 Argus, 16 August 1898, 7; 17 August 1898, 5; 20 August 1898, 14; Age, 19 August 1898, 5; 20 August 1898, 9.
the little world that was supposed to position itself in an orderly and respectful manner around his person. Cayron then took the matter directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to try to bypass the authority of his representative in Victoria. The letter grossly misrepresented the overall situation and the ways in which it affected him. For instance, he stipulated that the mines held ‘rich veins of gold’, whereas in court both plaintiff and defendants agreed they were barren, and he further sought to sully Russell’s name by repeating that he was of an ‘unknown’ civil status. Since Cayron was not able to use the power structure of the French colony to his advantage he instead sought to undermine it by going over the authority of the consul. It is telling that Cayron attempted to resolve a colonial civil law suit in a British colony involving the London Stock Exchange by going to the French authorities. Much like the businessmen had done with the protest letter to Lord Beauchamp, Cayron’s appeals to the consul and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reveal how much this male Gallic world indeed stood apart in the British colonies. It shows to what extent their sense of respectability, their status in Victoria and New South Wales, was defined through a country thousands of miles distant.

When Georges Playoust’s turn came in the witness box, the congenial man brought a calming effect to the effusive passions of the past few days, or indeed years, and tried to put the case in perspective. The flower pot, for a start, had remained on the table. Cayron had indeed almost lost his temper at the meeting of the Syndicate in 1897, confided Playoust, he had wrapped his hands around the pot, but it had remained on the table. He described Cayron as an excited man who ‘seemed to [be] wanting to make a quarrel’, but he did not believe he had committed any fraud. Rather, he had let his emotions get the better of his reason. Similarly, thought Playoust, the accusation that Russell had intended to ‘offer a douceur’ to the mine expert had been ‘painted a good deal blacker than it is’. In the end the court concurred with Georges Playoust. The judge sympathised with Cayron ‘that gentleman had been slandered in a very violent way, and the natural result, particularly in the case of a Frenchman, was to excite resentment’, but the verdict still found in favour of the defendants.

87 Woolf to Déjardin, 27 May 1898; 1 June 1898; 6 June 1898; MAE to Déjardin, 27 March 1897, MAE, 428PO/1/21. On the consul’s duties and whether he should have forwarded a copy of the interview to Cayron see Note sur le Dossier Cayron vs. Crivelli, 24 December 1896, MAE, 428PO/1/30.
88 Cayron* to MAE, 30 January 1897, MAE, 428PO/1/21.
89 Argus, 23 August 1898, 6.
90 Argus, 3 December 1896, 6; 1 September 1898, 9.
Conclusion

To the Australian lawyers involved in the cases, to the members of the public sitting on the court benches from where laughter could be heard, and even to the editors of the society paper *Punch*, the seemingly insignificant scuffle taking place publicly among those French migrants revealed a small cultural gulf between them and the French they found amusing. Certainly, similar lawsuits about personal honour were not uncommon. They were a particularly bourgeois concern, especially in settler colonies where personal status was sometimes all a person had to show. But if the Frenchmen were somewhat of a curiosity to laugh at, what was amusing was the way they went about it, the veneer rather than the substance. Calling each other’s reputation as Frenchmen into question in a British dominion was probably not the safest route to take – and it did not win Cayron his case.

But the French communities we have been concerned with in this chapter were largely products of recent migration. As such, it is easy to understand how simple it might have been to recreate a little world within a world that mirrored the social and gendered hierarchies of the *mère patrie*. Frenchness, for them, could be a tool for the definition of a personal and collective identity, delineating the boundaries of respectability, of social standing among themselves and in relation to their new home. Yet if we can see the significance of their Frenchness particularly in the face of adversity, this emotional community slowly disaggregated in the course of the twentieth century. For some in this relatively well-off and white migrant population, within two generations, processes of acculturation and adaptation changed the meaning of their French connection.
Chapter 5

Family Ties

‘I am an Australian, we are freer than anyone in France.’ Seventeen year-old Lydia Delarue penned these words in her diary in 1903 in Pau, at the foot of the Pyrenees in the South of France, during a six months stay at a ‘finishing school’. Her younger sister Eugénie attended the school with her, and the two young Delarue girls were accompanied by their mother Kate. As her last name indicates, Lydia was of French descent. In fact, beyond the patronymic resonance, until the three women undertook their journey – their first journey to France – she had grown up under the impression that she was French. But she had grown up in Australia, and her ideas of what being French meant in that context were challenged during her first trip to the country of her forebears.¹

This chapter examines the Delarue family’s changing relationship to France over several generations. It tracks, in particular, the evolution of the family’s sense of belonging as each generation became more anchored in Australian soil and as France became a more distant locus of the family’s mythology of origin. To do so, I examine the travel diary Lydia kept during her voyage in 1902–3 and set it in contrast with other Australian travel writings about France. Most particularly, however, I set it in contrast with the diary her own father, Leopold Hypolite Delarue, kept during his own travel to France in 1878. Whether Lydia was cognisant of her father’s diary remains unknown. But through similar family connections, and perhaps luck, Lydia and her father trod some of the same paths, thirty years apart, leaving us with a rare record of similar journeys, undertaken by members of the same family, yet separated by gender, time and age. The chapter charts the different Frances each encountered and the relational and shifting meanings of their Frenchness and Australianness.

These personal documents speak to the contingence and plurality of ideas about national and cultural belonging over time. They also help us go further than the sometimes rigid

¹ Lydia Delarue, ‘Diary 2/2’, 12. Lydia’s diary is composed of two small volumes that I have simply numbered 1 and 2. They are located within the Delarue Family Papers in the Mitchell Library in Sydney, ML MSS 5106, Box 01. Leopold’s single volume diary is in a private collection. It was exhibited as part of the 2004 exhibition ‘Vive la différence: the French in NSW’ in the Picture Gallery at the State Library of NSW, curated by Ivan Barko and Margot Riley. I warmly thank the owner of Leopold’s diary for allowing me to use it together with other material.
representations to be found in the colonial press and public discourse in order to touch on questions of acculturation and assimilation for white migrants in Anglo-Saxon Australia. The genre of travel writing and its significance in elucidating these themes requires some contextualisation first. Then, after piecing together the threads of the Delarue family story, I will consider the diaries themselves as historical documents, replete with potential as well as pitfalls for historical knowledge, in order to bring them together for the first time. This will allow me to highlight, amongst other things, the often unrecognised importance of the French countryside in nineteenth-century representations of France.

**Travel writing: Australia and France**

It is only in the past twenty years that Australian historians have focused their attention on the importance of the ‘elsewhere’ and the significance of travel abroad in shaping Australian lives and national culture.\(^2\) Geoffrey Blainey’s well worn catch-phrase, the ‘tyranny of distance’ meant that for a long time scholars in Australia focused their attention – somewhat obsessively – on what foreigners said about Australia, rather than looking at what Australians said about themselves, and the world, when in contact with other places.\(^3\) Yet, precisely because of the perceived tyranny of distance, travel was, and to a large extent still is, an intrinsic part of the Australian experience and formative in ‘giving that life a meaning’.\(^4\) Elegantly contributing to the reversal of that historiographical trend, Ros Persman’s *Duty Free: Australian Women Abroad* skilfully explored the polyphony of narratives, reasons and experiences emerging from Australian women’s accounts of travel to Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She defined “‘the overseas trip” as a ritual event, a rite of passage, a convention in Australian middle-class social and cultural life,’ which in relation to ideas of belonging and cultural attachment meant that ‘for a century and a half at least, European Australians claimed two homes, that of birth, family and friends, of memory and family history, and that of domicile’.\(^5\) From early colonial times, the adventurous

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journey to Europe (as a colonial enactment of the Grand Tour) was an essential part of the construction of self for an Australian elite and an aspiring middle class. Indeed Angela Woollacott and others have shown, going to Europe, and even more so going ‘Home’ – London or Britain more generally – was an act in itself ‘culturally intelligible to family and friends’, signifying social, cultural and often financial affluence.⁶ For some, the encounter with that ‘other home’, represented a turning point in their sense of Australianness or their identity as white colonials and British subjects.⁷ As several scholars have pointed out, these two forms of identification were not incompatible but indicative of the fluidity and plurality of cultural identities shaping Australians’ sense of self in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸ If one was young, however, the trip was often undertaken as part of an education. Men were sent to England and women to the Continent, preferably France, to be ‘finished’, as Lydia and Eugénie were, and to acquire the veneer of European refinement and culture required to establish one’s self as an accomplished model of colonial female gentility.

One example of this pattern that has attracted some attention in recent years is Margaret Isabella White, or Daisy, who spent two years in France with her sister Dorothy in a finishing school near Fontainebleau some ten years before the Delarue girls’ journey, between 1887 and 1889.⁹ Daisy White offers a rare and vivid insight into the French finishing school world from an Australian perspective. From a wealthy pastoralist family from the Upper Hunter Valley in New South Wales, Daisy felt her departure for France had been engineered as a form of exile by her father’s new wife. Yet, despite her animosity towards her stepmother, Daisy’s stay in Fontainebleau at the Les Ruches School was consistent with her class and status.¹⁰ The school itself was of high calibre, attracting daughters from the elite Anglo-Saxon world, both the old and the new: the English novelist Dorothy Bussy and the Americans Nathalie Barney and Eleanor Roosevelt were counted among its distinguished guests. Dorothy Bussy arrived only

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⁷ Woollacott, To Try Her Fortune in London. Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity.


one year before Daisy and their stays overlapped. In a semi-autobiographical novel first published anonymously and titled *Olivia*, Bussy describes the tumultuous, emotional years of all-female boarding schools, with their share of adolescent female and homoerotic passions, the infamous ‘crush’. The academic focus of the school on the arts and literature, coupled with its female accomplishment curriculum and the much anticipated visits to Paris, made Daisy’s two years in France a cultural whirlwind. She became acquainted with the canon of French literature: Molière, Montaigne, Racine and Voltaire, to name but a few, and attended performances of the greatest plays in the French repertoire: *L’Avare*, *Ruy Blas* and many more. Her diary also shows a command of French of a proficiency that allowed her to sprinkle her account with numerous elaborate French phrases and countless clever Gallicisms. Daisy’s experience largely conforms to the expected narrative of the time: it is that of a young, relatively inexperienced but clever young colonial girl benefitting from and embracing the advantages of an overseas education, donning the refinement of a cultural connection to France, the country *par excellence* of feminine accomplishments. But Lydia Delarue’s experience was, in many ways, different. If her own journey can be read as a similar response to a social impetus to accumulate cultural capital by going to France for under a year, the experience brought her closer to Australia, relegating France to a distant land of ancestral memory. To understand this process we need to re-situate the Delarues within their recent family history to be able to understand what Lydia’s diary, and that of her father, can tell us about the evolving meaning of their Frenchness and their changing projected identities, individually and as part of a migrant family.

They used a bidet

Strolling along George Street in turn-of-the-century Sydney, passers-by would look up to number 396 to check the time on what had become a city landmark, the large blackamoor clock adorning the shop of H. F. Delarue, silverware, jeweller and clock smith. The Delarue clock can be seen in the middle of the street, on the left hand side, in

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the exiled Communard Alfred Tischbauer’s painting of the busy thoroughfare in the late 1880s (Plate 1.1).12

Plate 5.1. Alfred Tischbauer, George Street, Sydney, 1883, oil on canvas, SLNSW, DG 210

Hippolyte Felix Delarue migrated to Australia from Berck, near Calais, in the 1850s. He married British-born Lydia Knight (young Lydia’s grandmother and namesake) in 1855, with whom he had three sons. His business, or ‘The Business’ as it was called within the family, rapidly prospered.13 Like the famous clock, Delarue silverware gained in renown, winning a plethora of national and international prizes: at the Paris International Exhibition in 1867, the Metropolitan Intercolonial Exhibition in Prince Alfred Park in 1870 and the Sydney International Exhibition in 1879. In 1868 Delarue provided the gold trowel ceremoniously used in laying the foundation stone of St.

Mary’s Cathedral in Sydney. Innovative, talented and ahead of his time, ‘Old Delarue’ craftily incorporated native Australian flora and fauna into his designs long before this became a fashionable trend from the 1880s onwards, and years before the arrival of Lucien Henry, for whom it became an important trademark for his Australian imagery in decorative arts and architecture. At the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1867, Hippolyte Delarue and his business partner Cyril Veyret presented a miniature clock tower, shaped like ‘a silver mounted emu’s egg’ heavily ornamented ‘with frosted silver-grapes and leaves, kangaroos and emus, opossums, flying squirrels, a laughing jackass and an Aboriginal surmounting a bouquet of wild bush flowers’. For all his professional success in Australia, and in the local Sydney community, Hippolyte Felix Delarue remained a Frenchman. Significantly, his Australian-born sons felt the same way.

Indeed, although he was born in Australia, Old Delarue’s eldest son, Leopold Hippolyte Delarue (1855–1891), identified with the native land of his father: ‘If you are born in a stable,’ he used to say, ‘it doesn’t make you a horse’, or so the family story goes. Leopold’s connection to France was strong. With his young wife Matilda Kate (1854–1943), the couple naturally first established themselves at Hunter’s Hill. They named their house Berck after the place in Normandy from which the family had come. Kate, born in England and brought to Australia as an infant, was surrounded by a mysterious mantle of Frenchness by association as she ‘was often taken to be French herself’.

Leopold maintained strong personal and professional bonds with Jules Joubert, one of the founders of the district. In 1878 he accompanied the latter as a Representative Commissioner to oversee the management of the daily displays of the New South Wales court at the Paris International Exhibition. The Commissioners had envisioned the Colony’s court on a grand scale, asking their representatives in France to see to it that the allotted space could be doubled from the initial forty feet by thirty six before the first shipment of displays arrived. These included minerals, fossils, wool, wine and

16 *Catalogue of the Natural and Industrial Products of New South Wales Forwarded to the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867 by the New South Wales Exhibition Commissioners* (Sydney, 1867), 28.
19 Jules Joubert to Hippolyte Felix Delarue, 7 June 1878, Delarue Family Papers, SLNSW, ML MSS 5106.
cereal, together with fifty tons of copper and tin ingots and blocks. In the end, space had to be taken from the Tasmanian and New Zealand courts. In keeping with his somewhat larger-than-life character, Joubert kept to himself the privilege to look after visiting royalty and high dignitaries. Leopold was entrusted once to deliver a package to the Bristol Hotel where the Archduke of Austria was staying, but it was Joubert who served his highness with Australian wine (the prince politely compared it with Hungarian wine). Leopold’s duties were indeed mundane: cleaning the court before the arrival of the Prince of Wales, running the odd errand and helping Sydney University Professor Archibald Liversidge to set up his displays of mineral fossils, day after day. The monotony of his duties meant that the entries to be found in his diary about the Exhibition were more than succinct, becoming a repetitive blur: ‘Exhibition again’, ‘Exhibition again, nothing particular today’, on one occasion the word ‘Exhibition’ alone was used for three condensed entries. Yet participating in the Exposition Universelle afforded Leopold the rare opportunity to spend several months in France and undertake the journey of a lifetime. He visited the European capitals of Lisbon, London and Paris, and he took the time to visit the South of France, both to see relatives and family connections and to tackle what he called a ‘little weakness’ of the lungs in the thermal cities of Eaux Bonnes and Eaux Chaudes in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques. This condition would later claim his life.

Back in Australia after the birth of Lydia Victorine, the eldest of the two Delarue daughters, the young family uprooted itself from Hunter’s Hill and moved to Bankstown following medical advice that the warmer climate would benefit Leopold’s lungs. In the small municipality west of Sydney, the Delarue girls, Lydia and her sister Eugénie, lived ‘a happy and carefree childhood’. Although the time they had with their ailing father was short, the French aura that had surrounded the young family was maintained tant bien que mal. This was developed not through the language, which was not passed on, but through sporadic cultural displays. In Bankstown, on occasion, the

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20 Paris Exhibition Commission, Commissioner’s Office, 22 September 1877; 13 December 1877, SRNSW, Colonial Secretary’s Correspondence, Special Bundles, NRS 906, 4/814.1.
21 Leopold, ‘Diary’, Friday 31/5/1878.
Delarue girls would recite French songs they had committed to memory, dress up as Breton peasant girls at fancy dress balls and, showing the height of French sophistication to the dismay of their friends, they used a bidet.\textsuperscript{27} It is little wonder that both Lydia and Eugénie grew up ‘thinking of [themselves] as French’, as Eugénie later put it in her memoirs, an idea ‘somewhat inaccurate but which made us a little “different”’, particularly in a colonial society that was trying to preserve its British identity down to, in the words of journalist Richard Twopeny, the ‘frowsy carpets and heavy solid chairs of England’s cold and foggy climate’.\textsuperscript{28}

The reason for the girls’ voyage to their ancestral home for six months in 1902-3 was, ostensibly, for the girls to be ‘finished’ in France. They attended a school in Pau as externes rather than internes, although their schooling was irregular at best – they only had thirty odd lessons of French with their teacher Mlle. Aubert.\textsuperscript{29} Neither Lydia nor Eugénie had ever attended school. Their education in Australia was limited to whatever an impressive succession of ‘governesses’ could teach them, the nearby state school being deemed ‘unworthy’.\textsuperscript{30} The decision to move overseas was made at a time of financial stress for the family. After the death of Leopold in 1891, and subsequent poor management of the business by Leopold’s brother and his widow, the family had fallen on hard times.\textsuperscript{31} In this context, there may also have been a will to flaunt fate and save face by spending six months abroad – a move that hinted at financial ease and cultural ambition in ‘an Australia where class boundaries were insecure and status depended on adopted customs, behaviours and wealth more than breeding’.\textsuperscript{32} For the Delarues, however, it was also a place of family connection, where they stayed with Old Delarue’s niece, Mme de Lostalot. The de Lostalots had lived in New Caledonia until Monsieur de Lostalot’s death, and his widow and two children had spent six months with the Delarues on their way back to France. Lydia’s mother also sought to visit a

\textsuperscript{27} Crawford, \textit{A Bunyip Close Behind Me}, 101, 106, 53.
\textsuperscript{28} Crawford, \textit{A Bunyip Close Behind Me}, 5; Twopeny, \textit{Town Life in Australia}, 40.
\textsuperscript{29} Delarue, ‘Diary 1/2’, 67.
\textsuperscript{30} Crawford, \textit{Ladies Didn’t. Recollections of an Edwardian Girlhood}, 4, ‘Governesses’ here is to be understood in a loose way as they seem to have taught the young Delarue girls little else than reading and writing.
\textsuperscript{31} Crawford, \textit{Ladies Didn’t. Recollections of an Edwardian Girlhood}, 4, 10.
now-aging gentleman in Dijon, Monsieur Terrier, whom she knew growing up in Sydney.\textsuperscript{33}

Whatever the reason they decided to move – prestige, flight or a little bit of both – the social significance of the trip was not intelligible to the Delarue’s neighbours in Bankstown in the same way it would have been in the suburb of Hunter’s Hill. One of their neighbours understood clearly why ‘gentlefolks’ would go ‘Home’, that is would go to England, but she was taken aback as to why three women alone would go ‘gallivanting round a country as notoriously immoral as France, where they danced the can can, ate frogs and every man had three mistresses’. She was convinced the Delarues would be ‘courting disaster and indubitably would fall into the hands of white slavers’.\textsuperscript{34} But they left all the same.

Their destination, Pau, had enjoyed a privileged status as a holiday resort for middle and upper-middle class British visitors since the 1840s. It first attracted members of the aristocracy and their children, who would include it in their explorations of the Pyrenees on the Grand Tour, on their way to or from the South of France and Italy. The region’s reputation for a beneficial climate, together with a state of semi-savagery still somewhat protected from the growing tourism industry, gradually attracted more and more visitors from the British Isles.\textsuperscript{35} The town rapidly adapted to the new-found opportunities and opened several establishments targeting the new visitors: British-style pubs, rather than French taverns, with names such as the \textit{d’Angleterre}, the \textit{Bristol} and the \textit{Victoria}. By 1853 more than half the visitors in the winter season came from Britain.\textsuperscript{36} Three years later Pau had a golf course.\textsuperscript{37} Thus by the time the family arrived, the city had already seen its share of foreigners, although Australians were a novelty. Still, as we shall see, for Lydia the journey remained disorienting.

The diaries and the question of belonging

Diaries and personal journals have attracted considerable attention from historians and literary theorists in recent years. As source documents, they can no longer be treated as

\textsuperscript{33} Crawford, \textit{A Bunyip Close Behind Me}, 96, 128–9; see also Papers of the Delarue and de Lostalot families, 1877-1911, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 4972.

\textsuperscript{34} Crawford, \textit{A Bunyip Close Behind Me}, 129.


\textsuperscript{36} Tucoo-Chala, \textit{Pau, ville anglaise}, 10, 14.

\textsuperscript{37} Tucoo-Chala, \textit{Pau, ville anglaise}, 49.
direct windows onto the minds of their authors.\textsuperscript{38} Indeed, the idea of a unitary subject encompassed in one diary or document has itself been problematized at length. But treated as texts that are inscribed in a complex process of production at different moments in time, they can yield interesting insights into practices of self-definition, and shed a critical light on projected identities. Treated as ‘records of a life in process rather than finished narratives about a life’, in the words of Julie Rak, diaries become sites of meaning where the writing practice itself – ellipses, omissions and repetitions – can be as important as what is committed in writing, what is said explicitly. Scholars now look for the subtleties in writing that betray the conscious or unconscious construction of what Paul Ricoeur calls a narrative identity. That is, not an identity that exists in and of itself, unmediated and essential, but one that changes over time, framed through references to contexts, circumstances and narrative strategies.\textsuperscript{39} Read in this light, the Delarue diaries, or more particularly Lydia’s diary seen in light of her father’s, provide clues to the shifting meaning of belonging and Frenchness, for the exercise allows us to go beyond the confines of the genre to which each diary belongs.

Taken separately, each document is fairly limited in terms of what it can tell us about its author. Leopold’s is the closest to what literary theorist Lynn Bloom calls a truly private diary: that is, a diary whose scope, content and structure make it difficult to understand for readers. It was probably never intended to be published. The text has fewer symptoms of conscious crafting than diaries that disclose more cognisance of a potential audience, present or future.\textsuperscript{40} Leopold was diligent, not only in writing entries on a daily or almost daily basis, but he kept clear records of dates, diligently recorded distances, latitudes, heights of mountains, names and places and often the time of the day. Closer to older forms of diary keeping (the ledger, the account book, gardening notebooks), his factual record seems at first to be an obtuse document that cannot reveal much of the inner workings of its author.

Lydia’s diary is closer to a public document, that is, a diary seemingly written with a contemporary audience or posterity in mind. Her diary falls within the confines of a


genre of writing that was increasingly codified in her era, that of the school girl or premarital diary. By the mid-nineteenth century this genre had its own emergent literary canon, at least since the publication of the journal of Marie Bashkirtseff. This meant that the publication of one’s girlhood diary as a source for the moral edification of others was at least a possibility. 41 Lydia’s diary thus calls on the conventions of a codified genre both in its format – starting and ending with the overseas trip – as well as in its style, for instance when she wishes her diary ‘good night’. It is a style that seems at face value to suggest intimacy or an unguarded flow of thoughts – indulging in what Alan Atkinson calls ‘the new game of introspection’. 42 In fact it connects Lydia to other young female diarists since the late-eighteenth century. Lydia was also writing as part of a pre-marital convention, a practice most girls gave up once they entered matrimony. Reading her diary, we feel that a potential readership - family, future husband, children or even friends – is always lurking at the edges of the page. 43 Yet as such her writing is more explicitly introspective, asking questions about herself, and her place in the world.

The differences in form and substance between the diaries become clear when we consider the question of cultural belonging, the question of ‘home’. For scholars seeking to find which markers of meaning, or which markers of personal identity were most potent for Australian colonists in the nineteenth century, the idea of ‘Home’ has had much currency in recent historiography. Where is Home? Britain or Australia? Australia or France? It is easy to see the influence of the idea of home in Australia during the nineteenth century and long after. For Henry Parkes, for instance, Federation was not just a political and legal project, it was also a means by which he intended to shift the idea that ‘home’ for Australians was elsewhere and, in doing so, to anchor them to their own emerging nation. 44 The usage of the word ‘home’ shifted over time for migrants and their families, but it remained frequent to refer to England as ‘home’, long after federal union even among the native born. 45 Yet, as David Fitzpatrick has warned, we must be cautious not to see the ubiquitous use of the word in migrant letters

45 Inglis, ‘Going Home’, 129.
or memoirs as systematically imbued with romantic ideals about a temporal or indeed an atemporal place of belonging – an imagined Britain, France or Ireland.\textsuperscript{46}

Indeed, in Leopold’s diary, we look in vain for a forthright answer to the question ‘where is home?’, or ‘where do you feel you belong?’. The word ‘home’ itself resists analytical reading: ‘stopped at Home’ could refer to Australia just as well as to his dwelling in Paris.\textsuperscript{47} The question of belonging seems to remain unanswered. Yet in rare instances his subjectivity, his constructed self-hood, can be seen peering out from the pages. His emotional and intellectual attachment to France, the result of family history and of education, becomes sporadically clear in sporadic occurrences in an otherwise unyielding document: one night in Paris was enough for him to proclaim that the French capital is ‘splendid’, while fourteen days in London only warranted a couple of comments on the ‘very narrow’ city plans.\textsuperscript{48} Indeed, while some of the architecture impressed him, he did not recognise it for what it was: Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament.\textsuperscript{49}

Things were different for Lydia. Her first impressions were the reverse of her father’s. When she, her sister and their mother arrived in England before moving on to Paris and later Pau, her descriptions of what she saw then bear a striking similarity to what other Australians recorded at the same period. Contrary to her father’s sentiments, Lydia’s impressions clearly inscribe her as a product of a British imperial culture which viewed England through the colonists’ mythology of ‘Home’. The first references are to the mythical ‘beautiful Cliffs of Dover,’ the ‘beautiful (...) colour of the grass’ and the ‘beautiful green hills.’ Not uncharacteristically, Lydia’s descriptions rely on repetitive language, using the same adjectives and sometimes even confiding her inability to express how she feels. These sentences suggest she shared with other colonials an uncritical collective understanding that England constitutes what Richard White has called the ‘ideal landscape.’\textsuperscript{50} Thirty years before her, Leopold simply jotted down that he ‘saw the celebrated white Cliﬀs of Dover’.\textsuperscript{51} When visiting Madame Tussaud’s waxworks there seems to have been no question in Lydia’s mind that the Royal Family itself and “Our King” – the epitome of Britishness – were also ‘beautiful.’ Such

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{46} David Fitzpatrick, ‘Ambiguities of “Home” in Irish-Australian Correspondence’, in \textit{Home or Away?}, 20.
\bibitem{47} Leopold, ‘Diary’, Sunday 30/7/1878; Thursday 10/10/1878.
\bibitem{48} Leopold, ‘Diary’, Saturday 20/4/1878.
\bibitem{49} Leopold, ‘Diary’, 9/4/1878.
\bibitem{51} Leopold, ‘Diary’, no date.
\end{thebibliography}
descriptive cues, found in numerous accounts of the period, as White notes, reveal ‘the inadequacy of a colonial culture face to face with an imperial ideal’.\textsuperscript{52} The grass, the hills, the Cliffs, the Royal Family, indeed England itself can be but ‘beautiful,’ for such is the response agreed upon through the imperial covenant.

Once in ‘London Town,’ the little family’s short visit reprised all the clichés of Australians in London. At alarming speed all the sights and sites of their Britishness were consumed: Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Lords and Commons, the Chamber of Horrors, Kew Gardens, the Zoological Gardens, the Crystal Palace, the Tate Gallery and the Tower of London where they walked ‘up the very stairs where the little Princes were found’ and ‘walked over the same ground where poor Ann Boleyn was executed’.\textsuperscript{53} They retraced a form of secular pilgrimage through the maze of English history.

Later, when the three women arrived in Paris for the first time, on their way to the South of France, the place was not intelligible to Lydia. At least it was not intelligible to her in the way it had been to her father, for whom the place held meaning before he saw it. First the language barrier created a clear distance between the travellers and place. Lydia recalled that ‘we had a bit of a worry here, could not speak any more French than “Parlez-vous Anglais [sic]?”.\textsuperscript{54} Some months later the same problem arose but Lydia brushed it off as a quaint experience: ‘Le Roche, nobody speaks English, we speak and receive a shrug of the shoulders’. ‘It is great fun’ she added.\textsuperscript{55} Fortunately, the Delarues found someone who could act as translator in Paris, and the family soon found its way through ‘Rue de la Madaliene [sic]’ in a four-wheeler to the St. Petersburg Hotel, in rue Caumartin, which their slightly outdated Baedeker guide describe as ‘respectable and conveniently situated’.\textsuperscript{56} Beyond the language problem, Paris did not elicit from Lydia the type of reactions as London or England. She remained as detached from the Parisian cityscape as her father had from that of London.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{53} Delarue, ‘Diary 1/2’, 32–43.
\textsuperscript{54} Delarue, ‘Diary 1/2’, 60.
\textsuperscript{55} Delarue, ‘Diary 1/2’, 97.
\textsuperscript{57} Alexis Bergantz, ‘“I Am an Australian, We Are Freer than Anyone in France”: Two Australian Girls and Their Diaries in France in the Late Nineteenth Century’, French History and Civilisation: Papers from the George Rudé Seminar 5 (2012): 148.
Her time in Paris was short. Most of the Delarues’ sojourn was spent in the French countryside where Lydia confided to her diary the trials she faced in a conservative and religious environment. Lydia understood little of the complexity of the Dreyfus Affair that was talked of so often around her. Rather than philosophical discussions about the place of worship and religion in French society that accompanied heated conversations about the accused Captain, Lydia was more concerned with her immediate experience in a foreign land. Growing up, she and her sister had enjoyed what Twopeny calls ‘the more frank relations between the sexes’ of the Australian colonies. On the journey to Europe, from Cape Cod to London, the girls were joined on board the Svevic by a group of Canadian soldiers, and each had an assigned beau. The band got along so well the soldiers accompanied the girls with their mother to Paris. As a result of her liberal education, Lydia became cruelly aware of the discrepancies in status between men and women in the south of France: ‘There is going to be a carnival soon but girls or ladies must not go. Oh how I wish I were a man I could be free to the world, go where I liked, be my own master, How I wish.’

It was through confrontation with the gender norms of the traditional environment of rural France that Lydia’s sense of being Australian was sharpened:

The Australians are free we can walk and talk it is not considered wrong to go for a walk in the park or go shopping alone or go [illegible] with anyone but her mother. Well in France the poor girls are different in England we are free. I am an Australian, we are freer than anyone in France. A girl comes out of school [here] she is never allowed to walk by herself anywhere even in the Park. As for speaking or walking with a young man in the street it would be considered shocking. The mother must be continually there. You must not even walk into a different room to take tea or anything as refreshment they must not go unless the mother or nurse went with her. How they get married is a wonder to me.

Attempting to understand individual subjectivity is challenging for historians. What someone may say or write needs to be interpreted critically. Although the trip was transformative for Lydia, insofar as we can see a shift in her self-identification as an Australian rather than as a French girl, it would be too simple to pinpoint this precise moment in her life and in her writing as the point in time where she realised her Australianness. The idea of ‘home’, as an analytical concept, does not allow us to go beyond the explicit, projected sense of self. I suggest that the German word Heimat probably better encapsulates what scholars are looking for and allows for a

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58 Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia*, 220.
disambiguation of migrants’ writing practices. The German word extends beyond homeland, nation, region or place of origin to encapsulate both the idea of nostalgia for a lost or imagined place of belonging and a more nuclear place where *heim* signifies the circle of family and friends: belonging not just to a place but to others as well. By examining both Leopold and Lydia’s descriptions of the French countryside in what follows, some light can be shed on the question of cultural belonging, for father and daughter, beyond the explicit things that both of them told their diaries, and themselves.

**Unlocking *Heimat*: the French countryside, through Australian eyes**

In the diary of Daisy White, which we discussed in the first part of this chapter, the young woman espoused many of the ideas that were prevalent about French high culture in the upper-class or bourgeois Anglo-Saxon world. Her experience was as much about education as about reproducing the attitudes of her class. Thus she mimicked the snobbery of Parisian cultural elites. After a performance of L’Abbé Constant in near Fontainebleau, she confided in her diary that the play had been ‘very well played … for la province’. But neither Lydia nor her father displayed the same contempt for the country. On the contrary, following recent work by Robert Tombs on British Gallomania and Gallophobia, I suggest that Australian views of France were more diverse than the oft-discussed attraction to Paris and French high culture. In spite of the differences in form and content, in spite of the distance of time, gender and age that separated them, and despite their self-identification with two different countries, when considered together in their treatment of the French countryside, Lydia and Leopold’s diaries suggest a continuity in their mode of viewing that anchors them both in the land of their birth.

Let us take a step back from the Delarue family for a moment. We saw in chapter one that the long-established idea of France linked to luxury saw the rise of explicit economic legislation in the mid-nineteenth century by the French government to preserve and enhance this specific export market. This focus on luxury paradoxically led another image to become prominent in British representations of France: that of an atemporal rural world populated by peasants rooted in the land.


63 White, *Daisy in Exile: The Diary of an Australian Schoolgirl in France (1887-1889)*, Introduced and Annotated by Marc Serge Rivière, 115.
The paradox between high culture and this specific idea of peasantry is only superficial. The conditions necessary for the emergence of a specialised manufacturing industry and a luxury export market also helped to preserve the conditions necessary for the emergence at the end of the nineteenth century of a British vision of France as an Arcadian idyll, a rural world whose landed peasantry represented the bedrock of French prosperity. In France, between the middle of the nineteenth century and the Great War, two-thirds of the French population was rural. Outside of Paris only Marseille, Lyon, Bordeaux and Rouen had between 100,000 and 200,000 inhabitants, and only the three commercial cities of Nantes, Toulouse and Lille had more than 75,000. By the turn of the century France might have had 14 cities of 100,000 people, compared to England’s 47, and agriculture was still more than half of the national GDP. The slow pace of mechanisation in the nineteenth century, the shortages of, and difficulties in effectively transporting, raw materials such as coal, deepened already existing differences between a closed-off entrepreneurial class and a relatively self-sufficient propertied peasantry. 64

One recalls Eugen Weber’s thesis that it was only in the late nineteenth century, through the expansion of an extensive railway system, the implementation of compulsory military service and compulsory primary education (in French rather than in dialects or patois), that the Third Republic turned ‘peasants into Frenchmen’. 65 Indeed, it is safe to say that French peasants would have seemed of another world to both British tourists and urban Frenchmen until the late nineteenth or even early twentieth centuries. Paul Gauguin himself only ‘discovered’ Brittany in 1886, with its pristine countryside and uncivilised peasants, before departing for more exotic places in search of artistic matter among other things. 66 Yet towards the end of the century, according to Tombs, it was this roughness – this unrefined imagery – that started to attract a number of British tourists. Keen to avoid the well-trodden paths of the usual urban areas that had become well known to British travellers, some sought the exotic and unknown French countryside, with its unexplored regions and peasants reminiscent of a bygone age. Rural France came to represent a simpler, more traditional agrarian ideal that found its truest expression in the image of the landed country gentry. Recently, Tombs has effectively argued that the long British fascination with the French countryside finds its

64 Marandon, L’image de la France dans l’Angleterre Victorienne, 309–312; Rioux, La France de 1900, 10; Watlon, France at the Crystal Palace, 5.
genealogy in large part in the sweeping socio-economic changes Britain underwent from the time of the industrial revolution onwards. Economic pressures and increasing urbanisation pushed many British travellers in the middle of the nineteenth century to forsake the Lake District and to look to rural France with a renewed gaze. They saw in its seemingly untainted remote regions a repository of the traditional values that were believed to be rapidly dissipating in modernising England.67

The imagery of France that developed in Britain as a result was reminiscent of an ante-diluvian age of innocence.68 Tombs identifies dozens of novels and memoirs published in Great Britain from the middle of the nineteenth century which reflect this attitude.69 *The Fields of France: Little Essays in Descriptive Sociology* published by Mary Duclaux in 1904 is another example. This book makes clear the connection between French peasants and an ancient folkloric time by linking a range of French regions and their inhabitants to the Middle Ages. Out of seven chapters, four are dedicated to contemporary regions the author had lived in or travelled through (Cantal, Touraine, Oise and Provence), two deal with the middle ages and one is dedicated to ‘The French Peasant, before and since the Revolution’.70 This last chapter in particular also conjures the myth of a static landed peasantry representing the bedrock of post-revolutionary French democracy, crystallising the egalitarian and democratic ideals of 1789. It is a picture in which the peasantry, liberated from its servile subjugation to an abusive aristocracy and ruling class, was seen as embracing the laudable values of simplicity and austerity.71

This attraction to rural France, and to an imagined peasantry, had wide currency in the late nineteenth century. It can be seen outside England, in France as well as in Australia. International Exhibitions - including the one in Paris in 1867 where Old Delarue presented his miniature clock, and the 1878 Exhibition in which his son took part - often presented ethnic villages showcasing traditional regional (and more problematically perhaps, ‘national’) costumes and implements. These were designed to exalt burgeoning patriotic feelings by demonstrating connections to a national origin in a bygone age.

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They showcased, on a global stage, many nations’ newly-found ancient narratives of belonging.\textsuperscript{72}

The importance of the peasantry as a bedrock of belonging can then be seen trickling down to private and public representations: the peasant imagery invokes memories of Lydia and Eugénie’s childhood when the girls dressed up as ‘Breton peasant girls’, or even on board ship during the outward voyage when Eugénie dressed as a French peasant at costume parties.\textsuperscript{73} It is also found in the theme proposed for a masked ball thrown by the Scandinavian population of Melbourne in 1903: ‘National or Peasant dress of various countries’, the amalgam itself rather telling.\textsuperscript{74}

There is no doubt that Lydia looked out from her train wagon in the South of France through this romantic intellectual prism:

\begin{quote}
We pass the most beautifully cultivated land I ever saw miles at a stretch land all colours, small patches, red, brown, black, green, red, yellow, making the hills a magnificent picture, we fly past hay fields with stacks standing about across a river, into groves of tall trees, out on the flatter country still cultivated, not an inch wasted, Grand! We see a peasant washing clothes in another river just as a picture, more hayfields, we stop […] France is the most beautiful place I have seen yet. London is grand and fine and old and antique buildings and all that, but France is so picturesque and quaint. There is brightness and life here the sun shines.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

A few months later in the depth of winter she took the picturesque a step further, describing the ‘very pretty picture’ of the snow-covered country and, as if describing a painting, ‘to complete it, a woman […] washing her clothes on a board at the river side’.\textsuperscript{76}

Significantly, both Lydia and her father saw rural France with a keen and searching eye for its agrarian development. Lydia was continually amazed at the agricultural prowess of the French peasants, the ‘greatest workers [she] ever saw’ in a country where seemingly ‘not a piece of land is not cultivated’.\textsuperscript{77} As soon as Leopold arrived in France from England the first thoughts he jotted down went to agriculture: ‘took train to Paris. The country through which we passed is finer than that of England, every available spot

\textsuperscript{73} Delarue, ‘Diary 1/2’, 97.
\textsuperscript{74} Consul General for Denmark to Vice-Consul for France, 15 August 1903, MAE, 428PO/1/28.
\textsuperscript{75} Delarue, ‘Diary 1/2’, 97.
\textsuperscript{76} Delarue, ‘Diary 2/2’, 24.
\textsuperscript{77} Delarue, ‘Diary 2/2’, 54.
is cultivated’. On his way to his thermal cure, Leopold commented on the monotony of the landscape between Bordeaux and Dax in the Landes region which stretched for miles with pine trees because it was ‘not cultivated’, whereas on the journey from Dax to Pau ‘the country is beautiful well cultivated’. Here is the key to the diaries’ broader significance. For they reveal, beyond the written words of each diarist, part of the mental furniture through which they experienced France - and it is a mental furniture that intimately connected them to one another as products of a colonial Australian culture.

The idea of improvement, borne out of the Scientific Revolution had, since the seventeenth century, offered an alternative view of the world to the fatality of the human condition. Economic development was intrinsically linked to successful exploitation of the land and had become the litmus test of civilisation. Though Enlightenment ideas of improvement and progress were hardly the prerogative of Australian colonists, the idea of scientifically-based improvement that had propelled the British agricultural revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had caused agriculture to be seen, since early colonial times, as the driving force of the colonial enterprise. It was a worldview in which ‘unimproved land was indicative of sloth and mismanagement’.

The corollary to the systematic and ‘scientific’ exploitation of the land in the Australian colonies was the dispossession of its original inhabitants. But this, in itself, helped to shape a distinctive Australian way of being and seeing. Several scholars have pointed out how colonial Australian perceptions of Europe differed from those of their British relatives because they were remoulded through the experience of living in Australia. Andrew Hassam has shown that when confronted with poverty in Great Britain, Australian travellers would compare the state of Britain’s poor not to their own working class, but rather, to Aboriginal Australians. Diane Barwick similarly has shown how, to colonial settlers, the traditional pejorative views of British and Scots migrants towards the Irish was used to condemn First Australians as barbarians. As part of the complex framework of dispossession, the idea of civilisation was expressed not only in racial but also material terms so that, in a convenient leap of logic, if the land was not cultivated,

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79 Leopold, ‘Diary’, 26/7/1878.
81 Hassam, Through Australian Eyes: Colonial Perceptions of Imperial Britain, 147; Diane E. Barwick, Rebellion at Coranderrk (Canberra: Aboriginal History Inc, 1998), 37.
not maximized by its native peoples, it was the irremediable proof that they were indeed not civilised and could not claim ownership of it.  

Certainly, I do not wish to suggest that the Delarues took a particularly racial view of their surroundings, or of their experience of France. The diaries do not allow me to draw such strong conclusions. But the idea of land improvement found such resonance in the nineteenth-century mercantile Protestant culture of the austral colonies that it was often an argument advanced for an Australian or a British-backed takeover of New Caledonia from the French, on the grounds that they were not effectively exploiting the natural resources of the islands. A decade after Lydia’s trip, the importance of land cultivation can be found again in Charles E.W. Bean’s _Letters from France_, the collection of letters the war correspondent wrote during his time with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) during the First World War. Not unlike Lydia, it was during a train trip to an undisclosed location that the journalist expressed his admiration for France, where

> [t]he country was almost all cultivated land, one vast farming industry. And they had managed to get through the whole year’s work exactly as if the men were there. As far as we could see every field was ploughed, every green crop springing. It is a wonderful performance.

Bean later concluded of what he had seen that ‘whatever the jabber of the world outside. Whatever may be the case with Paris, these country people of France are one of the freshest and strongest nations on earth.’

French peasants, in the descriptions above, do not embody just a remedy to the sweeping cultural and social changes of the nineteenth century, but through the act of cultivation – of civilising the land – also became a measurement of the prowess and civilisation of the French nation. And so it was for the Delarues as well, for Leopold and for his daughter Lydia. The anecdotal evidence of the diaries is not sufficient to generalise the differences between British and Australian views of the French countryside, but the continuity between the two Delarues’ observations make clear that whatever they were telling themselves and their diaries, they were both partly products of a colonial British culture, both seeing France through Australian eyes.

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83 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 July 1871, 2; *Brisbane Courier*, 8 May 1909, 13; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September 1913, 8.


Conclusion

For both Lydia and her father, Frenchness was a marker of personal identity deeply rooted in their family history. Yet it did not withstand the test of time. Their *heimat*, the place of belonging that had shaped them, had been the one they grew up in, though neither was probably taught to call it ‘Home’. For Lydia, a young woman who experienced the oppressive gender order of rural France, her self-identification with the country of her forebears underwent a transformation during her sojourn. As each generation became more rooted in Australia, the Delarue family’s connection to France faded and took on a different, more romantic hue than the strong nationalist sentiments that animated the French settlers of the preceding chapter. When she started the long voyage back to Australia, Lydia ‘felt parted from France and all its pleasures & dislikes forever’. Still, she confided in her diary in broken French that she would like to go back for her honeymoon. She married later in life, in 1924, at St Paul’s church in Sydney, and never had children. It is unknown if she did find her way back to France after her wedding. As for her sister Eugénie, her own daughter, Eugénie Crawford (née McNeil), who diligently wrote down her mother’s memoirs with her, still claimed in the 1980s to know the streets of Paris as well as those of the Australian capital cities, although she confessed herself ‘a poor linguist’. The accent of her name might have been superficially preserved, but the Delarue line was no-more.86 The family connection to France had meant that the two sisters grew up thinking of themselves as ‘a little different’. But for other Australians who desired to reap the social and cultural benefits that a link to French culture could bestow, things could prove more difficult. Some in Melbourne in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had to fight the French for it, tooth and nail.

86 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 June 1924, 14; Delarue, *Diary 2/2*, 47; Crawford, *Ladies didn’t*, ii.
Chapter 6

Alliance And Misalliance

It must have felt like a victory. When the Australian President of the *Alliance Française* of Victoria, Lady Holroyd, and the Treasurer of the organisation, Mrs Cave, withdrew from the meeting room, the French consul and Honorary President, Paul Maistre, surrounded by five French women, must have felt vindicated in the long and drawn out battle he had been waging against the women who ran the Committee of the *Alliance*. On the face of it, Lady Holroyd’s decision to adjourn that December meeting in 1907, on the motion of Mrs Cave, was triggered by the forcefulness with which the consul had questioned the decision of respectable society women to decline the membership of two prominent figures of the French community. He had called it a scandal and towered over them, not only as Honorary President but also as the representative of France in Victoria.¹ The problems, however, ran far deeper, and the incident was the culmination of a stand-off that had lasted the better part of a decade. And if Maistre could see the walk-out as a victory for himself, the Committee ladies who orchestrated it may have seen it quite differently.

The *Alliance Française* of Victoria became, between the last years of the 1880s and 1907, the contested site of what France and the French language represented in Australia. The battle was fought between a relatively sealed off Australian group of genteel *mondaines* on one side, and the official representative of the French nation and some of his compatriots on the other. For the former, the *Alliance* was a site through which to articulate and maintain their position in Melbourne society. As an organisation, the *Alliance*, through its connection to France, presented an opportunity for respectable women of the leisured class to maintain or enhance their status by promoting exclusivity of membership and hosting social events such as balls and ‘At

Home’ receptions. For them the *Alliance* became a location for the expression and production of gender and class identities. In the eyes of the consul and his supporters, this was at odds with the universalist and democratic intentions with which the society had been created. For the latter group, while the *Alliance* was under the satin-gloved control of Australian women, it became a symbol of the challenges facing their nation in the nineteenth century. This was a nation no longer certain of its pre-eminence in the world, seemingly assaulted on all sides by competing languages and cultures. Yet its official ideals had been given a new legitimacy by an aggressively expansionist Third Republic, bolstered by a rhetoric of popular universalism explicitly taking its roots in the Revolution and the Rights of Man. Beyond the *Alliance*, what seemed at stake was the honour and rank of the French nation. On a personal level for Paul Maistre, seeing the reins of the French institution solely in the hands of women was more than he could take. What ensued was a battle between the two groups, a struggle not just for the *Alliance*, but for the power it could bestow as an instrument of social reproduction, that is, an institution that could produce and confer different forms of symbolic and social capital depending on the identity of its master, or mistress. By examining the confrontation between the consul and the Melbourne Committee, this chapter fleshes out the different ideas about Frenchness that were articulated and lays bare the relations of power that gave those ideas meaning and significance.

The stakes in the confrontation, the interests of the different players and how they positioned themselves against one another, need to be understood in the context of two major developments that took place over the course of the nineteenth century. First, the language of Molière had been in turmoil for centuries, and its global status had never been so uncertain. From an aspiring universal language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it had been, by the end of the nineteenth century, relegated to the status of a feminine accomplishment in the Anglo-Saxon world, the learning of which was scorned by men. As the language of diplomacy, the Great War would mark its swan song.

The second development was the gradual creation of a monopoly over knowledge as a labour commodity that was increasingly held by universities. Before about 1900, the distribution of knowledge and skills was not the prerogative of universities alone. It was

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3 Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.
only progressively that the then new ‘sandstone’ universities in the colonial worlds of Sydney and Melbourne, like their European and American counterparts, were seen as conferring a particular aura of legitimacy to the subjects they taught, themselves growing institutionally as a result.\(^5\)

In the end, and though it cost him his posting in Australia, Paul Maistre achieved what he wanted: to restore the *Alliance* to what he believed to be its true purpose as a secular imperialist arm of the French Republic outside its formal colonies. It was to be an institution for the dissemination of the grandeur that accompanied the French language and its literature, and a body run by French nationals, of both sexes, for the benefit of all. What follows, however, is the story of that more mundane, more social, more closed off *Alliance Française* and the power struggle it generated.

**Universal aspirations thwarted**

From the eras of Louis XIV and Louis XV, many had thought that the French language would inevitably become, or at least had the potential to be, a universal language.\(^6\) In the eighteenth century its primacy seemed uncontested: French was spoken by the elite in the courts of Italy, Germany, as far away as Budapest and the Russian court. In 1744 Frederic II of Prussia decreed that French should replace Latin in the redaction of the acts of his Royal Academy of Sciences and Letters, suggesting its filiation as the heir apparent to the old established *lingua franca*.\(^7\)

In 1783, the (Italian-born) French essayist and conversationalist Antoine Rivarol was the co-winner of the first prize of the Berlin Academy for his essay entitled *The Universality of the French language*, in which he waxed lyrical on the intrinsic qualities of the French language.\(^8\) The second co-winner of the prize was less generous in his praise. In an analysis often left out of French accounts of this contest, the German writer Schwab provided a much more cynical explanation for the primacy of French by examining the recent (brutal) expansionist history of France in Europe. He also made it


\(^6\) It was Louis XIII, however, who created the *Académie de la Langue Française*, see Salon, *L’action Culturelle de la France dans Le Monde*, 9–11.


clear that the Teutonic language had already become a strong vehicle for ideas and culture. Significantly, he submitted his own entry text in German. Schwab would have found many allies in his resistance to French linguistic imperialism in the years to come. Indeed, while the French Revolution did much to expand the reach of French language and culture, many of the countries it touched directly or indirectly would also react against it. Many, under the impulse of romanticism, actively codified, in the image of Ossian, their local languages and dialects. From 1871 following the nation’s defeat against Prussia, the cultural prestige and pre-eminence of French declined further still. This process was only exacerbated by the phenomenal economic, colonial and industrial expansion of Great Britain, as well as the fast-growing military and colonial strength of Germany.

In this new world order, conquests had to be made of hearts and minds; wars were waged on the cultural and linguistic fronts as much as on battlefields. And France seemed to be losing ground fast. The creation of constructed languages, such as Volapük (1879-1880) and Esperanto (1887), highlights the fact that, even for those who still aspired towards a universal language, French was losing its appeal as a candidate. The impulse to create the Alliance Française in the first place, in 1883, may itself be read as a sign of the times. The need for such an institution to help propagate the French language overseas was itself, arguably, a portent of its declining universality. French had been the privileged language of diplomacy for several centuries; Thomas George Tucker, professor of classical philology at Melbourne University explained this to the Herald in 1906, tongue-in-cheek, because the flourish of French ‘enables so many diplomats to make non-committal statements in an agreeable manner’. But the practice was largely a matter of expediency rather than of international law, and it was often

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conceded only with great reluctance by others. Gradually, as former British dominions
gained independence and their own voice on the international stage, English caught up
with French until it was used on the same footing after the Great War at the signing of
the Treaty of Versailles.\textsuperscript{15}

Many, however, took the opposite view, chief among them the French. Clinging on to
past glories, real or imagined, said Franck Schoell, a social scientist writing in 1936, the French had

\begin{quote}
in the past two centuries, convinced themselves … and have managed to make
the idea popular in Europe, that compared to all other languages the French
language is, in itself, a paragon of clarity, endowed with special proprieties that
exclude vagueness and ambiguity.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

This was certainly the opinion of Isidore Maurice Carton (who hyphenated his signature
as Maurice-Carton), lecturer in French at the University of Melbourne between 1902
and 1920, and one of Paul Maistre’s key allies. For him, French possessed a precision
that ‘does not afford any loopholes for misapprehension as to meanings’, for ‘a French
sentence is easily comprehended, and cannot be misunderstood, like an English one
may be by the misplacing of a full stop or a semi-colon’.\textsuperscript{17} Schoell called this attitude
‘linguistic megalomania’.\textsuperscript{18} Beyond academic debates, however, a more tangible
concern for Maurice-Carton and others had more to do with who should teach French:
that is, who, in the end, was entitled to evangelise the good word of the French nation,
and reap the social and perhaps economic rewards. His answer to this question would
lead him, in his capacity as teacher of French at the University, and as a native
Frenchman, to oppose the Committee of the \textit{Alliance} alongside his consul.

The prestige of both France and its language had also taken another blow, of sorts, in
modern times. In this they were victims, perhaps, of their own success. Throughout the
eighteenth century, as a growing culture of ‘politeness’ began to take hold in Britain, it
had been a matter of course for gentlemen to be educated in all matters French,
including the language, and often to undertake extended trips to France to finish their
education.\textsuperscript{19} In order to master the social world, the great arbiter of British manners, the
fourth Earl of Chesterfield, had advised his son to carefully study the French ‘whose

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{15} Schoell, \textit{La Langue Française dans le Monde}, 321–327.
\textsuperscript{16} Schoell*, \textit{La Langue Française dans le Monde}, 323.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Herald}, 2 October 1906.
\textsuperscript{18} Schoell, \textit{La Langue Française dans le Monde}, 366.
\textsuperscript{19} Cohen, \textit{Fashioning Masculinity}, 38; see also Lawrence E. Klein, ed., \textit{Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), as well as Langford, \textit{Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650–1850}.
\end{footnotes}
politeness seems as easy and natural as any other part of their conversation’. But this attraction also faced resistance. In Britain, and the Anglo-Saxon world generally, much of the magnetism of France had come through its fashions and luxury goods – items imbued with particularly feminine connotations – which led to attacks on the effeminacy of the French influence, an attack extended to French manners and the language itself. What Linda Colley has termed the ‘invasion of Frenchisms’ in the late-eighteenth century also gradually came to be perceived as a threat to British ideas about masculinity even as it helped to define it. Over time the very linguistic qualities of the language, its ‘softness and musicality,’ its ‘melting tone’, came to be opposed to the virility of the English language. Commentators posited one as the domain of the weaker sex and femininity, the other as the domain of the strong and masculinity. Even though Chesterfield’s Letters were extremely popular, his advice about the meandering social agility of the French existed at a time of profound changes in gentlemanly education, and a parallel conversation about the French was starting to take place. As Michèle Cohen argues, British ideals of gentility and gentlemanly education were evolving fast as early as the 1760s. Activities which for a long time had been the domain of the gentleman, such as fencing or dancing, were now seen as frivolous, and mastery of foreign languages became the domain of women. A century later it was ‘a common place that the English gentleman did not speak French’ and the study of it by males was held in ‘contempt’. In 1903, speaking at a Royal Commission on the teaching at the University of Melbourne, Maurice-Carton remarked that boys studied French or German for commercial careers but ‘have never been taught to like or take an interest in the subject’. The shift in the cultural status of French was recognised, at least at some level, by the founders of the Alliance Française in Paris in 1883. For they imagined the Alliance not solely as a language institution but as a place of sociability and, in Melbourne, this aspect was acknowledged from the outset with the creation of a comité de femmes.

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20 Quoted in Cohen, Fashioning Masculinity, 44.
21 Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837, 90.
22 Cohen, Fashioning Masculinity, 39.
23 Cohen, Fashioning Masculinity, 68, 99.
24 Royal Commission on the University of Melbourne: Minutes of evidence on administration, teaching work, and government of the University of Melbourne (Melbourne: Robt. S. Brain, Government Printer, 1903), 326.
25 Schoell, La Langue Française dans le Monde, 348; the two book-length studies of the Alliance Française are Maurice Bruzière, L’Alliance Française: Histoire d’une Institution (Paris: Hachette, 1983) and Chaubet, La Politique Culturelle Française et la Diplomatie de la Langue, L’Alliance Française (1883–1940). For the Alliance in Australia, particularly in the twentieth century, see Colin
The *Alliance* in Paris was created independently of the government, but it quickly developed a strong relationship with the French state, as we saw briefly in chapter one. Two years after its founding, the *Alliance* was officially recognised as promoting the public interest, that is, its actions overseas were sanctioned by the Third Republic as serving the interests of France by promoting its language and literature.²⁶ Through its administrative, financial and political links to the republican government, the *Alliance* can be seen in many ways as a secular inheritor of the civilising mission of French Catholic and revolutionary universalism. More importantly here, it was at the same time charged with the mission of pursuing and maintaining French national interests abroad, both in the colonies and the rest of the world. The tensions at the heart of the universalist nationalism which formed the rhetorical and ideological basis of the Republic are evident in the statutes of the *Alliance*:

The *Alliance Française* … is essentially a patriotic institution … [It] proposes to make our language known and loved in the countries under our protectorate, in our colonies and abroad; to encourage, in barbarian lands or of oriental civilisation, the creation and the maintenance of schools where the French language can be taught; everywhere, to enter in relation with groups of French citizens who have settled outside of France, in order to maintain among them the cult of the national language. The propagation of the French language outside of France offers a very effective and practical means of increasing our [foreign] relations, of facilitating exports of French commerce and, as a consequence, to increase national production.²⁷

The methods the *Alliance* was to use to promote French culture and language overseas were clear, practical and have not changed since. They consisted in providing language courses for adults and children, linking the *Alliance* to existing courses in schools (by offering student prizes, for instance) or creating them if they did not exist, recruiting teachers and delivering public conferences and organising social events to promote the work of the society.²⁸ The statutes and methods would in time give Paul Maistre all the ammunition he needed to condemn the work of the Victorian branch.

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²⁷ *Bulletin de demandes d’allocations*, Alliance Française, 1887, MAE, 428PO/1/31.
Antagonistic institutions in Melbourne

The field of language teaching as we know it today was still in its infancy when the Alliance first established branches in Sydney and Melbourne in the late nineteenth century. The oldest university in Australia, the University of Sydney, for instance, followed the so-called Oxford model of classical education focusing on dead languages. It dabbled briefly in teaching ‘modern’ languages in its early stages but with little success. For the first fifteen years after the foundation of the university in 1850, classes in French language and literature were taught by a succession of unsuccessful and grossly underpaid teachers: the first, who held a doctorate, resigned; the second, a wine and spirit merchant, saw his miserly stipend reduced time and again in the face of poor enrolments until classes were discontinued altogether in 1868. They would not be reintroduced until 1882. At Melbourne University, despite humanist speeches and a proclaimed educational philosophy that recognised the importance of modern language teaching in the intellectual and practical development of students, concrete courses failed to materialise until the 1880s. French courses oscillated between an emphasis on practical language skills or the scholarly study of literature, a pattern which, according to Ivan Barko and Angus Martin, depended on the academic bent of the appointed head of discipline, and whether that person was a native speaker or not. The state of language teaching in Australia in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century meant that there was enough room for the Alliance both to find and create a market for the services it offered.

In Sydney, since its creation, the Alliance played an important role in the public teaching of French in the colony. Due in large part to the efforts and stranglehold of the Consul General, George Biard d’Aunet, the action of the Sydney Alliance focused primarily on language teaching, rather than social events, until at least 1903. Importantly, the Committee in Sydney undertook to link the Alliance to public teaching in New South Wales, in part working towards the state-wide adoption of new methods of language teaching. By 1908 the Public School Board of New South Wales required its candidate teachers to hold a diploma from the Sydney Alliance as proof of their

31 Barko and Martin, ‘A Short History of the Teaching of French in Australian Universities’, 30; see also Kerr, The Teaching of French Literature at the University of Sydney, 1887-1955.
competency in French. This conferred on the Alliance a stamp of legitimacy and ensured its success from its inception.

In sharp contrast, the branch in Melbourne largely failed, during the first twenty years of its existence, to fulfil its mandate in relation to the promotion of the French language across Victoria. It did not develop links with the emerging education sector nor offer a realistic alternative. Rather than linking up with existing institutions, the Alliance seemed intent on keeping its distances from the University. And after a first effort at a rapprochement that was declined, as we will later see, Maurice-Carton kept his distances from the Alliance as well.

Isidore Maurice Carton migrated to Australia with the intention of taking up farming in 1879, but instead completed a Master of Arts at the University of Melbourne before turning to teaching at the same institution. Haunted by the ghosts of the Franco-Prussian war in which he had fought, he always remained wary of, perhaps even paranoid about, the German cultural threat to France and its presence in Australia. The Alliance’s German counterpart, the Deutsche Schulverein von Victoria, was always at the forefront of his mind, and it was with a combative spirit against Germany that he doubled his efforts to promote the spread of French in the colony. Under his stewardship, first as part-time lecturer in 1902 and then full-time from 1905 until his retirement in 1920, the teaching of French at the university gained strong momentum. Besides the classes he offered in language and literature, Maurice-Carton was able to build on and reinforce the predominance of French in secondary schools in Victoria, working tirelessly to entice students to take up French literature and language at the tertiary level by creating numerous prizes (sometimes at personal expense) and supporting the creation of a French Club by students at the University. Two years after its foundation, in 1903, according to Maurice-Carton, the Club had a library of 300 volumes of French literature, eighty members and organised monthly meetings in which

34 Maistre to Mrs James Smith, 15 June 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
36 Chisholm, Men Were My Milestones, 114; Maurice-Carton to Maistre, 20 November 1905, MAE, 328PO/1/33.
37 For more details on the teaching of French under Maurice-Carton see Royal Commission on the University of Melbourne: Minutes of evidence on administration, teaching work, and government of the University of Melbourne.
literature and history were discussed. Every year through the University the Club awarded a £4 prize to the first runner-up of the Senior Public School (Honours) exam.

The shaky foundation of the Melbourne Alliance

The idea to open a branch of the Alliance Française in Melbourne came a few years before Maurice-Carton started teaching at the University. It was first floated at the beginning of 1888 by a man named Maurice Astruc, a Mauritian working for the Francophile solicitor Joseph Woolf, who had represented Leonce Cayron in his various libel cases. Astruc wrote to the General Secretary of the Alliance in Paris who, in turn, made contact with the then consul of France in Melbourne, Léon Déjardin. Though the latter was in favour of the idea, he was reluctant to entrust the opening of the Alliance to a man ‘of colour’, for fear of the social impact this might have on the running of the society and its membership rate. Déjardin approached Woolf himself as an alternative to set up an ‘action committee’, reportedly recommending him ‘because of the high esteem our compatriots have for him, and his demonstrated taste for the French language and French literature’. One of the first to join was Madame Berthe Mouchette, whom we encountered briefly in chapter three. Two years after the death of her husband, Madame Mouchette had purchased an already established and reputable girls’ boarding school ‘Oberwyl’ in St Kilda. When plans to open a new branch of the Alliance were set in motion she offered her services to create a ‘Comité de Dames’. Due to ill-health, however, Woolf could no longer fulfil his role so, with the approval of headquarters in Paris, he delegated his authority to Mme Mouchette, whose own committee was ratified in 1890. The fact that the idea for a Melbourne Alliance had initially come from a Mauritian man, a francophone product of French colonial history, but was, in the end,

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38 Maurice-Carton to Maistre, 18 May 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/33; Maurice-Carton to Pigeonneau, 20 May 1911; 22 May 1911, MAE, 428PO/1/38; on the creation of the Pierre Corneille prize see MAE, 428PO/1/40.
39 Maurice-Carton to Maistre, 20 November 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/33; Program and statutes of the Club Français, 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
40 The suggestion Déjardin considered that Astruc should not be seen as the initiator of the Alliance because of his origins is reported by Maistre. Paul Maistre*, ‘Notes sur l’Alliance Française de Victoria: Sa Fondation, ses Statuts, son But et ses Moyens d’Action’, 17 July 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31; on Mauritians in Australia see Edward Duyker, Of the Star and the Key. Mauritius, Mauritians and Australia (Sylvania, N.S.W.: Australian Mauritian Research Group, 1988); Edward Duyker, ‘Some Thoughts on the Mauritian Cultural Impact on Australia’, Explorations, no. 7 (1988): 13.
42 Maistre, ‘Notes Sur l’Alliance Française de Victoria’.
enacted by a French woman, herself chosen as the second best choice after an Anglo-Saxon male, speaks volumes about the paradoxes of both the little French Society and its wider society. In both cases, despite their universal aspirations, their inner workings and social prestige in Melbourne hinged on defined racial and gender hierarchies that were largely shared between the French metropolis and the British colonies.

Because of the peculiar circumstances of its foundation, the tone within the Melbourne Alliance was established from the outset. For want of a Comité d’hommes, the Alliance was, almost by default, one of ladies. And it immediately became the domain of illustrious ladies at that. Through her connections in Melbourne society, Berthe Mouchette was able to secure the support of leading personalities. The first Présidente d’honneur was Lady Janet Clarke, wife of the exceedingly wealthy Sir William Clarke, the largest landowner in the colony, who had been made baronet for his role as President in the 1880–81 Melbourne Exhibition.

Lady Clarke’s own social ascension is in itself remarkable. Born in Victoria, she first worked as governess to William Clarke’s children. After their marriage, the Clarkes became renowned for their parties and charities. They entertained on a grand and lavish scale, with guests coming by the hundreds to their East Melbourne mansion or their property at Sunbury, where they alighted at their private railway platform. Despite her humble origins, as a consequence of her wealth, her social work and her accumulated prestige, Lady Clarke became a leading figure in Melbourne society for over thirty years. As such she also become the vice-president of the Austral Salon and president of the Dante Society. The first Présidente of the Alliance was Mrs Holroyd (later Lady Holroyd), who was also the president for many years of the Imperial Federation League, as well as president of the Athenaeum and Savage Clubs. She was married to a well-known judge who was incidentally one of the three judges who allowed Leonce Cayron to appeal the outcome of his court trial against Russell, Crivelli, the Playousts, and

43 The Mouchettes were welcomed by the Crivellis as soon as they arrived. No doubt connections were established through Emile’s work at the consulate (as chancelier suppléant) as well as through the young ladies establishment Berthe Mouchette and Mlle Lion would later run together, see Drury, ‘Berthe Mouchette (1846–1928), Artists and Founder of the First Alliance Française in Australia, and Marie Lion (1855–1922), Artist and Writer’, 131–133.


others in the French Prospecting Syndicate law suit to save his honour as a Frenchman.\textsuperscript{46}

Though Lady Clarke, as Honorary President, would remain untouched and detached from the unfolding drama, her role as figurehead of the \textit{Alliance} and other societies, as well as Mrs Holroyd’s husband’s own involvement in gentlemen’s clubs, show the relevance of such organisations as spaces of sanctioned sociability where the games of social inclusion and exclusion could safely take place. These places were generally divided along gender lines: men had the Athenaeum and Savage Clubs, or the Melbourne Club, and women had their own clubs as well.\textsuperscript{47} The \textit{Austral Salon}, for instance, founded in 1890, was exclusively reserved for women professionally engaged in the literary and artistic world to discuss literature, drama and the arts for the advancement and the edification of their sex (though men could, of course, attend lectures and social events).\textsuperscript{48} Naturally, the gendered schism was reproduced at the Melbourne \textit{Alliance}: some of its events took place at the Austral Salon, or during ‘At Home’ receptions where the ‘sterner sex was somewhat scarce’.\textsuperscript{49} In late April 1900, members of the \textit{Alliance} were entertained at Lady Clarke’s ‘Cliveden’ residence, where the ‘fairer butterflies of Society’, as \textit{Table Talk} called the women in attendance, engaged in small talk over cups of coffee or champagne, while in the background some of the most \textit{en vogue} musicians could be heard performing, including the much sought-after Madame Charbonnet-Kellerman.\textsuperscript{50} Given the feminine and aristocratic ideas attached to French culture in the nineteenth century, the \textit{Alliance Française} provided an umbrella of decorum and taste that sanctioned female sociability. The only male on the first committee of the \textit{Alliance} was the secretary.\textsuperscript{51}

The first classes of the \textit{Alliance} took place at the property of Mme Mouchette in St Kilda, ‘Oberwyl’, where she and her sister Mlle Lion dispensed French lessons every

\textsuperscript{46} Sydney Morning Herald, 9 February 1899, 6; Sydney Morning Herald, 3 March 1899, 5.
\textsuperscript{47} Russell, \textit{A Wish of Distinction}, 1.
\textsuperscript{49} Mrs Cave to Maistre, 21 September 1904, MAE, 428PO/1/33; \textit{Table Talk}, 3 October 1901, 27.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Table Talk}, 3 May 1900, 15; Madame Charbonnet-Kellerman was a very sought-after musician and teacher in nineteenth-century Melbourne and Sydney. She was the mother of swimmer Annette Kellerman and taught Melba, among others. See Donegan, ‘Banned in Boston. A Biography of Annette Kellerman (1886-1975)’, 10–25; Bong, ‘Alice Ellen Charbonnet: A French Musician in Nineteenth-Century Australia’.
Wednesday night at eight o’clock. The lessons consisted of spoken readings of modern French theatre and accommodated ten to twenty students. Some, however, found the location too far from the city, too difficult of access, and the classes thus offered through the auspices of the *Alliance* insufficient for the growing number of members. A French correspondent asked *Table Talk*, in French, while lauding the efforts of his compatriots, why more was not being done to propagate the French language, especially since there was an over-abundance of teachers in the colony or people able and willing to teach French (as we saw in chapter three). He signed his little epistle Paul ‘Le Franc’, to be understood in the double sense of forthright, he who speaks the truth, but also as a native Frenchman, a tribal Franc. In a last jibe he suggested that the *Alliance* had worked its timetable around that of the Divine Sarah – Sarah Bernhardt – during her Australian tour, so as to not steal her spotlight. This criticism announced the colour of things to come, of the direction the *Alliance* would take in the near future and the disapprobation it would meet from French citizens. It already indicates a rift that would be cut along national lines, between French expatriates and the Australian members of the Society, a rift which would only widen over the following decade.

In these early years, the *Alliance* of Victoria kept its interactions with headquarters to a minimum. The committee did not follow the statutes of the *Alliance*, and failed to send regular reports back to Paris. When prompted, they only did so half-heartedly. After the departure of Mme Mouchette and her sister to Adelaide in 1894, the predominantly Anglo-Saxon committee members steered the committee and the *Alliance* decidedly in the direction of the other social clubs of which they were members. The consequence was that the *Alliance* became another site for the production and reproduction of their social world, to the exclusion of French nationals and Australians of lesser social strata, as we shall see. When Paul Maistre later complained to the General Secretary of the *Alliance* in Paris in 1907, he dismissed the Victorian branch as nothing more than one of those ‘mondaine Australian societies where, under the pretence of arts and classical literature, they organise “teas”, “soirées” and bals’. A place where French was as little known as Italian at the Dante Society, a frivolous social club, ‘a pale copy of the

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52 *Table Talk*, 15 May 1891, 9. The anonymous ‘Le Franc’ was probably Paul Maistre, other editorials by the same author, written in French, reveal a sound knowledge of the early years of the Alliance, its formation, its mission, and are similarly upfront in their criticism of the gender imbalance of the membership of the Society, see for instance *Table Talk*, 26 December 1890, 5.
53 Maistre to Mrs Cave, 15 August 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/31.
Austral Salon’.\textsuperscript{55} Outraged as Maistre may have been, the Australian members did not see this as a problem, it was quite natural to them to use the French institution as a social club. At an Alliance ‘At Home’ in Clivenden in 1901, at least one member put it simply: ‘If one has a good command of English, it is silly to try and master French or German.’\textsuperscript{56}

Unsurprisingly, though it might seem that the feminine composition of the Melbourne Alliance was a direct result of the peculiar circumstances of its creation in Melbourne, it must be noted that in 1905 in Sydney, out of twenty-one laureates at the annual exams, all were girls – from local lady colleges: Kambala, the Presbyterian College of Croydon and St Catherine’s Clergy Daughters in Waverley.\textsuperscript{57} So much for the language of diplomacy. The gender imbalance of the Alliance struck a sensitive chord for Paul Maistre. He was unequivocal in his descriptions of the female Committee, using the loaded expression ‘tomber en quenouille’, which has the double meaning of something falling under the authority of a woman, and of becoming obsolete.\textsuperscript{58}

Unfortunately for the Committee, Maistre found much fodder to carry out his plans to change the shape of the Alliance. In particular, the first language exams they organised were, in the eyes of many, a complete fiasco. The criticism this attracted led the Committee to reduce the activities of the Society to what they knew best, that is, organising social events, while neglecting to organise other activities to uphold the statutes of the Society. This would only infuriate the consul further, and eventually lead to the resignation of the first Committee.

**Teachers under examination**

By most accounts, the first exams held by the Alliance in Melbourne in 1890 were a disaster. They were ‘supposed to be an educational test,’ went one critique, but ‘were little short of farcical in almost every detail’. The examinations that should have been public were conducted one-on-one in low tones between one competitor and a single examiner ‘who passed or rejected the candidate according to individual fancy’. The

\textsuperscript{55} Maistre* to Dufourmantelle, Secrétaire Général de l’Alliance Française à Paris, draft letter entitled ‘L’Alliance Française du Victoria, ce qu’elle est et ce qu’elle devrait être’, December 1907; Paul Maistre, unaddressed note, 20 July 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31.

\textsuperscript{56} Table Talk, 3 October 1901, 27.

\textsuperscript{57} Courier Australien, 16 December 1905, 3.

\textsuperscript{58} Maistre to Dufourmantelle, draft letter entitled ‘L’Alliance Française du Victoria, ce qu’elle est et ce qu’elle devrait être’, December 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31.
examiners themselves seemed so at a loss that they sometimes ‘appealed to teachers who were present with their pupils’. Some students whose courses had laid emphasis on grammar found themselves at a disadvantage, for ‘pronunciation was the only consideration’. One student appears to have been disqualified for having spent a few days in France, ‘although it had not previously been announced that the breathing of French air … would be regarded as harmful to French students’. And the list of grievances went on, extending to the written examination as well.\(^{59}\)

In its 1893–1894 annual report, the *Alliance* tried to justify the declining number of students from local schools at *Alliance* examinations as a sign of the respect the society was earning as a language institution. The low numbers showed that ‘our exams are serious and that it is perfectly pointless to send us those of their students who are still learning to conjugate’. Some efforts were made the following year to give the examinations more credibility by employing more native speakers as examiners. These were from the establishment: the consulate in Sydney and the *Comptoir d’Escompte de Paris* in Melbourne. However, that at least two of the new examiners were Sydney-based and were linked to the Consulate in Sydney also suggests the possibility of a more coordinated effort to redress the workings of the Melbourne branch in a way the French administration saw more adequate and more in line with the vision they had and for the place of the *Alliance* in the world.\(^{60}\)

Another means through which the *Alliance* was supposed to help propagate French language and literature was through public conferences and literary soirées. Mlle Irma Dreyfus, a Frenchwoman who had migrated to Australia via New Zealand in 1890 with her sister Mrs Aarons, proposed to give a series of seventeen lectures on French literature through the *Alliance* in 1893. Both Dreyfus and her sister had been active in promoting the French language and culture since their arrival, and Irma already had a number of faithful and devoted students ‘des deux sexes’ when she offered her services to the *Alliance*.\(^{61}\) Though her help was accepted at first, the minutes of the *Alliance* committee fall silent after the first lecture was given. In 1894 Dreyfus asked Paul Maistre to come to her public talk, as he had done in the past, to lend his name ‘to those of a few professors and men of letters of Melbourne who have formed a committee to

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\(^{59}\) *Melbourne Punch*, 25 December 1890, 413; *Table Talk*, 19 December 1890, 2.

\(^{60}\) Annual report*, 1893-94, MAE, 428PO/1/31. New examiners included Mesdames James Smith and Biart and Messieurs James Smith, A. Picard (Albert Pinard, consul for France in Sydney who succeeded Georges Biard d’Aunet) and Charles Phalempin (director of the *Comptoir d’Escompte de Paris in Melbourne*).

\(^{61}\) Irma Dreyfus, Candidature to the *Palmes Académiques*, 12 August 1896, 428PO/1/21.
help [her] secure memberships’, indeed suggesting she was delivering them without the patronage of the Alliance. What exactly went on between the Committee and Dreyfus is not entirely clear. It is a very distinct possibility that she was at least in part ostracised for being Jewish. The homonymic similarity between her name and Captain Dreyfus led her, in the middle of the Affair in 1898, to defend herself against circulating rumours, stating that ‘my family is neither closely nor remotely related to that of that man’. Despite the animosity between Dreyfus and the committee, she remained devoted to the cause of the Alliance. In 1897 she gave another series of lectures at Government House, donating half the profit to the Alliance library. In March 1898 her contribution to the propagation of French in Australia was recognised by the French Government making her an Officier d’Academie in the chivalric Ordre des Palmes Académiques. In 1900 she left for Europe where she founded a new Alliance-affiliated society in Paris, the Alliance littéraire, scientifique et artistique Franco-Britannique whose aim was to establish personal and professional bonds between writers, savants and artists of the two countries through international exchange and conferences. Thereafter she kept in touch with events surrounding the Alliance branch in Melbourne through her correspondence with her sister and Paul Maistre.

A Frenchless Society

The rift between Dreyfus and the Committee seems to have been due in large part to the way the Alliance was being run. Before leaving she addressed an open letter to the President, Mrs Holroyd, published in French in Table Talk, with a full length portrait of herself (Plate 6.1). The letter was clearly an attempt to defend herself and point a polite, but firm, finger at the leadership of the Alliance for its language teaching and, importantly, its elitism:

but when I am asked if we organised language lessons, the monthly reunions of our Melbourne branch, which due to circumstances only concern one class of society and the smaller class, might seem to not have been enough. I will defend these reunions which have some good in them, a lot of good, but which, we all

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63 Dreyfus* to Maistre, 16 February 1898, MAE, 428PO/1/21.
64 Government House invitation, 28 July 1897, MAE, 428PO/1/28.
65 Age, 24 June 1898, 4.
66 See the booklet of the Alliance Littéraire, Scientifique et Artistique Franco-Britannique, 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31.
agree I believe, cannot and do not really do much for the propagation of the language.\textsuperscript{67}

She signed with her name and her new title, as an ‘Officer’ of the Republic. The year Dreyfus left, Maurice-Carton offered to give a series of lectures on French literature but the offer was also turned down by the \textit{Alliance}.\textsuperscript{68}

In lieu of educational soirées and public lectures the \textit{Alliance} became increasingly concerned with social events, in particular the Annual Alliance Ball. The 1907 ball was ‘the most successful this society has yet held, both numerically and socially’, according to the society paper \textit{Punch} (Figure 6.2).\textsuperscript{69} But in these days of fervent nationalism the French element seemed almost an imposition, at least aesthetically:

\begin{quote}
The decorations, entirely the work of the committee, were very artistic, and this is saying much, for the tricolour (blue, white and red) does not admit of any possibility in the way of soft contrast: consequently, pale and dark green foliage was all that could be used, and this was very tastefully done.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

The problems surrounding the exams and conferences show more than the inadequacy of a group of Australian women who were not qualified to run what, in essence, was supposed to be a language institution designed to promote another country’s cultural interests abroad. It shows that the Committee only saw the \textit{Alliance} as a place of social significance, sanctioned by its purported links to French culture, but where French itself in fact held little importance. This goes some way in explaining the Committee’s attitude towards both Maurice-Carton and Irma Dreyfus. But class had a lot to do with it too.

Maurice-Carton and Irma Dreyfus, individually and through their careers, represented a threat to the control of the \textit{Alliance} for they incarnated precisely what the committee was not: they were both French nationals and knowledgeable in the language and its culture, and both played an important role in the emerging discipline of modern language teaching in Melbourne. Through further involvement, both would quickly have shown the committee members to be grossly inadequate in their role. They would have exposed the fact that French was, for some at least, no more than a feminine accomplishment, part of the genteel performance. In her correspondence with Maistre, for instance, the Treasurer Mrs Cave not only wrote in a relatively shaky French, but

\textsuperscript{67} Table Talk*, 24 May 1900, 16.
\textsuperscript{68} Thornton-Smith, ‘Paul Maistre, Vice-Consul and Later Consul for France in Victoria, 1886-1898, 1901-1908 Part 1’, 8.
\textsuperscript{69} Punch, 17 October 1907, 573.
\textsuperscript{70} Punch, 17 October 1907, 573.
ironically, also apologized for what she herself called her ‘vilain françai s’ in a letter about the exams.  

Had the Committee members allowed Dreyfus and Maurice-Carton more room to enact the statutes of the *Alliance*, it would not have taken long before the effective control of the *Alliance* was snatched from them, so that excluding Maurice-Carton and Dreyfus was necessary to retain the power to define what the *Alliance* was, and whose interests it served.

The refusal to have Dreyfus and Carton more involved with the *Alliance* also speaks to the elitism of the Committee, as Dreyfus herself pointed out in her open letter, and shows the significance of the *Alliance* to the tight-knit group of socialites as a club through which to maintain their status and rank in the small world of Melbourne society. First and foremost, the committee did not renew itself by a fifth annually as was laid out in its statutes, keeping its control in the hands of the same group of individuals. Further, instead of sending out annual reports of the committee’s activities to society members in preparation for a meeting with paying members, the committee simply read a report out loud at social gatherings.

From that hermetically sealed circle, other attempts at democratising the *Alliance*, by opening it up to people of other social spheres, came to nothing. In response to the early fiasco of the exams it was suggested that teachers of French could become more closely involved with the *Alliance*, an idea which Mrs Cave dismissed as ‘inadvisable’. In 1906, when Maistre was on leave, his temporary replacement – the vice-consul in Sydney, Lucciardi – mentioned that French residents felt they were under-represented at the *Alliance*. When he suggested several French names for the committee, some of whom were teachers, the committee replied that they were decidedly against the membership of teachers, giving the outlandish explanation that they wished to ‘avoid any suspicion of unfairness in the examinations’.

Lucciardi did manage to bring more French people on to the committee. One of them was Mme Charlotte Crivelli, the daughter of Dr. Duret and the wife of his replacement Marcel Crivelli, the doctor of the French community in Melbourne – the ‘Mender of...
Ministers’ (chapter four). Though she was of French extraction and her family was a cornerstone of *le tout-Melbourne*, Mme Crivelli, through her upbringing in Victoria, sided quite naturally with the Australian members of the committee. The adhesion of the Crivellis was designed to tip the balance in Maistre’s favour, in favour of the ‘French’ side, but had the opposite effect. Through their connections to France the Crivellis were able to extend the reach of the Committee and make noise in high spheres in Paris. Reportedly, the Crivelli family remonstrated with Paris that the membership of the *Alliance* was becoming, in recent years, too open. From Paris, Irma Dreyfus’s sister, Rosa Aarons, wrote to Maistre:

> The Crivellis have complained that we have allowed wigmakers, corset-makers, and who knows what else to become members of the committee! And that seeing this, the wife of the Governor, who was expected at the meeting, sent her chambermaid instead.  

Plate 6.1. ‘Mlle Dreyfus on how to teach French’, *Table Talk*, 24 May 1900, 16

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75 Rosa Aarons* to Maistre, undated, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
The coup

Paul Maistre became actively involved with the Alliance in 1901 when he, his wife, and his daughter all became members. Over the following years Maistre tried to persuade the Alliance to follow the example of its Sydney sister and give the Society a larger reach. To encourage the study of French he wanted, following a suggestion from the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce, to create a small sustainable fund, the interest of which could be used to deliver annual prizes. To sanctify the work of the Alliance he wanted to make the examinations part of the Public Service exams. Both initiatives however fell on deaf ears.

His involvement became more assured, and more vigorous as well, after he himself became a member of the Committee in 1905. The first priority for Maistre, in order to gain the authority he needed to effect the change he wanted to see was to promote more regular contact with the Motherhouse in Paris. That this relationship was written in the statutes of the society left the committee members little choice, though they went about

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77 French Chamber of Commerce Treasurer to Maistre, 25 October 1904, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
it begrudgingly. During the few years of his membership it became apparent to Maistre that none of the women involved seemed aware of the statutes of the *Alliance*, which certainly partly explained how matters could have gone as they did in the preceding decade. It also provided him with the opportunity for staging an effective coup and remodelling the *Alliance* to the core.

In 1907, Maistre wrote out his scathing Notes sur l’*Alliance Française de Victoria: sa fondation, ses statuts, son but et ses moyens d’action*. He not only sent a copy to Paris, to seek support, but also handed a copy to the Committee. In his Notes, he outlined the history of the *Alliance*, its goals and the means by which it should seek to fulfil them. Vindictive, if not vengeful and outright brutal, the document was more than an attack on the Committee. By pointing out the similarities between the *Alliance* and other society clubs such as the Austral Salon, Maistre attacked the committee members themselves and their way of life. When his notes were read to the committee meeting in August of that year, their understandably vexed response was that: ‘the Committee can only say that if in its meetings there have been omissions or if it has not strictly observed regulations, all have always sought what is best for the Society’. Herein lay the crux of the matter. The Society, as it existed, hinged on the strictly defined class and gender boundaries of Melbourne’s exclusive social circles which excluded those which the *Alliance*’s messianic mission sought to include. The reforms Maistre thus proposed were based on the statutes of the *Alliance*, to make it ‘truly French, in its spirit, heart, and its action!’

**Spirit, heart and action**

The first point of Maistre’s *Notes* was about the structure and membership of the committee. Though a trivial technicality in appearance, it was of paramount importance in the struggle for effective control over the *Alliance*, for it signified in the long run a progressive erosion of the monopoly of its leadership. Secondly, the *Alliance* was supposed to be as much a refuge for French citizens to maintain contact with their national culture ‘whatever their social situation and their fortune’ as a place to promote French interests in foreign lands. So far French nationals had largely neglected the *Alliance* and one way, Maistre hoped, to remedy this would be to introduce more

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78 Maistre to Mrs Cave, 15 August 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/31.

79 Maistre* to Dufourmantelle, December 1907, draft letter entitled ‘L’*Alliance Française du Victoria, ce qu’elle est et ce qu’elle devrait être’, December 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31.
French members to the committee who would, in turn, attract more memberships. But Maistre also wanted these new members to be men, who could bring to ‘the Committee that habit of affairs, that calm judgment and the logic that are not, usually, the preserve of the fair sex’. Maistre’s desire to change the gender composition of the Alliance, to make it ‘truly’ French ironically lays bare some of the paradoxes at the heart of French society. It highlights the dialectic between a strong form of nationalism defined through a universalist rhetoric itself dovetailing with deeply entrenched stereotypes about the place of women in society, which we discussed in chapter one, and which Lydia Delarue found so confounding.

Maistre first tried to enlist Maurice-Carton. But, perhaps out of pride after having been rejected by the Alliance in 1900, Maurice-Carton dithered, torn between the desire to reshape the Alliance – for its own sake and for his own self-promotion - and the desire to preserve his monopoly on the teaching of French at the University. He first declined to become a full member of the committee, giving as his pretext that the University hierarchy would not allow him to participate in a capacity that might see his involvement in the teaching of French at Melbourne University diminished, while at the same time accepting with gusto the invitation to become an Honorary Member – he now could, buoyed by the title, free several of his evenings. His correspondence with Maistre, however, cut to the chase and made clear his position vis-à-vis the Alliance, and vis-à-vis Maistre’s predecessors, who

knowingly or not, have completely sacrificed the question of education to the vanity of receptions and soirées whose ephemeral brilliance only served their own pride. The influence of the Alliance is therefore seriously compromised … and, since to this day everything they have done seems directed against the University, the University can naturally only be hostile to them.

Maistre used transparent tactics to get Maurice-Carton’s attention. He appealed to his ego and petulant character by insidiously attacking his patriotism. Although Maurice-Carton eventually agreed to help, his suggestions were placatory. Indeed, most of his ideas for helping the Alliance saw it becoming subordinate to the University and himself. One idea was to instate properly anonymous examinations that would be modelled on the ones given at the university - exams that undergraduates could take

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80 Maistre* to Dufourmantelle, draft letter entitled ‘L’Alliance Française du Victoria, ce qu’elle est et ce qu’elle devrait être’, December 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31.
81 Maurice-Carton to Mrs Tobin, 16 September 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
82 Maurice-Carton* to Maistre, 1 August 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
83 Maurice-Carton to Maistre, 26 July 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
84 Maurice-Carton to Maistre, 27 June 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
first, essentially as mock exams. He then suggested the Alliance could give the
University an annual prize of £4 which would double that already offered by his own
French Club and would make for ‘a rather handsome reward, attractive enough and
which will no doubt make French even more popular in Victoria’. In turn, the Alliance
would benefit from the University’s endorsement. Ever conscious of the efforts of the
competing German society, the proposed prize would exceed that offered by the
Deutscher Shulverein, which offered a book prize worth £3.30.85

Maurice-Carton and the Alliance seemed to be irreconcilable. All that came from the
interactions between the society and Maistre was, in effect, venues through which
Maistre could himself steer the Committee’s work to make the Alliance more successful
and more French. Beyond that, the ideas he presented to them were nothing more than
what the Alliance headquarters advised and what the society did elsewhere, in Paris and
the provinces: exams, monthly literary soirées, liaising with primary and secondary
school teachers, and ensuring the complete ascendancy of the French language and
French music in all aspects of society. 86

Some changes started taking place slowly in the direction intended by Maistre, but these
were evidently and probably rightly seen by the Committee as a further attack on them.
In the last months of 1907 Rosa Aarons, sister to Irma Dreyfus, one of the most active
new – French – members of the committee, proposed that the Alliance give a series of
‘Soirées-Lectures’ not only for members, but also non-members and school pupils.
These should be of interest to ‘all who study our language and our literature, without
any distinction of age or social condition, and will educate through entertainment’. 87

The first representation was given on 20 September at the Independent Hall on Collins
Street. In more ways than one it was a landmark event. First, it offered special entry
prices to public school students and their teachers, thus extending the reach of the
Alliance to the general population and cementing its links with the education sector. It
saw an immediate spike in Alliance memberships.88 Second, the play that was selected,
Molière’s The Learned Women, cannot have been an anodyne choice. One local
newspaper noted the universality and timeless nature of the characters of the play. The
author’s satire was aimed ‘not at ridiculing ephemeral follies, affectations, absurdities of

85 Maurice-Carton* to Maistre, 1 August 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
86 Maurice-Carton to Maistre, 27 June 1905, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
87 Paul Maistre* to Dufourmantelle, draft letter entitled ‘L’Alliance Française du Victoria, ce qu’elle est
et ce qu’elle devrait être’, December 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31.
88 Maistre to Dufourmantelle, draft letter entitled ‘L’Alliance Française du Victoria, ce qu’elle est et ce
qu’elle devrait être’, December 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31.
language, and manners, but at making comedy from characters which exist, with
modifications, in all ages’. The Learned Women, for Molière, represented a new
archetype of women he was wont to satirize: women whose affectation of clothes, dress
and manners he had decried in his earlier The Pretentious Young Ladies, but who had
now grown older, along with their century, and in order to keep shining in society
affected scholarship in all the branches of the tree of knowledge. He derided the main
protagonists, three women belonging to the high bourgeoisie, for their superficial and
affected erudition, grotesque to the point of ridicule, in the sciences, high arts and
philosophy, and he mocked their attempts at using arcane jargon without understanding
the deeper meaning, their preoccupation with the form without the content. Could the
message have been clearer or more vindictive? In any case, it seems to have been
received. Neither Lady Holroyd, Lady Clarke nor Mrs Cave attended the representation,
nor any of the following soirées.

At that point, in late 1907, the situation between Maistre and his allies, on the one hand,
and Mrs Cave and her supporters on the other had reached the breaking point and would
soon lead to the walkout of the December meeting. The last straw was placed on the
camel’s back just before the first soirée-lecture. Part of Maistre’s plan to make the
Alliance more French was to integrate it more effectively with the interests of the
French and francophone community in Melbourne. As such, Maistre wanted the funds
of the French Alliance to be entrusted to the Comptoir National d’Escompte de Paris
in Melbourne. The idea had already been aired in 1905 and rejected by the committee,
who wanted to keep the funds at the Union Bank. Eventually Maistre obtained the
assent of most of the committee who, against the Treasurer’s wishes, agreed to the
transfer. The new director of the Comptoir National, M. d’Orgeval, probably on the
advice of Maistre, opened an account with his company and paid into it his and his
wife’s membership fees, sending a receipt to Mrs Cave, the treasurer of the Alliance.
For the treasurer to be bypassed in this manner, after the constant encroachment on the
authority that she and her friends had held over the Alliance, must have been a hard pill
to swallow. In a scathing letter, Cave wrote directly to d’Orgeval recalling the

89 Australasian, 21 September 1907, 627.
90 Maistre to Dufourmantelle, 30 March 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/31.
91 On the history of the Comptoir overseas see Hubert Bonin, ‘Le Comptoir National d’Escompte de Paris,
une Banque Impériale (1848–1940)’, Revue Française d’Histoire d’Outre-Mer 78, no. 293 (1991):
477–97.
92 Thornton-Smith, ‘Paul Maistre, Vice-Consul and Later Consul for France in Victoria, 1886–1898,
93 Maistre to Lady Holroyd, 4 January 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/33; Thornton-Smith, ‘Paul Maistre, Vice-
membership cards she had already sent out, stating she had believed the receipt to be a cheque for membership and that the money ought to be sent directly to her, and that, *in fine*, treasury and the matter of the transfer was her affair, and that ‘any other course of action is wrong, and even illegal’. D’Orgeval was outraged, and saw this as irrefutable proof of the anti-French sentiment of Mrs Cave. When, at the following Committee meeting, the ordinary membership of the d’Orgevals was rejected, it drew the ire of Maistre for whom the rejection of two distinguished members of the French community was an insult to that community, and likely to his own authority. As President d’Honneur and Consul for France, he regarded their rejection as an absolute scandal. This meeting was the culminating point in the tangled conflict of the past decade. It involved too many egos and too many incompatible vested interests. Twice Mrs Cave gave the injunction to Lady Holroyd to adjourn the meeting, who called ‘the meeting is adjourned’ as the Australian ladies got to their feet and left the room in concert.

From here Maistre staged a legal coup. When his first attempt to call a meeting without the assent of either of the two *Présidentes* failed, he sought advice from J. Woolf and, with some legal gymnastics, called a General Meeting in late January 1908, two months before the next scheduled official meeting. The presidents did not attend. During that rogue meeting, Maistre took charge and made business the *ordre du jour*. It included a petition addressed to Holroyd, and signed by thirty-five members, to have the 1906–1907 accounts audited. It also made provisions for the election of new members as well as a programme of soirées-lecture for the coming year. By March, at the first official meeting, the power balance had shifted too much for the old Committee to regain its ascendency. To legitimise his actions, Maistre produced two letters from the Paris *Alliance* lending him their full support for his reform agenda. In April, Lady Holroyd, Mrs Cave, Mrs Crivelli and four others presented their resignations to the Motherhouse and to the members of the Melbourne branch of the *Alliance Française*.

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94 Mrs Cave* to M. d’Orgeval, 8 October 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31. Cave further refused to have the accounts in her care examined by an independent auditor, instead she employed her own accountant, at the expense of the Society. See Maistre to Dufourmantelle, 6 May 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/33.

95 M. d’Orgeval to Maistre, 9 October 1907; 16 October 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31.

96 Mrs Bruggman to Maistre, 19 November 1907, MAE, 428PO/1/31.


98 Thornton-Smith, ‘Paul Maistre, Vice-Consul and Later Consul for France in Victoria, 1886-1898, 1901-1908 Part 1’, 20-24; Lady Holroyd to Mrs Aarons, 4 January 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/33.


100 Lady Holroyd to Madame Maistre, 18 April 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
Conclusion

Victory, in the end, came at a price. For if the Australian Committee resigned after virulent infighting with Maistre and his allies, its members did not leave quietly. Maistre probably felt entirely justified in his actions; he was supported by the Statutes of the Alliance and had the support of Paris to effect change. He also had the upper-hand as a man and as the legal representative of his country in Australia. And he was, after all, only serving the greater cause of France, of his France. Yet he underestimated his adversaries and the hurt he caused them. Secure in their own right as the first Committee of a Society that had, in the end, been theirs from its inception, the Australian ladies retaliated. On a visit to Paris Mrs Crivelli used her personal contacts to discuss Maistre’s manoeuvres and get word to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.  

In April 1908 the Consul General in Sydney also received a formal complaint from the former committee members which he had no choice but to relay to Paris. Four months later the despatch arrived in Melbourne:

Through your quarrels with the English lady members of the Committee of the Alliance Française of Melbourne you have … not only compromised your position in the society of that city, but also inconvenienced the local authorities, to whom they complained, as I have just heard. In these conditions, I believe keeping you in Melbourne in impossible and I invite you therefore to make arrangements to come back to France …

To this day, Maistre’s legacy endures, and the Alliance remains a strong presence in Victoria, working towards its mission of promoting French culture and language through public outreach events and by maintaining strong links with high schools. Every year, hundreds of Victorian students of French take part in the Berthe Mouchette competition in poetry recitation. Yet setting the Melbourne branch on a path consistent with the ideas of the Motherhouse had been a challenging task.

For the French nationals involved, it had been a matter of personal as well as national honour: it was about the seemingly fading prestige of their language and culture in the world, defending the egalitarian patriotic ethos of the young Republic and reclaiming the social place it could confer upon them in Australia. For the Australian women of the committee, French culture was largely detached from the realities of the contemporary

101 Copy of a letter from Mrs Aarons, undated, MAE, 428PO/1/31.
102 Pinard to Maistre, 23 April 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
103 MAE* to Maistre, 12 August 1908, MAE, 428PO/1/33.
French nation. It held meaning as an expression of a cosmopolitanism rooting itself further in time, in the eighteenth century and an era of generalised Francophilia in Europe. For them, French culture represented another asset in the game of refinement and prestige that helped define the boundaries of their social world. The French connection gained through the *Alliance* thus became a significant prize. It allowed both groups to catalyse opposing beliefs into concrete manifestations of social power. The *Alliance* was the site for a struggle between two competing and, in the end, irreconcilable visions of what French culture represented, fought out by two groups of people vying for old world prestige under a new Australian sun.
Epilogue

The celebration of Bastille day in Melbourne in 1915 reached a zenith of pomp and popularity never before seen for this event in the antipodes. Had Eugène Lucciardi, the disillusioned French acting vice-consul, still been in Australia, he might well have thought the ignorant school pupils that caused him such anguish in 1906 had grown into fine men and women in the intervening years. In the early hours, on that July morning, an ‘army’ of more than two thousand women spilled into the streets of the Victorian capital selling flowers, ‘cockades and flags in the colours of France’. By noon, thirty-two floats paraded in costumes representing the heroes and heroines of the French nation. The ‘compact and enthusiastic crowd’ was first waved at by Vercingetorix – the valiant chieftain who united the Gauls against the Romans. He was followed by ‘mounted courtiers of the medieval period’. Then came Henri of Navarre followed by Charlemagne. Louis XIV, flanked by some of his mistresses, trailed behind the red cloak of Cardinal Mazarin. Finally, the Empress Josephine and the Duke of Guise sat somewhat anachronistically next to each other – and in a motorcar. At lunch time, more than twenty ‘cafés chantants’ burst into the Marseillaise while collecting funds to be contributed to the French Red Cross and the war effort. In the evening, the celebrations reached their crescendo in a great concert of French music at the Town Hall, attended by representatives and high dignitaries of the State and friendly nations. Jules Homery, the newly arrived French vice-consul in Melbourne, could see that the ‘extraordinary devotion’ of so many men and women, ‘their feelings of friendship for France, and their admiration’ sprang from their ‘gratitude for everything She is accomplishing, and at what costs, for [her] own protection and for the good of humanity and the salvation of the world’.

The Great War, the accelerated circulation of people and ideas it generated, undeniably cemented diplomatic and cultural ties between France and Australia. It brought the two countries together in a less suspicious embrace. But celebrations of a shared victory, and a shared memory of sacrifice, have contributed in obscuring a more complex past. In the years prior to the war, the relationship between Australia and France, and between Australians and the French, reflected a time when the recent settlers of this continent

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105 Homery*, Vice-Consul for France to MAE, 16 July 1915, MAE, 139CPCOM/20; Argus, 15 July 1915, 8.
looked to the outside world, and not just Britain, with friendship and for inspiration, but also with envy, suspicion and fear. That outward gaze and the global circulation of people and ideas had deep implications for the processes that made Australia. They informed the ways in which the colonists saw themselves and the rest of the world.

France, in particular, had played an important but contested role in the development of British culture from the time of the Norman Conquest. As a result, many of the ideas the British held about the French were transferred to the Australian colonies. Some saw France and the French as a barometer of taste and refinement. Amongst these, France could be understood both as a repository of tradition and a herald of modernity, leading the way towards material and intellectual progress. But others saw them as a cautionary example - warning of the excesses of the century and foreshadowing the threat of moral decline. They saw in the falling French national birth rate, modern literature and the femininity associated with France, an instructive tale of degeneracy. These discussions mattered a great deal for they reflected and fanned local concerns about the place Australians wanted to occupy on the global stage.

Anxious to move on from the convict stain associated with the beginning of white settlement, many colonists were engaged in discussion about how best to ensure Australia would be counted among civilised nations. In this process of self-definition, France and the French were not merely an abstract idea to emulate or repudiate. The French imperial presence in the Pacific had a very tangible impact on Australian political life. It contributed to make the colonies aware of their isolated place in this vast ocean, far away from a distant London Government. The colonies feared once again being associated with the uncivilised stain of convictism. The proximity of New Caledonia and the constant flow of escaped and freed French convicts coming to the island continent fuelled on-going debates about the colonies’ shared self-image and the legal and political means through which they could advance their interests and express that self-image to the world.

Until recently, French migrants have, like many other non-British groups, been marginalised within the Australian national story, either because of the latter’s manifest focus on Britishness or because of the pitfalls of the contribution history that was developed in early attempts to modify that story. The main paradox of the history of the French in Australia is that they have had surprisingly little to do with defining French culture in the antipodes. This is, in many respects, because the meaning of ‘Frenchness’ was largely a pre-established part of the Anglo-Saxon world of ideas. Yet the French
had been here since the first convict ships arrived. They were perhaps more a collection of individuals rather than an immigrant group: most dissipated, intermarried and blended into the larger population. For some this was a necessity to escape from the reaches of the law or social shame, absconders and freed convicts alike were more likely to simply drop out of sight. Undoubtedly, the vast majority of the French in Australia, whether they came as maritime deserters, wine growers or exiled Communards, quickly dissipated in the hustle and bustle of colonial societies changing at a rapid pace. Bringing together archives from both countries can help us to restore some of their stories to the record and, in doing so, to reflect on some important but largely forgotten aspects of Australia’s national formation. These people found themselves, on occasion, caught between the colonists’ anxieties about their physical and symbolic place in the world, and their desires to claim a new form of identity for themselves, British, but also Australian, and building independent relationships with the wider world.

This study has sought to bring French people into Australian history, not to cast them as another set of contributing migrants – adjuncts in a broader national story. I have sought to use them to illuminate some of the broader dynamics of Australian history, and those dynamics in turn have helped us to understand the lives and stories of these migrants. But this study has not just been about French migrants. It has analysed a range of ways in which a connection to French culture informed people’s lives in Australia, whether that connection was the result of birth or not. The French people we encountered in these pages, saw their ‘Frenchness’, if it endured, in a range of ways. And they used it in a range of ways. It could be understood and presented as a strong national cement anchored in the core ideals of the Republic – égalité, liberté and fraternité. But it could also take on more subtle hues, linked to notions of social refinement and prestige, more aligned with Australian perceptions of French culture as a marker of class and taste.

Examining the articulation of cultural difference at a range of social levels, ranging from public discourse, to group interaction, to private reflection, allows us to open a door through which we can glimpse the ways in which many in Australia saw France and in turn saw themselves. In so doing this work has underscored some of the global and transnational connections that have informed Australians’ sense of being in the world.

Today, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, even more lavish celebrations of bilateral Franco-Australian friendship have been brought on by the commemorative
vogue of the centenary years. Much like their earlier iterations, these celebrations have displaced recent tensions between France and Australia in the Pacific. But these might not matter much to the new generation of migrants. Driven by better economic prospects and a sense of adventure, often admitting to not knowing much about Australia, the number of French backpackers on Holiday Working Visas or on the infamous 457 visa coming to the island continent grows sharply every year. In 2012 there were about 25,000 French people in Australia. Two years later that number had surpassed 40,000. Much as for their nineteenth century counterparts, Australia is indeed not always the ‘El Dorado’ or the ‘new far-west’ they had hoped for and dreamt of. But it is for many others, and they are an intrinsic part of the global story of Australia in the new millennium.

The French migrants to Australia in the nineteenth century were not large in number, and they were not as visible or controversial as some other migrant groups. But both the French, and the idea of France, were still a constitutive part of Australian history. Whether colonists were simply looking for something a little ‘chic’, or repulsed by the thought of French convicts swarming the coasts of the continent, the unique story of Australia was also made through a French connection.

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Appendix

Introduction

p. 1. un accident d’automobile traduit textuellement

Chapter 1

p. 21. l’art vestimentaire féminin

Chapter 2

p. 88. Ah! Il y en a des Anglaises et des belles, il y en a … où je travaille et qui ont de jolis yeux

Chapter 3

p. 90. La colonie française en Australie compte quelque deux cents individus disséminés sur le territoire, d’ailleurs pour la plupart ne gagnant guère à être fréquentés: fort souvent ce sont des échappés de la Nouvelle Calédonie. Citons encore des déserteurs, quelques coiffeurs et cuisiniers, et c’est tout! Les faits et gestes de ces compatriotes confirment plus souvent qu’ils ne démentent les préjugés malveillants envers notre pays et seules quelques dizaines de familles, aidées en cela par d’éventuels acheteurs de laine ou de rares voyageurs de marque, ont eu le rôle parfois difficile de contrebalancer es préventions générales de l’opinion publique à notre égard

p. 92. Mon amour pour la vie plus large des colonies anglaises m’a fait jeter mon dévolu sur l’Australie, dont je connais les progrès immenses

les rigueurs de l’hiver

p. 101. existe encore

p. 105. presque aussi beau que Paris

quitter Paris, c’est quitter le monde

sauf ce côté artistique que vous pourriez si bien fournir

p. 106. Partons-nous pour l’Australie?

Pourquoi pas?

brevet de capacité

Si vous ne pouvez me donner tous ces renseignements, auprès de qui pourrai-je les recueillir?
dans ce pays ici, à Melbourne, je gagne ma vie très misérablement dans un hôtel, avec 12 shillings par semaine et cela ne me suffit pas pour tous mes besoins, et je n’ai point d’amis ni de connaissance

les conditions de travail étant absolument contraires à tout ce qui m’avait été promis, je quittai cette place et fut à Sydney 2 ans et demie à doubler et faire des fourrures
tant qu’à faire la misère, j’aime mieux la faire dans mon pays

Je suis toute prête à partir, l’Australie est un beau pays, mais la misère y est bien dure

m’empresse … pour vous dissuader, si possible, de venir chercher, je ne dirai pas la fortune, mais une modeste aisance, en Australie

les professeurs de français sont, malheureusement pour vous, déjà trop nombreux dans ce pays, où pour arriver à subsister, ils se voient réduits à donner des leçons à des prix dérisoires

une crise assez aiguë qui n’est pas faite pour faciliter votre placement dans un pays où les étrangers ne sont pas vu d’un bon oeil par la population ouvrière très hostile à l’immigration

l’avantage de vivre dans un milieu national, c’est-à-dire sympathique

amour des voyages et principalement pour les pays lointains me fait supposer qu’il pourrait bien s’être réfugié à [sic] l’Australie

séparée de corps et de bien

j’ai l’honneur de vous prier de l’informer que je suis bien où je suis, pour mon repos que je l’engage à respecter toujours

vous êtes l’auteur de ma ruine

Ignorant complétement la langue, les mœurs, les usages du pays, et par conséquent, obligés d’accepter n’importe quelles offres, ils sont, en général, consciencieusement exploités jusqu’au jour ou, leurs employeurs australiens, ayant amplement profité de leurs connaissances particulières et de leur main d’œuvre expérimentée, ils se voient remerciés et s’aperçoivent qu’ils ont lâché la proie pour l’ombre, et peiné pour les autres

bons vignerons, munis d’excellents certificats de tous genres, et qui ont abandonné de bonnes places en Algérie pour l’aléa en Victoria sur la foi d’un discours de Lord Jersey et les informations que leur aurait fournies le Consul d’Angleterre à Alger !

dans cette Australie que réjouissait si fort, il y a une quinzaine d’années, la destruction de nos vignobles par le phylloxera et dont les vins viennent déjà en concurrence directe avec les nôtres

ni elle ni son mari ne voulaient plus entendre parler de leur fils, qu’ils ne voulaient plus rien faire pour lui et ne désirait pas le moins du monde son retour en France

p. 107.

p. 108.

p. 109.

p. 110.
Chapter 4

p. 120. la France est tombée au dernier rang des nations civilisées

p. 126. cette belle institution nationale dans laquelle toutes les familles françaises, riches et pauvres, sans distinction de foi religieuse, ont leur représentant

p. 131. les calomnies les plus odieuses

p. 135. de riches filons d’or

Chapter 6

p. 162. se sont, au cours des deux derniers siècles, persuadés eux-mêmes (bien qu’ils ne connussent pas les autres langues et ne pussent guère faire de comparaisons utiles), et ils ont réussi à accréditer assez largement en Europe l’idée, qu’au regard de toutes autres langues la langue française est, en soi, un paragon de clarté, qu’elle possède des vertus spéciales excluant le vague et l’ambiguïté

p. 164. L’Alliance française … est une association essentiellement patriotique … [Elle] se propose de faire connaître et aimer notre langue dans les pays soumis à notre protectorat, dans nos colonies et à l’étranger; de favoriser, dans les contrées encore barbares ou de civilisation orientale, la fondation et l’entretien d’âcoles où s’engeigne la langue française; partout enfin, d’entrer en relations avec les groupes de Français établis hors de France, afin de maintenir parmi eux le culte de la langue nationale. La diffusion de la langue française hors de France offre un moyen très efficace et très pratique d’accroître les relations, de faciliter les exportations du commerce français et, par conséquent, d’augmenter la production nationale

p. 167. de couleur

en raison de la haute estime où le tiennent nos compatriotes, et du goût qu’il montre pour la langue et la littérature française

p. 170. sociétés mondaines australiennes où, sous prétexte d’arts et de belles-lettres, on s’occupe autant de « thèses », de « soirées amusantes » et de bals

une pâle copie de l’Austral Salon

p. 172. nos examens sont sérieux et qu’il est parfaitement inutile d’envoyer ceux de leurs élèves qui en sont encore aux quatre conjugaisons

à ceux de quelques professeurs et lettrés de Melbourne qui ont formé un comité dans le but de me procurer des adhésions

p. 173. ma famille n’est alliée, ni de près, ni de loin, à celle de cet homme

mais lorsqu’on me demandera si nous avons organisé des cours de notre langue, les réunions mensuelles de notre section de Melbourne qui, par la force des choses ne concernent qu’une classe de la société, et la classe la moins nombreuse, pourront paraître une substitution insuffisante. Je
défendrai ces réunions qui ont du bon, beaucoup de bon, mais qui, chacun en convient, je crois, ne peuvent faire, et ne font réellement que bien peu pour la propagation de la langue.

p. 176. Les Crivelli se plaignaient de ce qu’on avait fait entrer des perruquiers comme membres du comité, des corsetières et que sais-je encore ! Et que ce voyant, la femme du Gouverneur qui devait assister à la réunion, y a envoyé sa femme de chambre, la trouvant plus à sa place qu’elle le Comité ne peut que dire, si dans les séances il y a eu des omissions ou s’il n’a pas observé strictement le règlement [sic], tous ont cherché toujours l’avancement de la Société.

p. 178. vraiment française d’esprit, de cœur et d’action !

p. 179. le Comité cette habitude des affaires, ce jugement reposé et cet esprit de logique qui ne sont pas, en général, l’apanage du beau sexe

soit exprès soit par ignorance, ont entièrement sacrifié la question d’éducation aux vanités de réceptions et de soirées dont l’éclat éphémère ne profitais qu’à leur orgueil personnel. L’influence de l’Alliance est donc gravement compromise … et, comme jusqu’à présent tout ce qu’elle a fait semble être plutôt dirigé contre l’Université, celle-ci naturellement ne peut que lui être hostile.

p. 180. une assez jolie somme, suffisamment attrayante et qui ne saurait manquer de rendre le français encore plus populaire en Victoria

tous ceux qui étudient notre langue et notre littérature, sans distinction d’âge ou de condition sociale, et qu’elles instruisent en amusant.

p. 182. toute autre façon d’agir est incorrecte, et même illégale

p. 183. Par vos démêlés avec les dames anglaises membres du Comité de l’Alliance française de Melbourne vous avez … non seulement compromis votre situation dans la société de cette ville, mais encore indisposé les autorités locales, auprès desquelles elles ont porté la plainte dont l’écho vient de me parvenir. J’estime que, dans ces conditions, votre maintien à Melbourne est impossible et je vous invite, en conséquence, à faire vos préparatifs pour rentrer en France.

Epilogue

p. 185. ne leur était dictée par d’autres sentiments que leur amitié pour la France, et leur admiration et leur reconnaissance pour tout ce qu’Elle est en train d’accomplir, au prix de quels sacrifices, en même temps que pour sa protection, pour le bien de l’humanité et le salut du monde.
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