Terre Vraiment Étrange:
French Travel Writing in Australia between the Gold Rush and Federation

Figure 1: Indigenous Australian photographed by French traveller Antoine Fauchery
Fauchery, Sun Pictures of Victoria, p. 127

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Abstract

Despite the rich heritage of the French in Australia, its corresponding field of scholarship is limited. This thesis will explore the travel writings of ten French men and women who visited Australia between the Gold Rush and Federation. Their writings constructed Australia through the lens of exoticism, as a land truly other to their experiences in Europe. Three key themes emerge across the writings: the bizarre animals and plants, the ‘savage’ Indigenous Australians, and the surprise of developed cities. Overall, this thesis will synthesise the French perspective on Australia from a corpus of essentially untapped yet highly revealing travel writings.

Keywords: French; Australia; nineteenth-century; travel writing; exotic; Indigenous Australians
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Introduction

Nous entrions non seulement dans un monde nouveau au point de vue géographique, mais dans un nouveau monde de pensées.... Cette civilisation naissante, sur une terre arrachée à l’inertie ou à la barbarie, n’est-ce pas un ensemble encore enveloppé d’un voile mystérieux ? Que de secrets pour nous qui arrivons ballottés par la mer avec toutes nos idées, toute notre atmosphère d’Europe!¹

C’est un monde de contrastes qui bouleverse les idées des peuples anciens.²

In his first and last diary entries in Australia on 7 July and 31 October 1866, respectively, the French aristocrat the Comte de Beauvoir reflected on his perceptions of Australia’s unique and surprising wildlife and geography, original inhabitants and settler society, and gold mines and towns. Beauvoir was later to coin the term ‘une terre vraiment étrange,’ which encapsulated the attitude of his fellow travel writers.³ As his concluding remark reflects, throughout his journal, he continually described Australia as subverting European standards and expectations. Moreover, the metaphor of a ‘voile mystérieux’ not only suggested that Australia confused the newly arrived visitors, but also implied that Beauvoir’s travel writing would lift this veil and explain the mysteries to his European readers.

Beauvoir was indeed successful in bringing his vision of Australia to his French audience. With at least fifteen editions published between 1869 and 1886, Beauvoir’s writings on Australia as part of

² Beauvoir, Australie, p. 352.
³ Beauvoir, Australie, p. 200.
his worldwide tour were certainly widely read.⁴ Although damningly reviewed by the English-language journal *Nature*, which described it as a ‘gossiping journal’ of ‘little permanent value,’ Beuvoir’s account succeeded in appealing to readers back home.⁵ A ‘highly complimentary review’ was published in leading French journal *Illustration*, which noted the ‘richness, vivacity and sagacity’ of the descriptions.⁶ These highly contrasting reviews suggest that nationality might have influenced the reception of travel writings about Australia.

Despite being perhaps the most widely-read French travel writer to Australia in the latter half of the nineteenth century, based on the number of editions, Beuvoir was not alone. An unprecedented number of French men and women journeyed to Australia between the Gold Rush and Federation, before publishing their diverse thoughts and reflections.⁷ Some travelled for leisure, as did Beuvoir and Anna Vickers, who used a family holiday to explore Australian botany.⁸ Others came because of official missions, such as Parisian courtesan come consul’s wife Céleste de Chabrillan or Oscar Comettant, a judge at the 1888 Melbourne International Centennial Exposition.⁹ Still others were fortune-seekers, including the gold-miner before café-owner Antoine Fauchery.¹⁰ Most remarkably, Henri Gilbert came to Australia on a wager, challenged to walk around the world in five years.¹¹ The

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⁶ Ramsland, ‘Impressions of a Young French Gentleman’s 1866 Visit to the Australian Colonies,’ p. 3.
⁷ That is, between 1851 and 1901.
reasons for travel to Australia thus varied greatly. Australia frequently featured as part and parcel of a world, or at least regional, tour, although occasionally, as in the case of Comettant, it provided the sole destination. While all these travellers’ accounts fell into the broad genre of travel writing, individual style fell into three broad genres: diary entries written at frequent intervals during the trip, letters to friends and family at home, and thematic reflections written entirely upon return to France.

This thesis will analyse these travel writings in terms of how they constructed and represented Australia. Specifically, the manner in which Australia was perceived as exotic and ‘other’ to France will be traced through three key themes: flora and fauna, Indigenous Australians, and the new cities. While these are not the only topics covered in the writings, they provide the most distinctive insights into French representations of Australia. Australian wildlife and the first inhabitants interested almost all French travellers as they appeared so strange and exotic in comparison to a European norm. Awareness of the work of world-leading French scientific naturalists at the beginning of the nineteenth century may well have influenced their outlook. In contrast, a study of representations of new cities draws out attitudes to social mores of settler society as well as perceptions of a built environment that was frequently modelled on older European metropolises. Naturally, representations varied according to the writers’ contexts, yet points of commonality are evident. These travel writings all laid emphasis on what was unusual, and at times incomprehensible, rather than what was familiar. Nevertheless, while contrasting the Australian situation with France, many things unfamiliar to French eyes were explained by comparison with European points of reference. I will compare and contrast such representations to discern the uniquely French construction of an exotic Australia.

Curiously, this large and interesting cache of writings has barely been investigated in depth. Some research has been done on individual writers and writings, frequently by the English language translators, and this work provides helpful contextual information. Several journal articles written on the French in Australia more generally at this time mention the travel writers. Yet there has been no detailed comparative analysis of the travel writings in this era: the closest is Colin Thornton-Smith’s article on French perceptions of Victoria, which lists all French writings on Victoria between 1852 and 1902, many of which are discussed in this thesis, and very briefly traces a few works. Colin Dyer’s recent book *The French Explorers and Sydney* compares the writings of seven French explorers of Sydney between 1788 and 1831, from Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse to Cyrille Laplace, thus demonstrating the possibilities of research into French travel writings on Australia. As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Two, limited study on the French perception of Indigenous Australians refers to the travel writings investigated here.

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thesis will integrate this significant corpus of works, by comparing and contrasting their contributions and perspectives, to determine what was common to the French view of Australia.

There is, however, a larger corpus of literature surrounding the French in Australia.\(^\text{17}\) This is the main body of history writing to which this thesis represents a contribution. The history of the French in Australia is rich and varied: from the early French explorers, to the ongoing French economic investment in Australian wool, to the rallying of public support and fundraising by *Le Courrier Australien* for General Charles de Gaulle and the Free French Forces, to the Alliance Française sponsored French Film Festival, which has grown over the past twenty-three years to be the largest French cinema festival outside France. Of particular relevance to this thesis are, of course, the early French voyages to Australia. Marion Du Fresne was the first Frenchman to visit Australia and the first European to explore Tasmania in 1772.\(^\text{18}\) La Pérouse arrived in Sydney Harbour in February 1788 only weeks after the landing of the First Fleet. Yet his ships went missing, causing Antoine Bruni d’Entrecasteaux to be commissioned to search for its remains in 1792 with the aptly named ships *La Recherche* and *L’Espérance*, followed by Nicholas Baudin’s 1800 scientific mission.\(^\text{19}\) Six further


\(^{19}\) Dyer, *The French Explorers and the Aboriginal Australians*, pp. 3-5.
expeditions were to follow before 1840, with the explorers frequently commenting on Australian flora and fauna, and Aboriginal Australians.\textsuperscript{20}

The consistent significance of the French presence in Australia despite the lack of a wave of French migration should be represented by a richer field of Franco-Australian history than currently exists. A peak of interest seems to have been reached during the 1980s, when the journal \textit{Explorations} was first published. Moreover, most scholarship on the French in Australia focuses either on the early explorers, geopolitics, or the cultural influence of the French in twentieth-century Sydney and Melbourne. This thesis will therefore fill a historical void by studying a largely neglected period. The writings covered in Chapters One and Two on flora and fauna and Indigenous Australians, respectively, were influenced by earlier explorers’ accounts, while the later French presence was felt in cities, covered in Chapter Three. Furthermore, this thesis will use the French perspectives of Australia to consider Australia outside the British lens as well as French views of their own place in the world.

This thesis will also engage with scholarly literature on other topics, such as the history of early French exploration in Australia, theories of exoticism, and urban history, which will each be discussed within the context of the relevant chapters. There is, however, a second key body of research with which the entirety of this thesis engages: the genre of travel writing. Over the past two decades, travel writing has emerged as a key theme for interdisciplinary analysis within the humanities and social sciences, with specialists from history, literature, geography and anthropology recognising its value.\textsuperscript{21} Four key scholarly concerns are pertinent: genre, historical context,\

\textsuperscript{20} de Freycinet (1818-9), Duperrey (1824), de Bougainville (1825), d’Urville (1826), Laplace (1831) and d’Urville (1839). Dyer, \textit{The French Explorers and the Aboriginal Australians}.

geographic context and gender. As Tim Youngs has argued, ‘Travel writing is not a literal or objective record of journeys undertaken. It carries preconceptions that, even if challenged, provide a reference point. It is influenced, if not determined, by its authors’ gender, class, age, nationality, cultural background and education.’ While this might appear common-sense in contemporary history writing, it is an important reminder of the need to consider the context of such accounts and their authors.

The first area of scholarly debate surrounds the definition of the genre of travel writing: whether travel fictions or guidebooks should be included, for example. Paul Fussell argues for a narrower definition, claiming the authors’ personal experience and first-person narration distinguish travel writing from guidebooks, while its factual nature sets it apart from fictional novels about travel. By contrast, Carl Thompson has proposed that there is a far more ambiguous line between travel writing fiction and non-fiction, emphasising the creative process of the travel writers which introduces a fictive dimension into the text. French travel writings to Australia were so popular that many fictional versions were written. The difficulties in determining what is and is not fictional were taken into consideration in defining the corpus for this thesis. Fictional accounts have been discarded as less helpful to the question of how French travellers represented Australia on the basis that their authors did not actually leave France. One exception is Madame Giovanni’s *Impressions de voyage*, the fictionalised memoirs of a real traveller, whose identity is unknown. It is also remarkable

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26 For example, *L’Alsace-Lorraine en Australie* appeared at first to be a series of letters from a group of French migrants after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1. Upon closer examination, it became clear that it was narrated by the fictional Daniel Huguenin and that author Armand Ernest Dubarry was a novelist who never visited Australia. Armand Ernest Dubarry, *L’Alsace-Lorraine en Australie: histoire d’une famille d’émigrants sur le continen austral* (Paris: Perrin, 1887).
for its famous author, Alexandre Dumas, and for its female narrator in an era when the majority of travel writers were men.

Preferring the variety of themes and the richness of the detail book-length travel writings furnish, I have eliminated general travel writings, in which Australia only receives a brief mention, and travel writings in the magazines *Tour du Monde* and *Illustration*. As I identified the era between the Gold Rush and Federation as a period of concentrated French interest in Australia, and one which has been largely ignored by historians, writings outside the period have also been omitted. Naturally, writings by non-French Francophones and secondary accounts of travels to Australia have been rejected for the sake of pertinence and clarity. The writings chosen form a broad corpus of the most interesting and relevant representations: despite their diversity of context, audience, topics of interest and style, they are united by nationality, era and broad genre.

The second contribution of the scholarly literature on travel writing is the era in which these writings were crafted. Travel writing was at its most influential during the nineteenth century, according to Roy Bridges. Yet as travel became more accessible and achievable, so began mass tourism. The role of travel writers shifted during the nineteenth century, as they sought to ‘distinguish themselves from the “mere tourists” by seeking the genius loci of locations’ in ‘symbols that would express the

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essence of “whole” places.” This search for representative images might explain why so many French writings on Australia were formulaic in treating quintessentially ‘Australian’ experiences such as unusual fauna.

Travel writing in this period was not, however, innocent, as it was deeply associated with the imperial impulses of European nations. Mary Louise Pratt’s connection between European imperialism and travel is seminal. Asking ‘How has travel and exploration writing produced “the rest of the world” for European readership?’ and ‘How has it produced Europe’s differentiated conceptions of itself in relation to something it became possible to call “the rest of the world”?’ she effectively links the concept of ‘othering’ to travel writing. Specifically, according to Roy Bridges, the style of ‘precise and scientific’ travel writing was politically motivated as it showed European superiority through scientific rationalism. By contrast, Françoise Lapeyre considers the scientific work of travellers more positive, a ‘double emancipation’ for the rare female voyagers who engaged in the intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century: ‘L’héritage des Lumières s’est diffusé dans une société qui croit en la connaissance par l’observation comme elle croit en la supériorité de ses valeurs.’ Joan Pau Rubiés has shown an earlier link than Pratt identifies between travel writing and imperialism, tracing ethnographic impulses in travel writing to the first era of colonial expansion in the sixteenth century. Pratt argued for a clear distinction between ‘ethnographic manners-and-customs portraits’ and descriptions of landscapes. This does not seem, however, to be the reality in the French travel writings on Australia in our period, where descriptions of both Indigenous and white peoples and societies accompany those of landscape, flora and fauna. It is important to note

33 Bridges, ‘Exploration and Travel outside Europe (1720-1914),’ pp. 53, 57.
36 Pratt, Imperial Eyes, p. 57.
that although Australia fell outside France’s own imperial boundaries, French travel writers in Australia expressed sentiments of racial superiority when interacting with Aboriginal Australians. Yet, the desire to know ‘the other’ was not only satisfied by ethnography: some Westerners ‘defectors’ totally embraced ‘primitive’ or Oriental cultures, though not for a particular objective: ‘Ils ne font que répondre à l’appel de “l’Ailleurs” et de “l’Autre.”’ This is less relevant when considering the French in Australia as none of the travellers undertook this transformation: Antoine Fauchery, who resided in Australia for the longest period (six years), continued to revel in his French identity in founding the Café Estaminet Français in Melbourne in 1854-5.

C. W. Thompson’s study of French travel writing in the first half of the nineteenth century neatly links the second and third elements of historical and geographical contexts. During the Romantic era, the French produced far more travel books than their British or German contemporaries. He argued this interest in travel literature was rooted in the ‘deep political needs’ of the country as a way to affirm national pride. This offers a credible argument, given the relative dominance of the British Empire at the time. Paradoxically, although more travel writers may have been French, the vast majority of academic studies of travel writing have been based on English language sources, an imbalance which this thesis will partially redress. The destination of Australia also held its peculiarities for travel writers. Richard White claims the enormity of the land and the large distances

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38 Belorgey, La vrai vie est ailleurs, p. 237. Fauchery, Lettres d’un mineur en Australie, p. 229. Narcisse Pelletier, who lived for seventeen years among the Uutaalinganu tribe near Cape York after being shipwrecked in 1858, is an exception: he ‘adopted all the ways of his tribe and his naturalisation was complete: he was no longer a Frenchman, he was an Australian.’ Yet his case study will not be considered extensively in this thesis as it is not travel writing, but rather a second-hand anthropological study written by anthropologist Constance Merland.
40 Thompson, French Romantic Travel Writing, pp. 66-7.
41 Thompson’s own work is of course an exception, as is Belorgey, La vrai vie est ailleurs and Lapeyre, Le roman des voyageuses françaises (1800-1900).
between cities meant that quite evidently ‘the land itself demanded more travel than most lands.’

Yet, considering that Australia is indeed of similar size to the United States, China and India, size alone cannot be the main challenge travellers faced. Rather, the harshness of the climate and the unpopulated empty spaces made the distances travelled particularly challenging. This can be most clearly seen in Henri Gilbert’s diary of his trek across the Nullarbor Plain, where he frequently struggled for days on end without food and water. It is important to clarify, as well, that although Australia was not a single entity but a series of colonies at the time, the travel writers frequently imagined it as ‘Australie,’ with Tasmania and even New Zealand being perceived as ambiguously related.

Finally, gender is an important factor shaping the perspective of travel writers. Part of the feminist historiographical project, beginning in the 1970s, of reinserting women into history was the rediscovery of women who had travelled. Jane Robinson was particularly influential, with an annotated bibliography of female travel writings, *Wayward Women*, and a collection of brief excerpts, *Unsuitable for Ladies*. Her underlying thesis is that there is a fundamental difference between the writings of male and female travellers: ‘Men’s travel accounts are to do with what and where, and women’s with how and why.’ Sara Mills perceives a different variation, arguing that women emphasise relationships in their travel writings and take a ‘less authoritarian stance... vis-à-vis narrative voice.’ Yet Susan Bassnett has called into question the idea that ‘women’s travel accounts differ from those written by man in any fundamental way’ and that ‘travel writing is

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inherently gendered.\textsuperscript{46} She warns against the ‘tendency to see “woman” as a unitary category, and to make assumptions based on that undifferentiated categorisation.’\textsuperscript{47} She concluded instead that ‘the sheer diversity of women’s travel writings resists simple categorisation’ and that ‘in terms of stylistic features, there is no way that women’s travel writing can be differentiated from that of male writers.’\textsuperscript{48} An examination of the three female travel writers who feature in this thesis lends support to Bassnett’s argument. There is no juxtaposition between a male and female narrative voice, as there is no single male or female voice evident in the corpus. Moreover, while the writings of Chabrillan and Giovanni do emphasise relationships, this is certainly not the case for Vickers, who is the most scientific of all the writers studied, focusing intently on botany.

Nevertheless, the fact that only three of ten writers are women does demonstrate the marginalisation of women in this period. Lapeyre argues that this continues today, as there is still ‘un certain manque de reconnaissance envers ses voyageuses et leurs témoignages.’\textsuperscript{49} Moreover, women are rarely mentioned in the travel writings of the Frenchmen, appearing mostly if at all as wives to men who occupy vastly more detailed accounts. The one exception is Comettant, whose chapter on education is almost exclusively dedicated to a portrait of two French women running a private girls’ school, alongside a chapter on courtship, prostitution, and women’s rights concerning adultery and rape. In the other travel writings, however, women are mostly absent. This is, of course, not merely an isolated case, but part of the broader historical silencing of women against

\textsuperscript{46} Bassnett, ‘Travel Writing and Gender,’ p. 227.
\textsuperscript{47} Bassnett, ‘Travel Writing and Gender,’ p. 227.
\textsuperscript{48} Bassnett, ‘Travel Writing and Gender,’ pp. 239-40.
\textsuperscript{49} Lapeyre, \textit{Le roman des voyageuses françaises (1800-1900)}, p. 240. This is despite the significant French women travel writers, especially during the twentieth century, such as Isabelle Eberhardt, who travelled in North Africa and Alexandra David-Néel, who travelled to Tibet.
which feminist scholars have rebelled.\textsuperscript{50} This thesis will integrate both male and female perspectives, noting the gendered differences where appropriate, rather than silencing or ignoring either gender.

Chapter One will begin with an account of the contributions of earlier French journeys to Australia to natural history. It will then analyse the varying approaches of the hunter, the pragmatists, the naturalist, and the tourists adopted by the writers. It will conclude that despite the variety of perspectives, there was unity in the representations, which all constructed Australian wildlife as strange and exotic. Chapter Two will also focus on exoticism, considering its role as a process of racial othering in nineteenth-century ethnographic writings. Situating the French travellers’ responses in a longer history of French representations of the first inhabitants as well as the scientific racism of their day, this thesis will show that their tone of writing combined descriptive, condemnatory and empathetic approaches. Chapter Three will move from predominantly rural settings to consider the representation of cities, specifically Sydney and Melbourne, situated in the context of urban historiography. This consideration of settler society, both physical and cultural, will show that Australia was paradoxically held to be an amalgamation of many European elements, and yet at the same time, something new and unique. Overall, this thesis will synthesise the French perspective on Australia from a corpus of essentially untapped yet highly revealing travel writings as \textit{une terre vraiment étrange}.

Chapter One: Flora and Fauna

L’Australie est en effet un pays si étrange et si différent des autres, que l’on est tenté de tout y décrire. Placez un homme au milieu de l’Inde, sans lui dire où il est, et il pourra se croire au Brésil, en Chine, aux Antilles ; placez-le en Sibérie, et il pourra se croire au Canada ; en France et il pourra se croire en Allemagne ; placez-le en Australie, et il regardera autour de lui avec étonnement et tombera des nues. C’est un autre monde.¹

Thus wrote the seasoned world traveller Henry Russell-Killough as he tried to come to terms with the confusion and incomprehension aroused in him by the bizarre Australian flora and fauna.² Having already travelled from Russia to Australia via Mongolia, Siberia and China, and thus experienced the harshness of climates and the great variety of wildlife, Russell-Killough’s reaction to Australia’s strangeness is remarkable.

While almost all of the writers discussed in this thesis were concerned to represent Australia’s flora and fauna as unique and exotic, their approach and reasons for interest varied greatly. Four main characters can be traced throughout the writings: the hunter (the Comte de Beauvoir); the pragmatists, both for reasons of survival (Henri Gilbert, and to a lesser extent Antoine Fauchery) and economics (Octave Chemin); the naturalist (Anna Vickers); and the tourists (in this case, Russell-Killough, Oscar Comettant and Ernest Michel). Only two writers were completely disinterested by Australian flora and fauna, Madame Giovanni and Céleste de Chabrillan. Their omissions stem not so much from their gender, as Vickers was indeed the most scientific of all the writers, but class. Both

¹ Russell-Killough, Seize mille lieues à travers l’Asie et l’Océanie, p. 349.
² Despite his name, Russell-Killough (later known as Henry Russell) is indeed French. He was born in Toulouse to an Irish father and a French mother. Although his youth was spent travelling the world, he became a passionate mountain-climber, pioneering the summits of the Pyrenees. In 1888 he was appointed the Comte de Pyrenees, with a concession at Vignemale, the highest summit in the Pyrenees, which had become his obsession. Exposition Virtuelle Henry Russell. Les Amis du Livre Pyrénéen, updated 2009, <http://www.amis-du-livre-pyreneen.fr/index.php/content/view/85/109/>, viewed 19 September 2012
were consciously attempting to construct themselves as aristocratic ladies, for whom science was perceived as a man's domain, and for whom reflections on social interactions appeared more genteel. These French visitors to Australia were not writing in a historical vacuum, of course. It is unclear exactly how much they had each read of earlier French and British scientific literature, yet each seemed to respond to the popular imagination of Australia as a contrary and exotic land.3

French official scientific expeditions took place alongside the early colonisation of Australia. La Pérouse’s mission in 1788 included two astronomers, a naturalist, a botanist, a mineralogist-meteorologist, a geographer, a gardener, botanical and landscape draughtsmen and two chaplains doubling as naturalists.4 Yet, its scientific contributions were lost when the expedition went missing. The naturalist Jacques de Labillardière travelled to Australia on d’Entrecasteaux’s rescue mission, and between 1804 and 1807, published the ‘first general flora of Australia,’ *Novae Hollandiae planatarum specimen*.5 Baudin’s subsequent voyage was the most significant in bringing knowledge of Australia to the French metropole. As the names of the boats suggest, *Le Géographe* and *Le Naturaliste*, this mission was scientific in nature and purpose: his crew included twenty-four civilian scientists, including five zoologists, two astronomers, two geographers, two mineralogists, four botanists, four gardeners, and five natural history artists.6

This trip made enormous scientific contributions: naturalist François Péron and natural history artist Charles Lesueur collected 100,000 preserved animals including 2,500 species previously unknown by

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science, along with a vast number of plants. In effect, the French expedition had ‘a zoological haul significantly surpassing that of the two Pacific voyages of Captain Cook.’ Live animals, including three wombats, an emu, a black swan, six parrots, two dingoes, and a long-necked tortoise were also sent to France. These were joined later by other animals, including kangaroos, more emus, black swans, and cuttings from the acacia, casuarina and grevillea trees to form a ‘menagerie’ at Empress Josephine’s private Chateau Malmaison. Josephine also commissioned the first comprehensive illustrated book on Australian flora, *Jardin de la Malmaison*, illustrated by Pierre Redouté and written by Labillardière. This book raised popular interest in Australian flora: despite the pioneering role of Sir Joseph Banks in Australian botany, his work was not published, and it took the British forty years to publish anything comparable to the French volume. Australia intrigued the French scientific community: the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle de Paris housed ‘one of the major collections of Australian natural science,’ boasting a large collection of specimens from the Baudin expedition.

Scholars have only recently laid to rest the myths of Baudin’s incompetence as a captain to recognise his prodigious scientific contribution. For example, Frank Horner argued that ‘so much of its scientific work failed to add to Europe’s knowledge of Australia’ as the zoological notebooks of both Péron and Lesueur remained inaccessible. This assessment cannot be justified, as it overlooks the important discoveries that were made. Rather, as Jean Fornasiero, Peter Monteath and John West-

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8 Moyal, *Platypus*, p. 25.
10 Hamilton, *Napoleon, the Empress and the Artist*, pp. 2-3, 76-82.
11 Hamilton, *Napoleon, the Empress and the Artist*, pp. 2-3, 24-5.
Sooby have shown, changed political circumstances in France and the personality clash between Baudin and Péron led to a failure to recognise the scientific impact of the expedition. Consequently, the contemporary voyage of Matthew Flinders received greater recognition in both Europe and England.15

The many ‘inversions and contrarieties of nature’ which seemed to have no obvious rational explanation puzzled Péron.16 His Voyage de Découvertes aux Terres Australes popularised the idea of Australian nature as ‘whimsical and freakish.’17 Similarly, Australia confronted the English as a ‘land of deviations and contrarieties’, which ‘departed from their norm.’18 ‘Contrary’ Australian flora and fauna baffled the scientists but had a profound impact on the development of dominant scientific theory, most significantly on Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. Visiting Australia in 1836, Darwin proclaimed that ‘an unbeliever in anything beyond his reason might exclaim “surely two Creators have been at work”’.19 The quandary of classification was exceptionally puzzling, especially the ‘eccentric’ monotremes, which did not easily fall into the established categories of bird, reptile or mammal. When the first sample of a platypus was sent to London, Dr George Shaw, Fellow of the Royal Society and Assistant Keeper of Natural History at the British Museum, suspected it to be a ‘hoax’ or a ‘colonial prank.’20 Eventually, the paradox of the ‘advanced yet primitive’ animal of the platypus helped mature Darwin’s ideas on ‘biogeography and diversity,’ while his visit to Australia overall was a ‘major flashpoint of understanding for his broad theory of evolution.’21 The scientific community’s interest in Australia as a confronting and baffling land trickled into popular

15 Jean Fornasiero, Peter Monteath, and John West-Sooby, Encountering Terra Australis: The Australian Voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders (Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2004), pp. 348-357.
17 Smith, European Vision and the South Pacific, p. 170.
18 Moyal, Platypus, p. 67.
20 Moyal, Platypus, p. 7.
21 Moyal, Platypus, pp. 107, 111.
consciousness. Not only were the French travel writers influenced by this widespread conception, they also perpetuated it by through their interactions with Australian flora and fauna.

The Hunter

One such interaction with Australian wildlife was through hunting, which was Beauvoir’s great passion. The importance of his aristocratic background in shaping this interest cannot be overstated. Beauvoir was twenty when he set off for his two-year worldwide adventure in 1866. Beauvoir published under his title as Count, indicating the value he placed on his aristocratic heritage despite having lost his ancestral privileges in the Revolution, which were only partially recouped in the Restoration. His travel companion was a childhood friend, the Duc de Penthièvre, the son of the Prince de Joinville, a successful naval commander.\(^\text{22}\) As aristocrats, but of a dynasty that was no longer in power, the two young men frequently met governors and other notable personalities, giving Beauvoir insight into a level of Australian society which none of the other travel writers enjoyed. It also offered them a public profile, their visit being referred to in many contemporary colonial newspapers.\(^\text{23}\) Therefore, it is not surprising that his time in Australia involved numerous hunting exploits, as it was a popular sport amongst nineteenth-century aristocrats. Hunting was also explicitly linked with colonialism, with the hunt for large game in Africa particularly solidifying the


link between empire and natural history. Beauvoir thus provides as an interesting case study in the history of hunting, as his occurs outside the boundaries of the French imperial context.

Early in his voyage, Beauvoir visited the Melbourne Museum, where he was instructed in natural history by Professor of Natural History, government palaeontologist and Museum Director Frederick McCoy. Beauvoir’s visit to the museum, opened only five years before his visit, took place in a context where individual colonial governments were attempting to throw off their convict image by heavily investing in science, in an era when the world’s eyes turned to Australia during the gold rushes. Studying specimens, Beauvoir claimed Australia ‘seems so strange to me’ and that the fauna had the ‘appearance of isolation and alienation’ from species throughout the rest of the world. Despite the intellectual debate between the two men that followed, on whether unique Australian fauna developed in the Mesozoic, Upper Palaeozoic or Tertiary periods, the purpose of his visit to the museum was to prepare for the hunting that was to follow. Kangaroos entranced Beauvoir, who rather amusingly described them as having a ‘poche comme une boîte aux lettres.’ His curiosity motivated him to hunt them: ‘ne craignez rien, si Dieu nous prête vie, nous leurs donnerons une belle et bonne poursuite!’

Beauvoir indeed fulfilled his promise to hunt kangaroos. On the first of his ten hunting trips, he killed three small kangaroos. He painted a lively picture of ‘frightfully break-neck’ hunting, which inspired

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29 Beauvoir, *Australie* p. 44.
‘an unknown charm, similar to a sort of drunkenness’ that merely whet his appetite for the chase.\textsuperscript{30} A later kangaroo hunt was described in very dramatic terms. Beauvoir was thrown from his horse and found himself in a ‘duel’ with a four-hundred-pound, eight-foot kangaroo which was ended by the Duke, who shot the animal.\textsuperscript{31} Beauvoir directly addressed his audience using the vous pronoun (which was not typical of his regular style): ‘Je ne puis vous dire combien sont émouvantes... est cette fantasia autour de la bête qui vous charge avec fureur.’\textsuperscript{32} This use of highly emotional language is typical to the experiences of the hunt in the nineteenth century, where ‘the animal is most to be valued, and by extension the hunter who slays it, according to the fight it puts up.’\textsuperscript{33} Hunting was perceived as a highly masculine activity: unsurprisingly, Beauvoir’s writing is highly evocative of images of male virility and almost entirely devoid of women.\textsuperscript{34}

Throughout his hunting expeditions, Beauvoir continued to feel joy at shooting the most challenging animals. Indeed, he ‘enjoyed’ Australian wildlife only by hunting it. His eyes were amazed at the rainbow coloured birds: killing dozens of them demanded their respect (‘force nous fut de les respecter’).\textsuperscript{35} Upon killing a black swan, which flew majestically, he was ‘au comble de la joie.’\textsuperscript{36} His surprise at the challenge that cranes posed to his hunting technique was indicated in the use of exclamation marks:

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\textsuperscript{30} ‘On se fait terriblement casse-cou dans ces belles galopades, qui inspirent un charmé inconnu, semblable à une sorte d’ivresse.’ Beauvoir, Australie p. 101-2.
\textsuperscript{31} Beauvoir, Australie pp. 166-7.
\textsuperscript{32} Beauvoir, Australie p. 168.
\textsuperscript{33} MacKenzie, The Empire of Nature, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{34} MacKenzie, The Empire of Nature, pp. 21, 42-50.
\textsuperscript{36} Beauvoir, Australie p. 157.
\end{flushright}
Rien de sauvage comme les grues australiennes, et bien malin celui que les approche ! Jamais nous n’avons vu tant de gibier, mais jamais aussi il ne nous a fallu tant de plans d’attaque, de marches à plat ventre et de feux convergents !

He took pride in the different hunting strategies and attack plans devised to shoot such challenging birds. Using martial language to describe his four-day ‘petite guerre’ in which his shooting party had killed around 320 birds, his only regret were the birds that had escaped and were still living. While these passages are quite uncomfortable for the modern reader aware of conservation issues, Beauvoir evidently felt no shame nor saw it as questionable behaviour, but rather a way to enjoy the ‘bounty’ of Australia. Over the past two centuries, social understandings of hunting have changed substantially. This is reflected in the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, which was originally established in 1967 by aristocrats François and Jacqueline Sommer to celebrate the hunt. Yet, recognising that hunting is now seen as highly questionable, it was remodelled in 2007 to focus on a more thematic approach analysing the importance of hunting throughout the ages.

In his hunting, Beauvoir superimposed references to European animals with which he was familiar on Australian fauna. For example, he described the platypus he shot as ‘moitié canard, moitié fourrure.’ Beauvoir used italics to show disbelief at the animal’s habits of rearing its young: ‘Elle pond des œufs et allaîte ses petits, voilà surtout le bizarre phénomène!’ Similarly, he described cassowaries as ‘les autruches de l’Australie.’ He was bemused by their inversion of typical gender roles: ‘C’est le mâle qui couve assidûment et pendant qu’il reste immobile, échauffent pendant des

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37 Beauvoir, Australie p. 158.
38 Beauvoir, Australie, pp. 159-60.
40 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 200.
41 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 199.
42 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 154.
Indeed, Beauvoir perceived Australia as an exotic paradise, which he was most fully able to enjoy through hunting its wildlife. He described the calm and serenity he felt surrounded by the Australian nature: ‘Voilà un magnifique ordinaire. Nous sommes dans le calme de la prairie, vivant de la vie sauvage, tuant les plus jolis oiseaux du monde, oubliant les villes et la civilisation.’

His hunting expeditions thus seemed to have become, in his mind at least, a return to the state of the noble savage uncorrupted by civilisation, as described by Rousseau; this will be considered further when studying French representations of the Indigenous Australians. Nevertheless, Beauvoir remained blood thirsty, only interested in fauna so much as it could be shot, and with native flora posing little interest to him: for example, he found the gum tree ‘monotone,’ and was unable to distinguish between different varieties but instead perceived them all as ‘le même grand arbre.’

He nevertheless remained full of awe and wonder: at the end of a trip to the outback, he listed the many things he found ‘étonnantes’, describing the entire country as a ‘terre vraiment étrange.’

The contrast between Australia and the other lands is explicit. Beauvoir’s reflections on hunting in other countries do not convey the same sense of curiosity: for example, his descriptions of crocodile hunting in the Dutch East Indies share the same adrenaline rush as hunting in Australia, but lack the sense of amazement in the strangeness of his prey. Moreover, while Beauvoir and Penthièvre continue to hunt wherever possible on the remainder of their world-tour, the hunts became less

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43 Beauvoir, Australie, pp. 170-1.
44 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 161.
45 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 200.
46 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 201.
frequent, with Australia forming a peak of interest, presumably because of the highly unusual and exotic animals at their disposal.

The Pragmatists

Although Beauvoir was not the only French visitor who hunted Australian animals, he alone did so for leisure. Animals killed by his hunting party were not eaten but rather collected as trophies, although it is not clear what happened to them in the long-term. By contrast, Fauchery killed Australian animals for food. As a fortune-seeker on the gold fields, he lacked the financial ease of the other travel writers, and so hunted and ate native animals to supplement his diet. He commented, for example, that the kangaroo had ‘côtelettes d’un goût plus que médiocre [qui] témoignent assez de la sobriété de la bête.’

Yet Fauchery was nuanced in his thinking, regretting the necessity of hunting, especially birds:

Outre que ce gibier est maigre et coriace, il y aurait péché à le détruire, son plumage étant toute la gaité et toute l’animation du paysage... On croirait voir la nature à travers un kaléidoscope ; les arbres sont multicolores et le terrain n’est plus qu’un tapis animé, où les rubis, les turquoises, les émeraudes et les opales s’entrelacent en capricieuses et folles arabesques.

This cumulative description has exotic connotations, for example in its reference to a kaleidoscope and a colourful carpet. Noting bird noises, he suggested that they were asking each other ‘la

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48 Efforts to trace the modern day location of his hunting collection have failed; it is unsure if it remains in a private collection or is lost to history.
49 Fauchery, _Lettres d’un mineur en Australie_, p. 126.
question traditionnelle: « As-tu déjeuné, Jacques ? » Fauchery’s literary creativity stems from his background in Paris as a bohemian, where he was friends with famous poet and writer Théodore de Banville, who wrote the prologue to his book. Moreover, his elegant expression in Lettres d’un Mineur led to his strong reputation as a writer. This work was published by the same company as Charles Baudelaire’s 1857 Fleurs du Mal: the two were bound together by their interest in the exotic and the ‘other.’ For example, Baudelaire’s ‘Parfum Exotique’ described ‘une île paresseuse où la nature donne des arbres singuliers et des fruits savoureux,’ while his interest shifted from the physical environment to his creole lover in ‘À Une Dame Créole.’ Therefore, although Fauchery valued Australian animals for their usefulness, his accounts of them are far from mere pragmatism.

This is not the case for Gilbert, who takes a bluntly pragmatic approach both in viewing Australian nature merely for food and through his frank writings. Yet this is easily explained by his experiences in Australia, which was by far the most arduous of all the French writers. Trekking across the Nullarbor Desert on his own, to satisfy a wager, Gilbert frequently went without food and water. This led him to eat native plants, chewing on eucalyptus leaves after fifteen days without food, although this, he found, ‘did me no good, as can be imagined.’ The following day, he ate the stalk of a ‘Black Boy’ (grass tree) which he found ‘good’ and ‘sweet’: being more impressed, he recorded the botanic name (‘Xanthorrhoea hastilis’) and described its use by Indigenous Australians and oxen.

On his walk through the desert, he encountered few animals or plants at all, let alone any which took his interest, although he mentioned in passing kangaroos, birds and snakes, along with the acacia plant which is at one point the only vegetation visible. Having experienced first-hand the

51 Fauchery, Lettres d’un mineur en Australie, p. 128.
56 Dyer, ed., A Frenchman’s Walk Across the Nullarbor, pp. 52-3.
57 Dyer, ed., A Frenchman’s Walk Across the Nullarbor, pp. 64, 71, 92, 103.
harshness of the Australian desert, Gilbert was full of sympathy for the pastoralists in the midst of drought and the rabbit plague, and noted the harsh sufferings at two stations he visited.\textsuperscript{58} Gilbert bemoaned: ‘Poor Stations! Poor Country! Poor inhabitants! How badly the world is shared for the elements of nature. When will justice come? When will there be lots of rain for this country?’\textsuperscript{59} This is one of the most literary passages in his journal, using repetition and rhetorical questions, and suggests he was profoundly marked by the sufferings of the region.

As for Chemin, he took a purely economic interest in Australia, including in the wildlife. Focusing entirely on West Australia, he divided the region into geographic zones according to the fertility of the soil, the abundance of trees, and the types of economic activity that are possible, such as farming or mining.\textsuperscript{60} He was engrossed by the eucalyptus tree, and noted the different species according to their uses. For example, he recorded that jarrah wood was used for stakes, posts, railway crossings, and planks and ribs of boats. He thus suggested: ‘Ce bois nous semble devoir être signalé d’une manière toute spéciale à l’attention des pouvoirs publics en France.’\textsuperscript{61}

Although he mentioned Australian fauna, such as kangaroos, possums and emus, his interest was only evoked by their commercial value for hunting of skins and feathers or food.\textsuperscript{62} The reason for such a singularly pragmatic approach is his context and audience. Chemin was appointed by the Minister for Public Education and Fine Arts to report on conditions for potential French settlers in West Australia, particularly for those interested in mining.\textsuperscript{63} In France, he was the senior engineer in charge of bridges and roads; and had been a professor at the world’s oldest engineering school, the

\textsuperscript{58} Dyer, ed., \textit{A Frenchman’s Walk Across the Nullarbor}, pp. 116-7, 127-8.
\textsuperscript{59} Dyer, ed., \textit{A Frenchman’s Walk Across the Nullarbor}, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{60} Chemin, \textit{De Paris aux mines d’or de l’Australie occidentale}, pp. 59-61.
\textsuperscript{61} ‘Pour pieux, poteaux, traverses de chemin de fer, planches et membrures de bateaux.’ Chemin, \textit{De Paris aux mines d’or de l’Australie occidentale}, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{62} Chemin, \textit{De Paris aux mines d’or de l’Australie occidentale}, p. 69-70.
\textsuperscript{63} Chemin, \textit{De Paris aux mines d’or de l’Australie occidentale}, p. 3.
It is therefore not surprising that he was interested in reporting on the usefulness of different woods for engineering projects, or of animals for hungry settlers: indeed, this is what his publishers and patron would have expected.

The Naturalist

The third approach is that of Vickers’ scientific gaze. Of all the travellers, she was the most interested in Australian wildlife, frequently noting the scientific names of species and giving the most detailed descriptions. Although she did describe Australian animals - a magpie, snakes, kangaroos and wallabies, the emu and the platypus - with great surprise at their unusual and unfamiliar features, her focus is on native plants. Her writing combines scientific details with personal reflections, reflecting a palpable sense of awe and surprise at the uniquely Australian features. For example, she reflected: ‘La nature a eu en Australie de ces bizarreries que l’on ne voit nulle part ailleurs. On ne se lasse pas de contempler et d’admirer ; à chaque pas l’on rencontre de nouvelles merveilles.’

Although this declaration was later proven untrue by highly detailed descriptions, the reader captures her sense of wonder in seeing so many unusual things that can be found nowhere else. In a later journal entry, she compared her position as a traveller to that of an explorer: ‘à chaque instant, nous faisons une nouvelle découverte.’

Vickers’ passion was flowers, especially those that ‘n’ont rien de commun avec celles de nos climats.’ She was therefore concerned to explain what was unique and exotic in Australian plants. Her description of an Australian daisy is typical: she noted the texture of the petals and leaves (‘d’un

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64 Chemin, De Paris aux mines d'or de l'Australie occidentale, p. i.
66 Vickers, Voyage en Australie et en Nouvelle Zélande, p. 44.
68 Vickers, Voyage en Australie et en Nouvelle Zélande, p. 56.
tissu laineux si doux qu’au toucher on croirait tenir de velours dans les doigts’), the shape and colour of the petal, the scientific name, its location, and a related species. 69 Similarly, when describing the grevillea, she distinguished between three sub-species and their identifying features. 70 Yet Vickers did not restrict herself merely to flowers: she was also fascinated by eucalyptus trees. Their variety continually surprised her, and she remarked on the differences in leaves, height, trunk size and shape, uses and location between varying species. 71 The survival of eucalyptus trees after fire confused her, as she asked rhetorically: ‘Comment vit-il? C’est ce qu’il est impossible de comprendre.’ 72 Her descriptive notes are supplemented by detailed photographs of the plants she found particularly interesting (see Figures 1.1-1.3) where her photographic gaze focuses on the exotic plants by placing them in the centre.

Figure 1.1 - Eucalyptus trees in the Grampian Ranges


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Figure 1.2 - Tree ferns in Fernshaw


Figure 1.3 - Black spur plants in Fernshaw

Efforts to trace Vickers’ early biography have proven fruitless; it is therefore unclear where she gained her botanic knowledge. She travelled with her parents and sisters, who joined her on excursions into the bush: it is therefore possible that botany was a family interest. Her notes refer frequently to plants that were discovered by Labillardière.\textsuperscript{73} She also visited and was instructed by Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, government botanist in Melbourne, director of the Botanical Gardens there, and a specialist in Australian flora, whose book \textit{Eucalyptographia: A Descriptive Atlas of the Eucalypts of Australia and the Adjoining Islands} was published between 1879 and 1884.\textsuperscript{74} Twelve years after her visit to Australia, Vickers had developed her specialisation as a marine algologist. She collected algae in the Mediterranean, the Canary Islands and Barbados that were later donated to the British Museum, published her scientific book \textit{Phycologia Barbadensis} in 1908, and was commemorated by the algae \textit{Vickersia Karsakoff} in 1896.\textsuperscript{75}

Vickers’ position as a female botanist was both unusual and socially acceptable. The late nineteenth-century was a male-dominated society where women rarely entered the scientific world.\textsuperscript{76} As Virginia Woolf pointed out, the schooling of ‘daughters of educated men’ was almost always put secondary to that of their brothers, and was not seen as valuable.\textsuperscript{77} Yet natural sciences, and especially botany, were relatively accessible for women. Since Antiquity, women had access to knowledge about plants, and as botany developed, Rousseau perceived this new science as suitable

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Vickers, \textit{Voyage en Australie et en Nouvelle Zélande}, pp. 56-7, 140.
\item Moyal, \textit{A Bright & Savage Land}, p. 90.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
for female capacities.\textsuperscript{78} He believed both that young girls needed their reason trained so that they would be better mothers, and that they were unable to think abstractly: botany consequently provided the ideal field.\textsuperscript{79} Moreover, flowers were associated with ‘femininity, modesty and innocence’: the delicacy of botany was seen as fitting for women.\textsuperscript{80} Between 1760 and 1830, botany thus complemented ‘conventional ideas about women’s nature’ and suited the gendered assumptions of the ideal woman.\textsuperscript{81} Yet, as botany was transformed into botanical sciences in the 1830s, ‘gendering was inverted’ to deny women access, leaving them restricted to literary and educational, rather than scientific, works on botany.\textsuperscript{82} The genre of ‘botaniques des dames’ that subsequently developed was characterised more by a literary than scientific focus: Vickers’ \textit{Voyage en Australie et en Nouvelle-Zélande} fell into this genre, as botany was not her sole concern.\textsuperscript{83}

Women, including Vickers, also contributed significantly to scientific illustrations: two centuries earlier, the works of German artist Maria Sibylla Merian along with her daughters in Suriname ‘combined art and innovative science’ to achieve remarkable results.\textsuperscript{84}

Although not a travel writer, the French-born Louis Buvelot deserves a mention for changing colonists’ perceptions of gum trees through his landscape paintings. Buvelot worked in Melbourne from 1865 to 1882, and by 1869 had established a reputation as Victoria’s ‘leading landscape artist’ (see Figures 1.4-1.5).\textsuperscript{85} Commentators at the time claimed ‘he was the first to point out how

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{78} Nicole Biagioli, ‘Les botaniques des dames, badinage précieux ou initiation scientifique?’, \textit{Women in French Studies} (2009), p. 55.
\item Biagioli, ‘Les botaniques des dames,’ p. 55.
\item Shteir, \textit{Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science}, pp. 35, 50.
\item Shteir, \textit{Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science}, pp. 166, 169, 197.
\item Biagioli, ‘Les botaniques des dames,’ pp. 55-62.
\end{itemize}
admirably the despised gum, box, peppermint and stringy-bark trees will lead themselves to pictorial
treatment ... for all artistic purposes, indeed, he may be said to have discovered these trees.\(^{86}\) His
work gradually changed attitudes by revealing the picturesque quality of the eucalyptus as equal to
the 'elm, oak, beech and birch of the mother country.\(^{87}\) It is remarkable that a Frenchman made
such a significant contribution to changing the perceptions of British settlers of Australian gumtrees.
By contrast, the travel writers most strongly influenced their readers in France rather than the
limited section of the Australian population who could read French and had access to their
publications.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 1.4 - ‘Upper Fall of the Wannon’, 1874, (oil on canvas)

Ansermoz-Dubois and Ansermoz-Dubois, Louis Buvelot 1814-1888, p. 28.

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Violette Ansermoz-Dubois, Louis Buvelot, 1814-1888 (Lausanne, Switzerland: Société vaudoise des Beaux-Arts,
1985), pp. 28, 30, 32-3, 36-7, 41.

86 James Smith, ‘The Buvelot Loan Exhibition,’ Argus, 10 July 1888, quoted in Tim Bonyhady, The Colonial Earth,

87 The Victorian Exhibition, opened 6th November 1872; Official Catalogue, p. 2. Quoted in Bonyhady, The
Colonial Earth, p. 164.
Finally, some travellers took a touristic approach to Australian wildlife, appreciating plants and animals without delving into scientific details. Russell-Killough exemplifies this position: ‘N’étant pas botaniste, je me garderai d’écrire des noms latins pour les caractériser, et n’en parlerai qu’en touriste.’

Following the pattern of comparing Australian animals and plants to those back in Europe, Russell-Killough explained that although the same names were used, they indicated dissimilar species, comparing quite ridiculously the rat and the elephant to show the contrary nature of Australian wildlife. Moreover, he portrayed Australia as an idyllic retreat, where one felt at liberty, and imagined that if a pastoralist returned to Europe,

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Il regrettera chez nous la vie pastorale, à moitié sauvage, qu’il menait parmi les kangourous... il regrettera ces arbres antiques qui ... retentissaient chaque matin le chant des perroquets.\textsuperscript{90}

The repetition of regret, attached to different aspects of a wild and uncivilised life, emphasises his perception of Australia as an exotic retreat.

Comettant’s primary interaction with Australian wildlife, outside a brief visit to a pastoral station, came through a trip to the Melbourne Zoo. Here, he saw a wider range of animals than the other French writers, being the only one to mention the koala and the wombat. Yet the extent of his commentary is almost exclusively comparing Australian animals to their European equivalents. He repeated the clichés of the platypus being ‘le plus curieux des animaux de l’Australie’ and ‘bien paradoxal ... à nul autre semblable’; yet this does not stop him comparing it to a duck and an otter.\textsuperscript{91} Similarly, he describes what can only be assumed to be koalas (as he does not name them) as ‘les petits ours de l’hémisphère sud... gracieux comme des chats et doux comme des agneaux.’\textsuperscript{92} He rather amusingly proclaimed ‘que j’en aurais voulu un pour l’emmener avec moi en France!’\textsuperscript{93} Other comparisons he made were the possum with the hare, the wombat with the wild pig, the cassowary with the ostrich, Australian cicadas with their Provençal equivalent, and the kookaburra with the kingfisher (stumbling quite accidentally upon a scientifically accurate comparison, as the two birds belong to the same family, \textit{Halcyonidae}).\textsuperscript{94} Comparison enabled Comettant to come to terms with the Australian exoticism.

\textsuperscript{90} Russell-Killough, \textit{Seize mille lieues à travers l’Asie et l’Océanie}, p. 348.
\textsuperscript{91} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{92} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{93} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{94} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 91-2, 94, 109.
Comettant was entranced by kangaroos, recording their physical description as well as the protective habits of the female kangaroo with their joeys.\textsuperscript{95} Interestingly, he was the only travel writer to mention the fossils of the now-extinct mega-fauna, describing them as ‘colosses redoutables.’\textsuperscript{96} Whether deliberately or not, the description of him standing and contemplating strange animals (‘j’ai passé une bonne heure à contempler’) echoes Victor Hugo’s ‘Le Poème du Jardin des Plantes’ (‘sans sortir de Lutèce allons en Assyrîe, et sans quitter Paris partons pour Tombouctou’ ... ‘terre des baobabs, des bambous, des lianes’).\textsuperscript{97} Hugo’s poem represented ‘the colonies and the wider world come home to Paris.’\textsuperscript{98} As the zoo represented, in both Paris and London, the triumph of imperialism and the mission civilisatrice, it was a symbol of colonial might for zoos to exist not only in the metropole but also in the colonies.\textsuperscript{99}

Michel also enjoyed institutionalised Australian wildlife, in his case by visiting botanical gardens in both Sydney and Adelaide. He is particularly complimentary regarding Adelaide’s botanical gardens, which were separated into a section of ornamentation and a section for botanical study for young doctors, pharmacists and botanists. He described the former as reminding him of ‘un des jardins de Nice,’ and concluded it was ‘le plus beau des jardins australiens.’\textsuperscript{100} Although his second volume provided a detailed overview of Australian flora and fauna, it is likely that much of this was secondary information rather than sourced from his actual travels; his third volume, which covers most of his stay in Australia, does not indicate many visits to the bush but rather these botanical gardens.\textsuperscript{101} This rather shallow approach to seeking information can be explained by the extent of

\textsuperscript{95} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, pp. 92-4.
\textsuperscript{96} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{99} Wilfrid Blunt, \textit{The Ark in the Park: The Zoo in the Nineteenth Century} (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1976) details the ‘exotic’ animals in London Zoo in the nineteenth century, including kangaroos from Australia!
\textsuperscript{100} Michel, \textit{A travers l’hémisphère sud III}, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{101} Michel, \textit{A travers l’hémisphère sud II}, pp. 234, 255.
his travel in a relatively short time. This attitude of tourist, in general, is perhaps the least perceptive in its understanding of Australian plants and animals, yet is imbued with the desire to compare Australia’s exotic and strange elements with familiar wildlife.

In conclusion, there was a great diversity between the different representations of Australian flora and fauna by French travellers. Varying levels of scientific awareness as well as interest in wildlife shaped the degree and manner of description and commentary. Yet amongst the four approaches of hunter, naturalist, pragmatist and tourist, there emerges a common thread. French travellers were united by their underlying attitude to Australian flora and fauna, perceiving it not only as different to what they were familiar with at home, but also strange, exotic and surprising.
Chapter Two: Indigenous Australians

Nous étions assis tranquillement au bord de la rivière, lorsque nous apercevons de l’autre côté une bande d’indigènes qui nous observe.... Personne ne bouge. Pas le plus léger mouvement de leur côté ! ... Notre situation commence à devenir inquiétante. Il nous semble que ces misérables attendent la nuit pour venir nous attaquer. Deux heures plus tard ... à notre grande surprise, nous nous apercevons que nos Australiens en costume de guerre n’étaient pas du tout des Australiens, mais des troncs d’arbre auxquels un effet de lumière, aidé de notre imagination, avait donné des formes humaines. Nous avons bien ri de notre méprise.¹

This ludicrous almost-interaction between a group of French travellers and imagined Indigenous Australians is highly revealing of the emotions experienced at cross-cultural contact. Anna Vickers’ recount reveals fear, anxiety and suspicion towards what she believed were highly threatening Aboriginal people. The naivety of the travelling party is shown by their own recognition of over-active imaginations. The irony of a perceived danger being in reality no threat at all symbolises the confusing and confronting interactions between the French travellers and the first inhabitants of Australia.

It is almost self-evident to remark that French reflections on Aboriginal people were racially-based, and at times highly racist. This chapter will not seek to exonerate the French attitudes, nor condemn the Indigenous Australians through the same lenses as those of the French. Rather, it will examine the elements of Aboriginal culture that the travel writers deemed either interesting or important to record, situating their reactions within their historical context. French reflections on Indigenous

Australians fall into four general categories: the scientific, inspired by theories of human taxonomy and scientific racism; the descriptive, such as physical appearances and languages; the condemnatory, including accusations of idleness, nudity and cannibalism; and the empathetic, regarding frontier warfare, poverty and dispossession from land, and the perceivably doomed nature of their race.

Setting the Scene

The French travel writers in the second half of the nineteenth century were conscious of writing in the wake of earlier travellers. Between 1772 and 1840, ten French expeditions visited Australia and made substantive comments on the culture and lifestyle of the first inhabitants. The Marion Du Fresne, d’Entrecasteaux and Baudin expeditions were particularly significant, observing the Indigenous Tasmanians ‘in their natural state’ before European settlement in 1803. Marion Dufresne’s expedition, which landed in Van Dieman’s Land in 1772, was both the first French contact with Australia and the first European contact with Aboriginal Tasmanians. Unfortunately, this was a negative first encounter: volleys of stones and gunfire were exchanged, resulting in the injury of several French sailors and the death of an Aboriginal Tasmanian. A far more ‘wholly positive’ encounter was enjoyed by d’Entrecasteaux’s crew, where an unusual tone of ‘gaiety and delight,
Terre Vraiment Étrange

even joy,’ abounded.7 The Tasmanians were referred to as ‘our good friends’ and both language and gifts were exchanged.8 While the Baudin expedition’s cross-cultural experiences turned to mistrust and confusion, not joy, it did achieve more detailed and deliberate anthropological studies. Baudin had received thorough instructions from the first anthropological society in the world, the Société des Observateurs de l’Homme.9 Specifically, Georges Cuvier encouraged portraiture and collection of cultural artefacts, while Joseph-Marie de Gérando proposed a highly-detailed anthropological method.10 Furthermore, François Péron’s report on Maria Island, off the east coast of Tasmania, is possibly the ‘first ever commissioned anthropological fieldwork report’ world-wide.11 These earlier encounters form a rich heritage of French anthropological interest in Aboriginal Australians which shaped the experiences of the later travellers.

Moreover, the French travellers’ perception of Indigenous Australians was shaped not only by previous encounters, but also by contemporary theories and ideologies. One of the most influential philosophers, particularly for the early explorers, was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although he never used the phrase ‘noble savage,’ Rousseau’s ideas on l’homme originel, or l’homme sauvage, influenced the ‘cult of primitivism.’12 The d’Entrecasteaux expedition can be seen as ‘fulfilling for the French a Rousseanaesque ideal of life in the state of nature.’13 Subsequent encounters rendered this

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unsustainable. Margaret Sankey argues that François Péron, naturalist with the Baudin expedition, struggled to balance his idealized Rousseauian view of savage man with the reality of his experience.\textsuperscript{14} He was frustrated to find that ‘the real Other does not correspond to the imaginary Other, the worthy counterpart of civilised man,’ a finding that was confirmed in ‘scientific’ measurements using a dynamometer which seemed to indicate the Aboriginal Australians’ lack of physical strength.\textsuperscript{15} His abandonment of Rousseau’s ideology in relation to Indigenous Australians marks a turning point: henceforth, they were denied any ‘nobility or dignity, physical or moral’ in all travel writings and fictional accounts by French writers.\textsuperscript{16}

Exoticism is a helpful paradigm in considering the cross-cultural interpretations of Indigenous Australians by French travel writers. The first modern travel writer, François-René de Chateaubriand, writing at the turn of the nineteenth century, self-consciously reflected on the exoticism of the Other he encountered.\textsuperscript{17} Victor Segalen’s \textit{Essai sur l’Exotisme}, written between 1904 and 1918 (but only published in 1978) is a seminal work, influenced by his experiences in Tahiti. In 1908, he defined exoticism as ‘la notion du différent; la perception du Divers; la connaissance que quelque chose n’est pas soi-même.’\textsuperscript{18} Ten years later, as his ideas developed, he clarified what was different: ‘Je conviens de nommer “Divers” tout ce qui jusqu’aujourd’hui fut appelé étranger, insolite, inattendu, surprenant, mystérieux, amoureux, surhumain, héroïque et divin même, tout ce qui est \textit{Autre}.’\textsuperscript{19} Throughout the passages in the travel writings that describe Aboriginal people, there is a sense of this exoticism – Indigenous Australians are constructed as distinctly different, but also strange,

\textsuperscript{15} Sankey, ‘Anthropology and Myth,’ pp. 141, 143.
\textsuperscript{19} Segalen, \textit{Essai sur l’exotisme}, p. 82.
surprising and mysterious. Indeed, Claude Liauzu suggests that travel writing is frequently linked to exoticism: ‘À partir des grandes découvertes, le merveilleux mythique le cède au réalisme du bizarre, tant le vrai peut n’être pas vraisemblable, ou tant la réalité dépasse la fiction.’ Jennifer Yee helpfully clarifies that exotic writing is ‘not the voice of the Other come to disturb a monolithic European Self, but the European representation of an Other’s voice.’ Aboriginal Australians were generally not given a voice in the French travel writings, but were merely described by the travellers, unable to shape their own representation. The one exception to this is Oscar Comettant’s twelve-page character study of Berak. Despite being outraged at the injustice suffered by the dispossessed chief of the Yarra-Yarra tribe who had been left impoverished by a denied petition for a ‘pension alimentaire’ by the Governor of Victoria, the reader only learns about Berak through Comettant’s representation of his voice.

**The Scientific**

It is worth considering firstly the range of collective nouns used by the French travellers to describe Aboriginal Australians, as they reveal underlying attitudes. All the writers repeatedly interchanged their use of collective nouns rather than sticking to a single descriptor. Although the ideal of the noble savage was proven false by their experiences, ‘les sauvages’ was still used. As Stephanie Anderson explains, ‘sauvage’ was frequently juxtaposed with ‘civilisé’: this term was used to emphasise primitivism. Similarly ‘les naturels,’ ‘les indigènes’ and ‘les primitifs’ censured the

22 Comettant, *Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or*, p. 115.
Aboriginal Australians’ apparent lack of civilisation.25 ‘Les Australiens’ was first used in 1824 to refer exclusively to Indigenous people, but evolved throughout the nineteenth century to refer both to the Indigenous inhabitants and the British settlers.26 ‘Les Aborigènes’ emerged around the same time, first used in 1830 in English and 1831 in French, stemming from the Latin ab origine or ‘from the beginning.’27 Interestingly, ‘les cannibales’ was used occasionally without further discussing the claim of anthropophagy, which was taken for granted (as discussed later in this chapter).28 Finally, ‘les nègres’ and ‘les noirs’ were used to integrate Indigenous Australians with the negroide type by applying a ‘scientific’ analysis of race.29

Indeed, many of the descriptions of Indigenous Australians deliberately echoed the dominant scientific theories of the day. The Comte de Beauvoir repeatedly compared Aboriginal people to animals. Whilst on a hunting trip in the country, where he described unusual Australian animals, he


28 Beauvoir, Australie, pp. vi, 336, 346, 349 (2 times).

listed, as if one of the animals, ‘des Noirs.’

He seemed torn between believing that the Indigenous Australians share a common ancestry with the Europeans or not:

Nous tombâmes unanimement d’accord pour déclarer que si tous ces Noirs étaient les descendants de Cham, ce fils de Noé devait être épouvantablement laid ! C’est qui m’a frappé encore plus que la peau de crocodile, la face de singe, et l’aspect repoussant de ces êtres humains qui sont nos frères, c’est qu’ils vivent plus sauvages que les bêtes féroces. Le lion a sa tanière et le tigre son antre : ces Cannibales n’avaient même pas une hutte en feuilles d’arbre.

The animalistic comparisons used to describe Aboriginal Australians’ physical appearance and customs is striking, as is Beauvoir’s fundamental misunderstanding of their nomadic practises. Other writers do not have the same equivocation. Vickers claimed that ‘ce type a autant de rapports avec le singe qu’avec l’homme,’ while Antoine Fauchery reported that ‘[ils] peuvent prendre rang immédiatement après les singes.’ This reference to a monkey is not innocent, but rather contextually sits as part of the debate between monogenism and polygenism that raged throughout the nineteenth century. Carl Linnaeus’ taxonomy of 1735 classed humans and apes in one category. The nineteenth century re-emergence of theories of the Grand Chain of Being racialised this taxonomy, with the chain between man and monkey filled in by ‘black races at the bottom of the human link, closest to the highest simian,’ both biologically, and following Darwin’s example, morally and intellectually. Marc Ferro recounts the interesting stance taken by French novelist Jules Verne, who criticised the British for their treatment of the Indigenous Australians, which they

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30 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 171.
31 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 346.
34 McGregor, Imagined Destinies, p. 7.
justified by their belief ‘que ce sont des singes.’\textsuperscript{36} By contrast, the French travel writers who actually visited Australia did not seem disturbed by this belief.

Vickers is far more explicit than Fauchery when offering her ‘scientific’ belief on civilisation: ‘Ces malheureux indigènes se trouvent tout à fait au bas de l’échelle de la civilisation.’\textsuperscript{37} This refers to theories of the development of civilisation which abounded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1694, François Bernier attempted the first ‘racial classification of the world.’\textsuperscript{38} A more developed racial hierarchy was proposed by the Comte de Buffon in \textit{Variétés dans l’espèce humaine} (1749), ranking in a descending order Western Europeans, other Europeans, Asians and Africans, and lastly American ‘savages’ (Aboriginal Australians were classed into this category in his later writings).\textsuperscript{39} His theory was later vulgarised by Arthur de Gobineau, whose 1853-55 \textit{Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines} argued for the supremacy of the Aryan race.\textsuperscript{40}

A third type of scientific comment was made by Ernest Michel, who clearly supported the polygenist theory by positing that there were two racial origins for Indigenous Australians: those descended from the Indo-European, and those from the Negro, based on their physical appearance and their family structures.\textsuperscript{41} This echoes Linnaeus’ taxonomy of humanity, in which all humans were divided into four races (white European, red American, brown Asian and black African).\textsuperscript{42} It is important to acknowledge the influence of science in constructing the Other. Liauzu argues that ‘la production

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Todorov} Todorov, \textit{Nous et les autres}, p. 122.
\bibitem{Todorov} Todorov, \textit{Nous et les autres}, p. 153.
\bibitem{Michel} Michel, \textit{A travers l’hémisphère sud II}, p. 242-3.
\bibitem{McGregor} McGregor, \textit{Imagined Destinies}, p. 7.
\end{thebibliography}
scientifique ... a contribué à alimenter la production symbolique de l’Autre.’

Nineteenth century positivist science led to ‘scientific racism’, which influenced the racially based comments of the travel writers.

The Descriptive

Scientific racism influenced the manner in which Indigenous Australians were described. Consequently, giving an accurate impression of their physical appearance was a priority. As the most widely read writer in this period, Beauvoir’s highly negative portrayal of their physical appearance influenced later writers. His first encounter with Indigenous Australians occurred shortly after arriving in Melbourne in 1866, and set the tone for his subsequent interactions. His description was rooted in the believed close link between Aboriginal Australians and monkeys:

Un groupe vient à passer, groupe fétide et horrible d’hommes et de femmes à la peau plus noire que celle des crocodiles, aux cheveux crépus et immondes, au visage déprimé et bestial ! Ce sont des Aborigènes ! ... les corps tout petits, grêles, ignobles, plus affreux que ceux de tous les singes du monde.

Throughout his writing, he is particularly obsessed by what he found to be an overwhelming smell, described at various times as ‘une odeur nauséabonde’, ‘une odeur affreuse et putride,’ ‘celle d’un abattoir en été,’ and Aboriginal people themselves as ‘fétides, étiques, épouvantables.’ Beauvoir’s comments fall into the context of the nineteenth-century obsession with smell which built on the

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43 Liauzu, *Race et civilisation*, p. 86.
classical view of the miasma. One outworking of this was the scientific interest in the stench of the poor: as the bourgeois class discovered deodorising techniques, foul smell became a condemning marker of social class and of poverty. Beauvoir’s obsession with their apparent stench is therefore a reinforcement of his own superiority, both racially and class-based.

Céleste de Chabrillan was also critical in her description of Aboriginal Australians’ physical appearance, claiming ‘the country’s black natives are the worst built and the most frightful beings I have seen in my life. They look like monkeys with their disproportionately large heads, their frizzy hair standing on end, high, broad shoulders and spindly legs.’ This series of judgemental adjectives is quite confronting for the modern reader, but reflects her context. Buffon’s influential 36-volume Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière, published between 1749-1788, described the inhabitants of New Holland as ‘extremely ugly and disgusting’ and ‘without a single feature that is agreeable.’ Similarly, Péron’s descriptions of Tasmanians used superlatives to describe their ‘blackness, ugliness, brutishness, primitiveness and perfidy.’

A far more positive portrayal is offered by Oscar Comettant, whose social views are throughout his account are the most progressive of the travel writers. Quoting Beauvoir’s first contact, Comettant contradicts his representation of Aboriginal Australians, having not found anyone who resembled his

49 Chabrillan, The French Consul’s Wife, p. 121.
51 Anderson, ‘French Anthropology in Australia, the first fieldwork report,’ p. 238.
description on his own visits to Indigenous refuge homes. Moreover, his character study represented Berak in highly favourable terms as a handsome man:

Il a le front découvert, le nez grec, les yeux grands, doux et singulièrement expressifs, les lèvres fines et correctes, le menton rond, le visage d’un ovale harmonieux. Quand il rit, il laisse voir les plus jolies dents qui aient jamais orné une mâchoire d’homme.... De profil, le visage de Berak rivaliserait de beauté avec les profils grecs dont la statuaire des anciens Hellènes nous a laissé des modèles.

The reference to features of Westernised, and specifically classical Hellenic, beauty inverts the contemporary accusations of ugliness, and directly challenges Beauvoir’s representation through a remarkable exemplar. Nevertheless, Comettant valorises Berak to make him appear beautiful by unrealistic European terms, reverting to the idealised Classicist mould rather than appreciating him on his own terms.

A third area of descriptive interest is Aboriginal language. The French travellers were aware that each tribe had its own language or dialect. When spending an evening visiting an Aboriginal tribe in the Victorian countryside, Beauvoir reflected that the words spoken to him were ‘pur hébreu pour nous,’ and somewhat ironically claimed that the dialect was ‘peu enseigné dans nos lycées.’ He recorded, however, six phrases he was able to pick up: ‘Narra-waraggarah: Vite, dépêche-toi. Tattawattah-onganian: Conduis-moi. Pounnamountah: Un casoar. Loah-maggalantah : De l’eau.

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52 Comettant, *Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or*, pp. 112-3.
Similarly, Ernest Michel recorded different words for ‘mon père’ amongst five different tribes.\textsuperscript{57}

It is difficult to know whether these vocabulary lists are genuine approximations of the spoken language, or simply flights of imagination. Nevertheless, there is precedent for vocabulary lists in earlier French writings on Australia, obtained by Péron, d’Entrecasteaux and several of his crew including Labillardière, and René Lesson (who came to Australia in 1824 on the Duperrey expedition).\textsuperscript{58} Péron’s is the most remarkable, obtaining through charades the words for ‘yawn, burn oneself, urinate, defecate, break wind, laugh, cry, whistle, bellow, spit, give a slap, tie, untie, struggle, tear, strangle, have an erection, etc. etc.’\textsuperscript{59} As Colin Dyer remarks, ‘The inhabitants doubtless found him an interesting spectacle!’\textsuperscript{60} Nevertheless, one of the difficulties in acquiring Indigenous languages was that the traveller could not be certain that the vocabulary recorded was ‘the name of the object or instead one of its qualities.’\textsuperscript{61}

The condemnatory

The travel writers did not merely write descriptively when discussing Indigenous Australians; rather, they were explicitly condemnatory as regards certain apparent ‘failings.’ Firstly, the Indigenous Australian character was perceived as intentionally lazy. Fauchery claimed that ‘le fond de leur

\textsuperscript{56} Beauvoir, Australie, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{57} Michel, A travers l’hémisphère sud II, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{60} Dyer, The French Explorers and the Aboriginal Australians, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{61} Konishi, The Aboriginal Male in the Enlightenment World, p. 118.
nature est la paresse. Ils n’ont aucune des ingéniosités particulières aux sauvages.\textsuperscript{62} Similarly, Chabrillan, who intentionally mimicked much of the content in Fauchery’s writings throughout her book, also reported that ‘they are so lazy of body and mind that no one has ever been able to teach a single one of them how to do anything.’\textsuperscript{63} Fauchery and Chabrillan wrote into the larger myth of Indigenous indolence which began with the first European contacts and continues to this day, based on a misunderstanding of the division of labour in hunter-gatherer societies and difficulties adopting traditional culture to the invader’s society.\textsuperscript{64} D’Entrecasteaux’s sailors were particularly censorious of Aboriginal men for leaving everything for the women to undertake, hypocritically criticising Indigenous patriarchy while blind to their own. Lieutenant-Commander Pierre Milius on the Baudin expedition simply claimed that ‘leur penchant naturel ... est l’indolence.’\textsuperscript{65} Yet Comettant provides a counter-balance to the indolence myth, by recognising their skills: ‘Ils n’ont pas leurs pareils pour courir, sauter, grimper aux arbres, plonger, nager, et ils se montrent les égaux des meilleurs de chiens de chasse pour relever et suivre une piste. Ces talents et ces qualités ayant suffi à tous leurs besoins pendant qu’ils étaient les maîtres de l’Australie.’\textsuperscript{66} Comettant’s focus on merely physical activities implied that Indigenous Australians were animalistic, yet his tone affirms rather than degrades them.\textsuperscript{67}

The supposed uncleanliness of Indigenous Australians was another frequently criticised characteristic. Henri Gilbert spoke mockingly of a ‘native’ policeman he encountered when crossing the desert, and objected to what he perceived as his ‘dirty and disgusting’ habits in supposedly

\textsuperscript{63} Chabrillan, \textit{The French Consul’s Wife}, pp. 121-2.
\textsuperscript{65} Konishi, ‘Idle Men,’ p. 104.
\textsuperscript{66} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{67} Konishi, ‘Idle Men,’ p. 106.
avoiding washing unless forced to do so.\textsuperscript{68} This aversion, based on a perception of Aboriginal character, led him to eating food handled by the policeman only at great pains and refusing the lizard the latter captured despite overwhelming hunger.\textsuperscript{69} Although his scrapbook includes a photograph of a group of Aboriginal people he presumably met, his diary does not mention this encounter (Figure 2.1).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{Penong_Station_South_Australia_from_Gilberts_scrapbook.png}
\caption{Aboriginal people at Penong Station, South Australia; from Gilbert’s scrapbook}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Dyer, A Frenchman’s Walk Across the Nullarbor,} plate between pp. 100-1.

Beauvoir typified the Aboriginal character across the different tribes he met as child-like, referring to them twice as ‘bons enfants,’ an expression which was associated with the scientific racism dominant at the time.\textsuperscript{70} He thus co-opted tribesmen to help carry his hunting trophies, portraying his party as having easily become the kings of the \textit{nègrillons}.\textsuperscript{71}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68} Dyer, ed., \textit{A Frenchman’s Walk Across the Nullarbor}, p. 61.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Dyer, ed., \textit{A Frenchman’s Walk Across the Nullarbor}, p. 62.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, pp. 188, 339.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, pp. 186-7.
\end{itemize}
The second feature of Indigenous life which the French visitors to Australia historically criticised was their nudity. Dyer highlights that one of the first observations generally made by explorers was that the Aboriginal Australians were ‘naked’, a word that is found recurrently and is frequently ‘preceded by a diversity of emphatic adverbs.’ Studying the New England frontier, Ann Little remarked that the English described Native Americans as naked whilst also describing their ‘dress and adornment’: although this seems contradictory, she argues ‘this paradox has an ideological logic, to signify Indian difference’ and their lack of civilisation. Shino Konishi argues this is also the case for early contact encounters between Indigenous Australians and Europeans, including Baudin.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the French travel writers were aware that the Aboriginal people were at least partially clothed. European influence on Aboriginal society had also led to many adopting Western dress. Not surprisingly, the clearest rebuttal of the nudity myth came from Comettant: ‘On a dit, et je l’ai lu, que les indigènes de ce pays vivaient aussi nus que la Vérité, sans même la moindre feuille de vigne pour cocarde. Berak m’a assuré qu’il n’en était point ainsi. Hommes et femmes étaient, hiver comme été, recouverts de peaux d’opossums.’ Photographs and sketches included in a number of writings provide visual confirmation that Aboriginal Australians were not, in fact, naked but rather at least partially clothed (Figures 2.2-2.5. Interestingly, the gaze in each of these photographs is directly at the camera, creating a powerful connection with the reader.) Yet this could also be a source of ridicule; after bartering with an Indigenous tribe in Cake York, Beauvoir mockingly records the incongruity of European clothing. ‘Nous nous tordions de rire en les voyant se pavaner, celle-ci avec un faux-col blanc sur sa peau noire, celle-là avec un morceau

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75 Comettant, Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or, p. 119.
de papier en médaillon suspendu à une herbe tressée ! This derisive reaction was a frequent response to the way ‘primitive’ peoples adopted and adapted European clothing.

Figure 2.2 - Aboriginal man clothed in animal skin

Beauvoir, Australie, p. 1.

Figure 2.3 - Two Aboriginal women, with blankets over their lower bodies

Fauchery, Sun Pictures of Victoria, p. 113.

Beauvoir, Australie, pp. 341-2.
Thirdly, and undoubtedly the most troublingly, was the perception that Indigenous Australians were cannibals. Beauvoir recounted that of the twenty Royal Marines originally stationed at Cape York,
only thirteen remained, seven having been killed and eaten by the Indigenous Australians.\textsuperscript{77} Shortly afterwards, he met a tribeswoman wearing a necklace made from the dried bones of a white man: the unstated implication is it was a victory trophy from these mariners.\textsuperscript{78} While he used a rather sombre tone in this passage, Beauvoir also referred to cannibalism for comic relief, citing the story of a missionary who made a tribal chief promise to divorce all but one of his wives. Upon returning six months later, he found the chief with only one wife and asked him what happened to the other women: ‘Mais je les ai mangées !’ repartit ingénument le prosélyte. Triste fin de tendres épouses !\textsuperscript{79}

Similarly, Comettant saw the ironic humour implicit in cannibalism. Berak recounted that his tribe ate their prisoners of war, but instead of being an untameable savage, his role is inverted to become akin to the quintessentially French \textit{gourmand}.

\begin{quote}
[Ils] ne mangeaient jamais mieux que lorsqu’ils faisaient griller un prisonnier de bonne graisse. Il se souvient d’en avoir mangé dans sa première enfance, et c’est en riant d’un rire franc et communicatif qu’il nous fit connaître que la meilleure partie de l’homme était la cuisse…. Berak, vous le voyez, est un fin gourmet.

Instinctivement, quand il nous contait cela, j’ai mis mes mains sur mes cuisses comme pour leur servir de bouclier. Sur ma demande pour savoir si la chair du blanc vaut celle du noir, Berak nous dit qu’il n’avait jamais mangé de l’Anglais. Ce comestible manque à sa collection et il paraissait le regretter. Eh bien ! ce sont les Anglais qui, moralement, ont mangé Berak !\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{77} Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, pp. 336-7.
\textsuperscript{78} Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, p. 340.
\textsuperscript{79} Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, p. 270.
\textsuperscript{80} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, pp. 118-9.
Furthermore, it is also remarkable that the butt of the joke was not Berak but rather Comettant himself, who comically shields his own thighs, and that this incident was used to criticise the English for their poor treatment of Berak, rather than the Indigenous Australians for their supposed anthropophagic behaviour. Yet the role of Berak as a performer cannot be understated. It is highly likely that he was responding to the European stereotype for his own amusement by constructing an imagined voice. At the time of Comettant’s writing, professional ‘savages’ were frequently employed to satisfy European desires for exotic spectacle. From 1877, the Jardin d’Acclimatation in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris had ethnographic displays of ‘exotic races.’

For example, nine Indigenous Queenslanders were toured through Europe and America by the circus showman R. A. Cunningham from 1883, first being featured in American circus-master P. T. Barnum’s 1883 ‘Ethnological Congress of Strange and Savage Tribes,’ along with Zulu, Nubians, Toda and Sioux performers. Berak seems to have taken on willingly the typecast of the exotic performer, talking quite fantastically and light-heartedly about cannibalism for the amusement of his audience, and quite likely his own.

Debate exists between scholars as to whether Indigenous Australians were in fact cannibals. Although to a modern reader, cannibalism might seem to be merely comical flights of fancy, a consistent body of evidence reports cannibalistic behaviour, and in a far more serious tone than Beauvoir and Comettant. It is widely accepted that Indigenous Australians ‘in some areas, in rare circumstances, and in the conduct of rituals’ practised anthropophagy. Anthropologists argue that this should not, however, be constructed through the ‘squeamish lens of Western cannibal myths.’

Moreover, Gananath Obeyesekere argued that British fascination with cannibalism among native peoples enabled them to ‘disavow their own anthropophagy’: the longstanding tradition of maritime

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84 Biber, ‘Cannibals and Colonialism,’ p. 626.
cannibalism following shipwrecks observed set conventions of drawing lots, drinking blood to appease thirst, eating flesh and burying bodily extremities including the head at sea.\textsuperscript{85} Katherine Biber argues that ‘the discourse of cannibalism is a repeated and powerful trope in colonial contact and conflict. Fascination with – and accusations of – anthropophagy, ritual sacrifices and survival cannibalism disclose the fear of the native Other.’\textsuperscript{86}

### The Empathetic

At the same time, some French travel writers displayed a remarkable degree of empathy for the sufferings of Indigenous Australians. Firstly, there was a consciousness of frontier warfare. Speaking to a squatter, Comettant recorded the most typical form of small-scale conflict and violence, which his interviewee quite unabashedly described as war.\textsuperscript{87}

> On apprend que des noirs ont pendant la nuit volé des bestiaux et qu’ils sont partis avec les bêtes. Vite on selle les chevaux, on prend son revolver, sa carabine si on en a, et en route à la recherche …. Cinquante coups de revolver sont tirés en moins d’une minute. Deux, trois, quatre indigènes tombent ; les autres prennent la fuite.\textsuperscript{88}

Michel recorded the more overwhelming conquest, that of the Aboriginal Tasmanians in the Black War and subsequent resettlement by George Robinson, a British settler appointed by the Governor to negotiate with the Indigenous tribes. Michel showed sympathy for the Tasmanians who had by his time been completely wiped out, describing it as a ‘triste histoire’ of ‘les épisodes tragiques.’\textsuperscript{89}

Interestingly, the salient points of the history he recorded accord with even the most recent analyses

\textsuperscript{86} Biber, ‘Cannibals and Colonialism,’ , p. 624.
\textsuperscript{87} ‘Nous faisons la guerre’ Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{88} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, pp. 99-100.
\textsuperscript{89} Michel, \textit{A travers l’hémisphère sud II}, pp. 224, 228.
of the Black Line and the resettlement in Oyster Cove.\textsuperscript{90} Lyndall Ryan argues, however, that the ‘Tasmanian Aborigines did not die out in 1876 or in any other period of Tasmania’s history’, and in fact have experienced a resurgence of consciousness in the beginning of the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{91}

Despite his critical stance throughout most of the book regarding Aboriginal people, Beauvoir shows deep sympathy for them in the face of frontier violence. His opinion of a ‘tueur des Noirs’ was unabashedly condemnatory:

\begin{quote}
Son regard fait frémir, ses actes font horreur... il les tue à petit feu : « ça roule comme un lapin, c’est un delightful sport ! » nous disait-il. Il y a loin de là à la légitime défense, et quand on a tué \textit{soixante-cinq} êtres humains à vingt-quatre ans, on est plus bas qu’un Cannibale.... Cet homme, qui enlève non seulement le sol, mais la vie aux Nègres, par passion de sport, fait tâche en Australie.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

Moreover, Beauvoir recognised Aboriginal agency in actively participating in frontier conflict rather than being mere passive victims. For example, he recounted the story of a young boy he met, whose father had killed twenty-five white men before being killed himself.\textsuperscript{93} Revealingly, both Henry Russell-Killough and ‘Madame Giovanni’ comment on not having met any Aboriginal Australians, the former because he did not venture past the cities, where by the 1860s they had mostly been chased out, and the latter because she only visited Tasmania, where they had all ‘died out.’ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider the historiographical debate of the ‘History Wars’ that erupted in the early 2000s, except to remark that the French travel writings provide evidence for both terrible

\textsuperscript{91} Ryan, \textit{Tasmanian Aborigines}, p. xvii, see also pp. 313-358.
\textsuperscript{92} Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, p. 349.
\textsuperscript{93} Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, p. 191.
violence suffered by Indigenous Australians and their active response to this.\textsuperscript{94} This stands in contrast to the ‘great Australian silence,’ which was a phenomenon of the twentieth century not the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{95}

The French writers also displayed sympathy for what they perceived as the unjust poverty resulting from their dispossession from their land. Comettant’s Berak is the prime example, having lost his tribal land and been reduced to a state of dependent poverty. Comettant acutely perceives the injustice of the situation, giving Berak a title (‘prince en exil’) that echoed contemporary European history and representing his petition as reasonable and worthy, and the unfavourable response he received from the Governor as ungracious.\textsuperscript{96} Despite being frustrated by the persistence of a begging Aboriginal man outside his tent when on the gold mines in 1854, eventually only feeding him begrudgingly after two hours of repeated requests, Fauchery’s attitude to Aboriginal poverty seems to have changed over time.\textsuperscript{97} The photograph taken as part of the Sun Pictures of Victoria collection with Richard Daintree between 1857 and 1859 (Figure 2.6) shows Aboriginal poverty in a far more empathetic light, by positioning the Indigenous people in the centre of the portrait, surrounded by their ramshackle lodging.

\textsuperscript{94} See, for example, Bain Attwood, and S.G. Foster, eds., Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2003).
\textsuperscript{96} Comettant, Au pays des kangourous et des mines d'or, pp. 115-6.
\textsuperscript{97} Fauchery, Lettres d’un mineur en Australie, pp. 254-8.
Beauvoir also used a sympathetic character study. Although he belittles the Indigenous Australians wearing a hotchpotch of castoff clothing, he is simultaneously empathetic to their sufferings, perceiving the unfairness of their situation: ‘Tel est l’aspect des antiques possesseurs de ce continent ! telle est la race à laquelle, à tort ou à raison, nous sommes venus disputer ce sol immense pour la refouler chaque jour plus avant dans les bois !’  

Vickers expressed similar thoughts, writing that ‘Ils sont traqués, pourchassés comme des bêtes fauves, et reculent à mesure que les Anglais avancent et gagnent du terrain.’  

It is remarkable that the French writers perceived the poverty and indigence of the Indigenous Australians as inextricably linked to their dispossession from the land, and therefore the responsibility of the colonisers. Their French national identity almost certainly made it easier to criticise the British colonisers, than if they were describing their own nation’s colony. No comparisons were ever made to French colonial policy and there seems to be an ironic blindness to the comparable injustices wrought by their own country.

Finally, many of the French writers believed the Indigenous Australians were a dying race, and showed sympathy for them on that ground. Different reasons were given for this belief. Firstly on the grounds of previous experience: Fauchery claimed, for example, that three-quarters of the Indigenous population had now become extinct.\textsuperscript{100} Similarly, Michel believed the Tasmanian experience heralded a coming pattern: ‘On peut prévoir le temps où il sera des indigènes de l’Australie ce qui a été de ceux de la Tasmanie ; ils ne vivront plus que dans la mémoire des anciens, et par l’histoire.’\textsuperscript{101} Chabrillan and Vickers both believed the development of towns would cause the disappearance of Aboriginal Australians, for ‘ils ne peuvent exister côte à côte avec la civilisation.’\textsuperscript{102} Lastly, Comettant blamed alcohol and specifically whisky for their demise.\textsuperscript{103} As Russell McGregor notes, by the 1830s, the doomed race theory had captured the colonial mentality, and the extinction of Indigenous Australians was perceived as inevitable.\textsuperscript{104} Moreover, this belief was not limited only to Australia but was found ‘wherever and whenever Europeans and white Americans encountered indigenous peoples.’\textsuperscript{105} The reasons the French travel writers put forward were all shared by colonists of the time, with the underlying notion being their primitive state: ‘A race so underdeveloped and immature could not possibly survive in competition with the superior and progressive Europeans, any more than the dinosaur could survive in the age of mammals.’\textsuperscript{106}

In conclusion, the representation by French travel writers of Aboriginal Australians elucidates many of the key concerns the French, and Europeans more generally, had when visiting Australia. The

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\textsuperscript{100} Fauchery, \textit{Lettres d’un mineur en Australie}, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{101} Michel, \textit{A travers l’hémisphère sud II}, p. 245, see also p. 248.
\textsuperscript{102} Vickers, \textit{Voyage en Australie et en Nouvelle Zélande}, p. 71. See also Chabrillan, \textit{The French Consul’s Wife}, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{103} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{106} McGregor, \textit{Imagined Destinies}, p. 48. See also pp. 14-18, 48-56.
variety of tones of writing, from descriptive to condemnatory to empathetic, reveals that Indigenous Australians confused and confounded expectations: they were a truly contrasting Other. Yet despite the divergent perspectives on Aboriginal Australians, the French view is unified by an underlying attitude of disdain and condescension, expressed to varying degrees. From the blatant hatred expressed by Gilbert to Comettant’s condescending humanitarianism, even the most empathetic of views was laced with the underlying scientific racist theories. Nevertheless, their position as outsiders allowed the French freedom to speak openly, particularly on the sufferings endured by Indigenous Australians.
Chapter Three: The Cities

Rien dans l’ensemble ni dans les détails ne venait justifier l’idée que je m’étais faite de Melbourne. Là où je m’attendais à rencontrer des maisons en bois, des huttes même, érigées à la hâte et éparpillées sous les arbres, j’ai trouvé des maisons en brique à un ou deux étages, solidement construites, alignées au cordeau, formant des rues d’un kilomètre de long, très droites, très larges, parfaitement macadamisées, et dans ces rues des habits noirs, des faux-cols, des robes de soie, des bottines à talons, de tout, comme en Europe, de tout, jusqu’à des orgues de Barbarie.¹

Arriving in Melbourne in 1852, towards the beginning of the Gold Rushes, Antoine Fauchery was astounded by Melbourne’s urban development. Nothing was as he expected; his preconceived idea of a rustic town was proven false. In its place, he found a well-built and well-planned city filled with signs of civilisation and bourgeois culture. It was as if he were still in Europe.

Fauchery was not the only French travel writer to be surprised by the Australian cities. This was a sentiment common to almost all the writings, developing in strength over the fifty-year period as the colonial capitals grew in size and sophistication. Whereas Australian wildlife and Indigenous Australians were remarkable for their uniqueness and otherness, the most surprising thing about the cities was their similarities to European and English metropolises. This can be seen in four main areas: descriptions of the built environment particularly in Sydney and Melbourne, deliberate comparisons and references to the old world, varying opinions on the significance of the convict heritage, and the development of ideas of Australia as the working man’s paradise.

The significance of the city in these travel writings provides a counter-balance to traditional Australian historiography, which has emphasised the bush rather than urban life. Russel Ward’s *The Australian Legend* was particularly crucial in tracing the ‘historical origins and development of the Australian legend of national mystique’ to bush workers in the pastoral industry, seen as the ‘typical’ Australians. Yet, as Graeme Davison emphasises, investing ‘the Bush with such romantic ideals’ and locating the Australian value of mateship in the Bush is puzzling and incongruous. Moreover, Australia was and is one of the most urbanised countries world-wide. Since the 1970s, this historical blindness has been rectified by studies of particular Australian cities, as part of the development of urban history internationally. The French travel writers who recognised the importance of the cities contribute to this more balanced perspective.

**The Built Environment**

The highly developed nature of the cities, particularly Sydney and Melbourne, caused great surprise to the French visitors. The Comte de Beauvoir was immediately stunned upon debarkation at Port Phillip, ‘voyant à quel point la civilisation y est avancée.’ A few days later, as he discovered more of the city, he drew a more explicit contrast between his perception and the reality: ‘Cette Australie qu’on croit chez nous, et que je croyais un peu moi-même, si perdue et si sauvage, possède tous les luxes de l’Europe.’ Even though Céleste de Chabrillan held a mostly negative perception of Melbourne, as will be discussed, she was willing to recognise that ‘everything happens as if by magic:

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today, you see a plain, a week later, it’s a village.\textsuperscript{8} While Melbourne astounded the other writers, Anna Vickers found her greatest surprise was captured by Adelaide. She foresaw a bright future for this city: ‘Adelaide deviendra peut-être une des plus grandes villes du monde ... Il n’y aurait rien d’étonnant à cela, les progrès étant si rapides dans ces colonies!’\textsuperscript{9}

The perception of rapid progress was rendered explicit when considering the cities’ monuments. For example, Beauvoir wrote of Sydney:

\begin{quote}
Quel contraste entre cette ville de plus de cent mille habitants, avec des théâtres, des bibliothèques, des rues animées, dont quelques-unes, Pitt street et George street, sont ornées de boutiques d’un bout à l’autre et sillonnées sans cesse par des voitures de luxe et des omnibus, quel contraste entre tous les effets brillants d’une civilisation étonnante et l’aspect sauvage de Botany-Bay, où débarquèrent les fondateurs de Sydney !\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quote}

Here, the repetition of ‘quel contraste’ reinforces the stark differences between the modern, bustling and even luxurious city and the wildness of the pre-European landscape. Almost all the different writers gave detailed descriptions of the buildings and monuments of the cities. Oscar Comettant’s picture of Melbourne, for example, is quite typical. He remarked upon the beginnings of the CBD with multi-level offices (‘avec ascenseur, bien entendu’!), the banks (‘parmi les plus beaux buildings’), the new Parliament (‘le plus vaste et le plus beau monument ... d’un aspect grandiose’ - this most likely refers to the colonnade and portico built during the 1880s and finished in 1888, the year of Comettant’s voyage), the Legislative Assembly and Senate (describing the former as ‘le Palais législatif’, no doubt reminding him of Palais Bourbon), the Treasury (‘dans le style italien... un monument remarquable’), the General Post Office (‘un peu sombre’), the Town Hall (‘un édifice d’ordre supérieur’), the law courts, the library, Government House, the university, the observatory,

\begin{itemize}
\item Chabrillan, \textit{The French Consul’s Wife}, p. 94.
\item Vickers, \textit{Voyage en Australie et en Nouvelle Zélande}, p. 156.
\item Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, p. 272.
\end{itemize}
theatres, the museum, Customs House (all of which he lists without giving much detail), and numerous churches with high steeples (‘afin de rappeler aux justes que, là, est l’espérance’). Photographs of Melbourne’s streetscapes and monumental buildings were captured by Antoine Fauchery (see Figures 3.1-3.4), while Anna Vickers took comparative photographs of Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart (see Figures 3.5-3.7). Figures 3.3-3.7 are particularly remarkable for their photographic gaze directly facing the cityscapes, thus enabling the readers to imagine themselves amidst the colonial cities.

![Figure 3.1 - Bourke Street, Melbourne](image)

**Figure 3.1 - Bourke Street, Melbourne**

*Fauchery, Sun Pictures of Victoria, p. 28.*

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Figure 3.2 - Swanston Street, Melbourne
Fauchery, *Sun Pictures of Victoria*, p. 49.

Figure 3.3 - Oriental Bank
Figure 3.4 - Melbourne Savings Bank

Fauchery, *Sun Pictures of Victoria*, p. 35.

Figure 3.5 – Panorama of Sydney

The built environment was inextricably linked to social behaviour. This appears most explicit in the descriptions of ‘Doing the Block’ on Collins Street between Swanston and Elizabeth streets. As Davison recounts, this was where ‘fashionable Melbourne showed off its finery, greeted its friends
and “cut” its enemies.\textsuperscript{12} Vickers distinguished between the pretext of doing errands and the reality of meeting friends and hearing the latest gossip (‘se mettre au courant de tous les nouveaux cancans de la ville’).\textsuperscript{13} She paralleled the elegance of the shopfronts with young ladies in their latest finery.\textsuperscript{14} Comettant also mentions the Block, adding a class-based commentary about the working-class people walking on one side of the road, and their superiors on the other.

Writing at a later period, Comettant was able to provide insight into suburbia. He visited fellow Frenchman George Burk, who lived in North Brighton, which was twenty minutes by train from Melbourne. Yet his first visit was quite confusing as the streets were not marked. This gave rise to a rather amusing anecdote where, one of the few times he used the second person pronoun, he invited the readers to imagine themselves an Australian newly arrived in Paris and invited to dinner at “\textit{Belle-Maman, Nanterre}.” ‘Vous demandez, en descendant, à la gare, « Belle-Maman. » - connais pas, vous répond-on. Vous cherchez, vous fouillez les chemins… « Belle-Maman » semble fuir à votre approche.’\textsuperscript{15} Consequently, he suggested that Australians should have a better way to indicate ‘country houses.’\textsuperscript{16} On a brief trip to Sydney, Comettant also remarked on the growing suburban lifestyle: ‘où logent les familles de ceux qui, dans la ville, dirigent des établissements commerciaux. L’heure des affaires passées, ils vont rejoindre les leurs dans cette demi-campagne des alentours de Sydney.’\textsuperscript{17} This portrayal of suburbia as an escape from the city reflected the Australian desire for bringing the ‘advantages of country and city life combined.’\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{12} Davison, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne}, p. 286.
\textsuperscript{15} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{16} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{17} Comettant, \textit{Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or}, p. 368.
\textsuperscript{18} Davison, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne}, p. 167.
Nevertheless, the colonial city, specifically Melbourne, did not enjoy a unanimously positive representation. Rather, as the city developed, so too did the travel writers’ opinion of it. Fauchery provides a nuanced depiction of the city, recognising both its surprising elements of development, as already mentioned, and its shabbier side. He describes the temporary tent city of ‘Canevas-Town’ (on the southern side of the Yarra, for the poorest of the newly arrived migrants) in sombre terms: ‘cité flottante que le soleil dévore, que la pluie traverse et que le vente emporte dans ses jours de mauvaise humeur!’\(^{19}\) Chabrillan was even more negative, describing streets littered with old shoes, clothes and broken pottery.\(^{20}\) She used the dual metaphors of a fairground and a market to describe the chaos, both in terms of society and even the built environment – which apparently consisted at this time (1854) of only a few brick houses along with huts and tents.\(^{21}\) Moreover, her portrayal of the society is damning, claiming the area in St. Kilda where she lived was a ‘favoured haunt for criminals’ and as such she had ‘unconquerable fears.’\(^{22}\) While indeed there is truth to her comments, which are corroborated to a certain degree by Fauchery’s, they cannot be taken at merely face value. Chabrillan was rejected by Melbournian society for being a former courtesan, and felt the pain of being deliberately not invited to accompany her husband to parties.\(^{23}\) Thus, her highly negative portrayal of Melbourne represented her revenge on the city that had rejected her. Her travel writing, *Un Deuil au bout de monde*, was not the only form of revenge-seeking. Her Australian-inspired novel *Les Voleurs d’or* repeated this: ‘At that period Melbourne was not yet a city. It was an entrepôt. Everywhere shops and stores. No repose, no sociality. Something forced and brutal, like the first efforts of society in its rudimentary stage.’\(^{24}\) This series of short sentences reinforces her sense of shock at the city that scorned her.

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\(^{20}\) Chabrillan, *The French Consul’s Wife*, p. 89.  
\(^{21}\) Chabrillan, *The French Consul’s Wife*, p. 89.  
\(^{22}\) Chabrillan, *The French Consul’s Wife*, p. 91.  
\(^{23}\) Chabrillan, *The French Consul’s Wife*, pp. 84-6, 102, 113-4, 132.  
A geographic difference also exists in the description of different cities, with a conscious comparison frequently emerging between Melbourne and Sydney. Melbourne’s planned aspect, and particularly its well laid out streets, was praised in direct contrast to Sydney’s more sprawling layout.\textsuperscript{25} Yet this did not deter the French visitors from enjoying Sydney. For example, Comettant wrote, ‘Melbourne est plus grandiose que Sydney, mais Sydney a peut-être quelque chose de plus intime, de plus empreint du caractère créole, c’est-à-dire de plus séduisant.’\textsuperscript{26} The reference to creolity links Sydney, as a white settler colonial society, to the vast array of Creole societies from the West Indies to Martinique to coastal West Africa that were ‘surviving or thriving in nearly unliveable surroundings.’\textsuperscript{27} This emphasises the exotic nature of Indigenised culture, which Comettant saw as more organic in Sydney than in Melbourne. Henry Russell-Killough, for his part, was unable to explain exactly why he enjoyed Sydney so much, but claimed it was his favourite city not only in Australia but in all his world travels: ‘la ville où je me suis trouvé le plus heureux.’\textsuperscript{28}

**Comparisons with the Old World**

In trying to best capture and describe the colonial cities, the French writers frequently appealed to comparisons with the old world. This is a continuation of seeking reference points for Australian flora and fauna. Yet the side-by-side European and English references are unexpected. The rise of postcolonial history in the 2000s led to numerous studies of Britishness in Australia, which suggested

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\textsuperscript{26} Comettant, *Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or*, pp. 368-9.


\textsuperscript{28} Russell-Killough, *Seize mille lieues à travers l’Asie et l’Océanie*, pp. 389-90.
that emulating British culture embodied a conscious reflection of belonging to the Empire. Yet from their position as outsiders, these French travel writings provide a nuanced counter-balance to recognise the elements of continental modelling in Australia as well as the British influence. As Davison argues, ‘the antithesis between Anglo-Saxon and continental models of urban development had been there almost from the beginning.’ For example, the 1850s pamphlet *Melbourne as it is, and as it ought to be* advanced that Mediterranean town planning of squares, arcades and colonnades was more suitable in the Australian climate than the British and American grid layout.

Beauvoir’s initial impression upon landing in Melbourne, the first place in Australia he visited, was its striking resemblance to England:

> Il me semble que la couleur locale de ce pays-ci consiste précisément à n’être pas couleur locale, et que la colonie … ressemble d’une façon inouïe à la métropole…. Tout ce qu’il y a d’étonnant dans cette fidèle reproduction de l’ancien monde sur une terre inconnue il y a deux cents ans, vierge encore il y a trente-trois ans !

The surprise of a reproduction of the British *metropole* in the colony is exemplified by the rapidity of the city’s expansion. Yet only a few days later, Beauvoir compares Melbourne to Europe. Similarly, Sydney reminded Beauvoir of Europe, and specifically of his social life in Paris, whilst also resembling England (though he does not specify how exactly). Evidently, he did not see any contradiction in comparing the same city to two different models of urban planning despite the great differences

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31 Davison, ‘The European City in Australia,’ p. 780.


between Paris and London. Comettant specified clearly which elements reminded him of which country: for him, Melbourne was ‘essentiellement anglaise par ses mœurs, ses habitants et ses constructions,’ while its grid pattern layout was ‘yankee fashion’.\(^35\) Sydney, by contrast, was in his eyes more European than British in its design, despite its heritage: ‘j’aurais pu me croire en Europe, en pays anglais dans la ville mère de l’Australie.’\(^36\)

Comparing Australian cities to their old world equivalents gave rise to expressions of homesickness. Vickers, for example, was disconcerted by a Christmas without snow in the middle of summer. She described herself as feeling disoriented (‘dépaysé’) and estranged (‘l’éloignement se fait sentir avec plus de force’).\(^37\) Vickers visited the home of a French woman living in Australia, Madame T, who claimed to have become completely Australian in her heart and soul. When Vickers and her family started talking about galettes and brioches, Madame T burst into tears, leading Vickers to reflect that while she may well have become Australian in heart and soul, she remained decidedly French in her stomach!\(^38\) Chabrillan similarly wept at the thought of France, when hosting a fundraiser ball for the French wounded in Crimea, where French national songs were played. Claiming to be deeply disturbed, she concluded, ‘There is no getting away from it: I’m a Parisian to the core!’\(^39\) Yet homesickness was not restricted to the women. Beauvoir found spending Sundays in a British city such as Melbourne sad and bleak as opposed to happy Sundays home in France. Comettant deliberately chose to stay at the French Club hotel in Melbourne so that he could live amongst compatriots: ‘J’ai vécu en Australie presque comme si je n’étais pas sorti de France.’\(^40\) These experiences of homesickness indicate that there was a sharp awareness of the differences between

\(^{35}\) Comettant, *Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or*, p. 61.

\(^{36}\) Comettant, *Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or*, p. 368.


\(^{39}\) Chabrillan, *The French Consul’s Wife*, pp. 139-40.

Australia and the old world, despite the many similarities in society and urban planning, perspectives expressed in defensiveness of the superiority of France.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the extent to which French urban development shaped the thoughts of the travel writers during their time in Australia. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Paris was made anew. This was largely the work of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, Prefect of the Seine during the reign of Napoleon III. Works of modernisation, especially in public hygiene, were significant; however, the most important contribution was creating a uniform look to the city with ‘striking regularity’ and ‘obsessively straight’ wide boulevards.\textsuperscript{41} While all major European cities were modernised during the nineteenth century, the fame of Haussmann’s work lies both in its immensity and the rapidity of its achievement.\textsuperscript{42} Nevertheless, he was heavily criticised for the “vandalisme” avec lequel il jeta à terre le vieux Paris.\textsuperscript{43} Rather comically, in 1892, the term haussmanniser was coined to define urban renewal by demolition.\textsuperscript{44} Beauvoir reflected this attitude, suggesting that as everything in Melbourne was new, Haussmann would be bored since there was nothing to destroy!\textsuperscript{45} The interest in Australian urban planning by the French travellers, therefore, reflects their historical context in which their own capital was being radically transformed.

\textbf{The Convict Heritage}

One of the aspects of settler society, including that of the cities, which weighed heavily on the consciences of the French travel writers, was the convict heritage. At the same time as Britain was

\textsuperscript{42} Bernard Marchand, Paris, histoire d’une ville XIX\textsuperscript{e}-XX\textsuperscript{e} siècle (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993), p. 92.
\textsuperscript{43} Marchand, Paris, histoire d’une ville XIX\textsuperscript{e}-XX\textsuperscript{e} siècle, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{44} Jordan, ‘Haussmann and Haussmannisation,’ p. 88.
\textsuperscript{45} Beauvoir, Australie, pp. 83-4.
moving away from the convict system, France moved towards it. Transportation to the east coast of Australia ended in 1852, the same year in which a disastrous French experiment of transportation to French Guiana began.\textsuperscript{46} Similarly, transportation to Australia ended entirely in 1868, with Western Australia the last destination for British criminals.\textsuperscript{47} Four years before, France had established a penal colony in New Caledonia.\textsuperscript{48}

This decision had a long history, as the political instability of France in the first half of the nineteenth century meant that debates on crime and punishment were revisited many times during this period.\textsuperscript{49} In 1819, a government committee decided that a penal colony was desirable, and suggested the southwest corner of Australia was the most suitable location; however, this decision was not acted upon.\textsuperscript{50} A fierce debate erupted in the Chambre des Députés in 1831, proposing to remove from the penal code the deportation of political prisoners, which resulted in an amendment supporting the sentence of deportation.\textsuperscript{51} Yet it was not until the Second Empire that transportation was put into place, with 15,000 political prisoners after the June 1848 insurrection sent to Algeria.\textsuperscript{52} Throughout the French decision-making on penal policy, Australia was an important test case of the possibilities of criminals forming the basis of a successful colony.\textsuperscript{53} Interestingly, French politicians, both those in favour of and those opposed to transportation, used Botany Bay to support their arguments.\textsuperscript{54} For example, the 1831 debate centred on the success of the British colony, with the chairman of the legal committee in the Chambre des Députés who presented the bill remarking that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} Transportation to Tasmania was abolished in 1853.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Forster, 'French Penal Policy and the Origins of the French Presence in New Caledonia,' pp. 135-150.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Forster, 'French Penal Policy and the Origins of the French Presence in New Caledonia,' p. 138.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Forster, \textit{France and Botany Bay}, pp. 55-67.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Forster, 'French Penal Policy and the Origins of the French Presence in New Caledonia,' p. 146.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Forster, \textit{France and Botany Bay}, pp. 1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Forster, \textit{France and Botany Bay}, pp. 3, 7-54.
\end{itemize}
‘On all sides the example of Botany-Bay is cited.’55 The contentious issue of transportation continued until its cessation in New Caledonia in 1896 and French Guiana in 1938.56

It is therefore unsurprising that the French travel writers visiting Australia participated in this debate by commenting on their impressions: first of the reality of the convict system and later its legacy. Although opinions varied, following the greater divergence of views in Paris, a general trend can be observed in the development of the French representation of ‘convictism.’ During the era of transportation, the dangers of convictism appeared all too real. Yet, as the risk was removed with the cessation of transportation to Australia, the writers proved eager to assure their readers back in France that European understandings of convicts running wild were not accurate.

The fictional Madame Giovanni, who travelled to Tasmania before 1855, provided a detailed description of the convict system, still active at the time. Talking with her servant, she was astounded to find that convicts surrounded her. Her sense of curiosity and also fear was clearly evident:

Mon premier mot, et c’est le mot de tout étranger, fut :

- Où donc sont les prisonniers ?

On me fit la réponse de Solitaire :

- Partout et nulle part.

J’insistai.

56 Forster, France and Botany Bay, p. 175.
- Le commissaire qui a apporté votre bagage ici est un prisonnier ; le domestique qui vous sert est un prisonnier ; l'homme à qui vous demandez votre chemin dans la rue est un prisonnier ; l'agent de police qui examine si vos papiers sont en règle est un prisonnier ; moi-même qui ai l'honneur de vous servir, je suis un prisonnier ; seulement, comme vous le voyez, nous sommes des prisonniers sans prison.\textsuperscript{57}

Later, as she discovered more about the realities of the penal system, Giovanni reported on the penitentiary, the female factory, the conditional pardon system, and punishment of men and women.\textsuperscript{58} She was particularly confronted by tales of Norfolk Island, ‘que le ciel avait fait pour être un paradis, est devenue, entre les mains des hommes, un de cercles de l’enfer de Dante.’\textsuperscript{59} The contrast here between paradise and hell, reinforced by the literary illusion to Dante, is striking. As most of her journal, in Tasmania and beyond, centres on her social interactions with the wives of government and other officials, the extent of detailed writing suggests that convictism was a topic of almost morbid curiosity for Dumas, which was shared by increasing numbers of British writers.

While Giovanni tended to reserve judgement on the benefit or risks of the convict system, Fauchery, who also wrote contemporaneously to transportation, spoke in highly critical terms of its cruelties. He quoted extensively from the letter of an ex-convict, who reported the apparent deaths by starvation of 13,000 convicts in six months, and 800 in the following five months, taking at face value presumably inflated statistics.\textsuperscript{60} He also related the rather gruesome death of a convict buried alive, repeated deaths by flogging with up to 800 lashes, and a pregnant female convict who was killed by being plunged multiple times into the river from the top of a ship's deck.\textsuperscript{61} Fauchery's condemnatory stance on convictism in Australia was presumably influenced by his politically liberal stance.

\textsuperscript{57} Dumas, \textit{Impressions de Voyage}, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{58} Dumas, \textit{Impressions de Voyage}, pp. 1-3.
\textsuperscript{59} Dumas, \textit{Impressions de Voyage}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{60} Fauchery, \textit{Lettres d'un mineur en Australie}, p. 106.
grounded in his social context of Bohemian Paris circles. As his friend the poet and writer Théodore de Banville recounted in the introduction to Lettres d’un mineur en Australie, Fauchery had set off only a few years earlier in 1848 to ‘liberate’ Poland from Russian control, before running out of funds and being interred in a camp, then repatriated to Paris. This quirky episode was part of a movement in 1848-9 of Polish patriots ‘galvanised into action by the revolutionary wave that seemed to herald the collapse of absolutism in Prussia and Austria’: in Paris, for example, on 15 May 1848 thousands of works invaded the National Assembly crying ‘Vive la Pologne!’ Fauchery’s involvement with this movement is an indication of his radical political ideology, which influenced his critique of the convict system.

There occurred a marked change in representations of the convict system after its abolishment. Comettant noted after his 1888 visit that ‘Sydney s’est lavée depuis longtemps de la tâche originelle des convicts (condamnés).’ Yet it became a serious pre-occupation for Beauvoir to exonerate the stain that convictism had left on Australia in the European imagination. In one of his first diary entries, on 12 July, he remarked:

Aux yeux de bien des gens en Europe, l’Australie n’est encore qu’une colonie pénitentiaire du Royaume-Uni et un refuge d’aventuriers chercheurs d’or. On se figure sans doute que nous y coudoyons à chaque pas, que nous y avons pour commensaux des convicts, des assassins ayant tué père et mère…. Mais c’est là une erreur bien grande, et tel n’est point l’état des choses.

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65 Comettant, Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or, pp. 368-9.
66 Beauvoir, Australie, pp. 53-4.
He noted that no convicts were ever sent to Melbourne, and that it was unjust to stain all Australian colonies with the same heritage of convictism. Beauvoir evidently held a Manichean dualistic view, seeing convicts as a moral stain and assuming that all convicts were dangerous robbers when in reality many were petty criminals. As he visited other cities, his ideas became even more fervently defensive in explaining the erosion of convictism. When in Tasmania, he briefly discussed the history of convictism but concentrated disproportionately on the history of the free settler immigrants. He implicitly compared Tasmania to the United States (where 50,000 convicts were sent between 1718 and 1775) in recounting the victory over transportation: ‘C'était la seconde fois qu’une société nuisible s’effaçait.’

Finally, when in Sydney, Beauvoir’s indignation at the misrepresentations of colonial society reached a pinnacle. He remarked: ‘la pauvreté et la condition impure des premiers pionniers ont été noyées et refoulées dans l’abîme par le flot régulier et envahisseur d’une immigration pure, laborieuse et honnête.’ The strength of the verbs ‘noyées’ and ‘refoulées’, and the vivid imagery they conjure, is matched by the moralistic descriptors of the free-settler immigrants, continuing his dualistic conservatism. So great was his sentiment on this matter that it served as one of the motivating factors for publishing his travel writings.

Si le bonheur veut que je revienne en Europe, une chose avant tout me sera bien vivement à cœur : ce sera de contribuer à laver la Nouvelle-Galles du Sud de la tâche que lui a infligée en Europe son origine impure.

Je ne serai heureux que si j’ai pu remplir mon devoir, et rendre hommage à la société de Sydney qu’on ne connaît pas, et pour laquelle on est, chez nous, injuste sans le vouloir.


68 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 275.

69 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 276.
The priority he accorded to what he perceived as his duty above all other things is remarkable. Beauvoir’s use of the language of stain echoed the same metaphor employed by Australian colonists to describe the convict heritage. This suggests that he was deeply influenced by the people he encountered, and that his motivation probably grew out of conversations with Sydneysiders.

A Worker’s Paradise

The fourth and final element of city lifestyle that interested the French travel writers was the socio-political reforms, seen in parliamentary democracy and workers’ rights. This emerged most evidently in the writings of Beauvoir and Comettant; while other travellers mentioned Parliaments, and even in the case of Vickers attended one parliamentary sitting, they do not make political assessments of the same profundity from their experiences. There are two likely reasons why Beauvoir and Comettant could develop more in-depth analyses. Firstly, both had access, whether from aristocratic status in the case of the former, or an official mandate for the visit in the case of the latter, to leading government officials and local dignitaries. Secondly, both were writing after the development of both the colonial parliamentary systems and the rights obtained by workers, particularly in contrast to the 1850s. Fauchery, Chabrilan and Giovanni all visited prior to the obtaining of responsible government in New South Wales and the first elections in Victoria, both of which occurred in 1856.

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Despite the loss of his aristocratic privileges as a result of revolution in France, Beauvoir complimented the ‘pure democracy put to work’ and the ‘school of political life open to all’ in Victoria.\(^74\) He found the colonists’ liberty in self-government and particularly their achievement in writing their own constitution highly appealing.\(^75\) Moreover, he praised Victoria for establishing equality between different religious denominations so that unlike in England, the Anglican Church did not enjoy any special privileges, thus resolving what he saw as one of the greatest troubles in the United Kingdom through freedom of religion.\(^76\) Beauvoir found the style of colonial government both effective and attractive: ‘Elle a créé non plus une colonie mais un monde nouveau.’\(^77\) This reflection on the Victorian political system led him to interject and offer political commentary on France’s most valuable colony: ‘et dire qu’après de si beaux résultats, qui ne sont certes pas ignorés en Europe, on refuse encore des députés à l’Algérie française!’\(^78\) This reflects the contextual difference between British settler colonies which granted progressive self-government to white migrant population, and the French model of colonialism in Algeria which was seen as an extension of mainland France but had less political autonomy.

Beauvoir also mentioned the excellent workers’ conditions in the Australian colonies. He was impressed upon visiting the State Library of Victoria to find 400 working-class men studying there. Upon being surprised not only by the desire to instruct the worker but also by the mere fact that workers had time for such instruction, he discovered the Australian institution of eight-hour days.\(^79\) Yet it was Comettant who wrote most extensively on workers’ rights. Due to a labour shortage in the 1880s, workers were well paid as they were able to dictate terms to the employers rather than vice

\(^{74}\) ‘La pure démocratie mise à l’œuvre, l’école de la vie politique ouverte à tous.’ Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, p. 147.  
\(^{75}\) Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, p. 138.  
\(^{76}\) Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, pp. 220-1.  
\(^{77}\) Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, p. 147.  
\(^{78}\) Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, p. 150.  
\(^{79}\) Beauvoir, \textit{Australie}, pp. 42-3.
versa.\textsuperscript{80} He then noted the low cost of living, which enabled workers to save enough to own their own house and anticipate an independent retirement.\textsuperscript{81} With strong unions able to block foreign workers, they were able to maintain their comfortable situation.\textsuperscript{82} Comettant thus concluded: ‘Les ouvriers y sont... incontestablement heureux.’\textsuperscript{83} His reflections reproduced the popular Australian mentality which since the 1850s had seen Australia as the ‘working man’s paradise.’

Although neither Beauvoir nor Comettant appear to be socialist (they do not align themselves with any of the disparate strands of socialism dominant in France at the time, utopianism, Marxism, or anarchism; nor do they mention contemporary French socialists, such as Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Louis Blanc, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon or Jules Guesde).\textsuperscript{84} They do prefigure the French idea at the beginning of the twentieth century of Australia as a working model of socialism in action. This stems from Albert Métin’s book \textit{Le Socialisme sans doctrines}, first published in 1901. Although not travel writing per se, this political treatise originated in an academic five-month tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1899. Métin would later become a député from 1909 to 1918, representing various radical parties.\textsuperscript{85} Russel Ward, who translated his work into English, suggests Métin was a utopian socialist who believed piecemeal reform would lead to a future socialist society, and as such sought to stress the success of practical Australasian reformism rather than Continental intellectualism.\textsuperscript{86}
Métin studied numerous aspects of Australian working life, including trade unionism, working hours, legal protection of workers, arbitration, the minimum wage, unemployment assistance, the old-age pension and the idea of the worker’s paradise. He claimed that Australia was the closest of any British territory in realising the rallying cry of English workers for ‘Eight Hours to Work, Eight Hours to Play, Eight Hours to Sleep, Eight Shillings a Day.’ Moreover, he reported favourably that the colonies enjoyed more public services than European countries and spent the most proportionally on education and public works. The pinnacle, in his opinion, was old-age pensions, which had been established since 1899 in New Zealand and which Australia was at the time in the process of adopting. He described this initiative as moving behind expediency and entering into truly socialist tendencies. Yet his disappointment is palpable when he assesses that socialism has not seduced Australians, and that it had a pejorative meaning even amongst the leaders of the trade unions. In his conclusion, Métin imagines that Australian politics could become socialist; consequently, his pleasure when writing the preface to the second edition in 1910 is palpable as he concludes that ‘l’évolution se fait en ce moment vers le socialisme d’État.’ Unfortunately, Métin had an idealised view of the reality of the working-class experience in Australia, unaware of some of the darker aspects. For example, the first big industrial dispute in Australia, the 1891 Shearers’ Strike in Queensland, was ended by colonial mounted troops arresting the unionists involved for conspiracy and sedition, thirteen of whom were sentenced to three years imprisonment.

In conclusion, the French travellers were surprised by the developed nature of Australian cities. In striking contrast to the uniqueness and exotic flora and fauna and Indigenous Australians, which

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88 Métin, Le socialisme sans doctrines, pp. 233-4.
89 Métin, Le socialisme sans doctrines, p. 252.
90 Métin, Le socialisme sans doctrines, p. 115.
91 Métin, Le socialisme sans doctrines, p. vii.
were remarkable for their difference and otherness, the cities surprised the French by their similarity. The built environment echoed simultaneously British and European town planning models. Looming large in the French imagination of Australia was the practice and legacy of convictism. Yet once the travellers’ investigations had overcome this stain, the successfulness of social and political reforms in Australia challenged and surpassed the French model.
Conclusion

Nous avons pu découvrir de magnifiques paysages, tous aussi beaux les uns que les autres....

Il est vraiment difficile de dire que nous avons préféré un endroit plutôt qu'un autre ... car même si tous ces lieux sont très différents, il y a toujours quelque chose qui rend ces endroits uniques et magnifiques. Nous avons vu des paysages que jamais nous n’aurions pu imaginer, l’Australie regorge d’endroits insolites.¹

The experience of modern-day French travellers Sophie Bichon and Adrien Lamotte encountering Australia’s unusualness is remarkably similar to their nineteenth century predecessors. During their year-long Australian road trip, their travel blog (the new form of travel writing) recorded their reflections. The themes of strange flora and fauna, ancient Aboriginal culture and bustling cities continued to remain points of fascination, just as they had for the earlier French travellers.

In undertaking a thematic analysis of the travel writings of Céleste de Chabrillan, Madame Giovanni, Antoine Fauchery, Henry Russell-Killough, the Comte de Beauvoir, Anna Vickers, Oscar Comettant, Ernest Michel, Octave Chemin and Henri Gilbert, this thesis has revealed their pertinence. Previously, these ten travel writings had been essentially untapped, with very little academic research considering the French texts.

Yet they are highly relevant in three key areas. First, they provide an outsider perspective on life in nineteenth-century Australia. Writing from the perspective of a French traveller, they were able to comment on the more controversial and damning aspects of Australian society, such as the poor treatment of Indigenous Australians, as well as recognise the non-British influences in Australia, for example in urban planning. While there are more British and settler accounts than non-British writings on Australia, the perspective of the outsider adds vitality and should be integrated into Australian history.

Second, they show a glimpse of France’s relations with other countries. French nineteenth-century imperialism has of course been widely studied, as has its diplomatic relations with other European nations. By contrast, Australia was not a French colony and the travellers, even those on official missions, were not representatives of official French foreign policy. The travel writings reveal the interaction of individual French men and women with a part of the world that was outside their normal experience. This unfamiliarity may be a reason why their representations focused so intently on Australian difference and otherness. This common view is suggestive of shared perceptions and values regarding foreign countries.

Third, the travel writers themselves have fascinating stories that deserve to be told, from Chabrillan’s history as a courtesan and cross-dressing actress come scorned consul’s wife; to Fauchery’s time amongst the Parisian bohemians before gold-mining, running a café, and photographing Australian scenes; to Vickers’ family holiday in Australia before becoming an algologist and having an algae named after her. The French people who visited Australia were genuinely interesting and deserve not to remain in historical oblivion. It would be exciting to see a renewed interest in Franco-Australian history, where other fascinating stories remain to be told.
Amidst the disparate topics covered in each of the travel writings, three key themes of flora and fauna, Aboriginal Australians and the cities have been studied. Obviously, each writer’s background, socio-political beliefs, experiences in Australia and the time of writing nuanced their representation of Australia. Nevertheless, a unified French view on Australia does emerge. Binding together all the travel writings is the recognition of exoticism and otherness, whether it was felt by comparisons or distinctions from Europe, and whether it was expressed in its appearance (as was the case for the flora, fauna and Indigenous Australians) or its absence (as for the cities, where similarities were just as surprising as differences). Moreover, there is a sense of contradiction in the two ‘Australias’ - felt in the divergence between the truly strange and sauvage flora, fauna and first inhabitants; and the modern, well-developed cities. This gave rise to the perception of Australia as a land of paradox, ‘une terre vraiment étrange.’

The French travellers deserve all the more not to sink into historical oblivion because the same perceptions their writings displayed endure today. As the travel blog of Bichon and Lamotte reveals, French travellers continue to perceive Australia as a strange yet appealing exotic land. The themes that fascinated the nineteenth-century French travellers have not lost their relevance, but rather continue to resonate in the French conception of Australia, this terre vraiment étrange.

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2 Beauvoir, Australie, p. 200.
Appendix: Who’s Who

By order of arrival in Australia

Madame Giovanni

Madame Giovanni’s *Impressions de voyage* ambiguously straddles the divide between fiction and fact. Written by Alexandre Dumas père, it was first published in serialised form in *Le Siècle* in 1855 and later in a collected edition in 1856. Dumas claimed it was based on the facts, judgements and reflections from the notes of the traveller, and that only the form belonged to him. No clues are left to her identity. Giovanni travelled with her husband, first to Tasmania and Sydney, and later to the Pacific Islands, California and Mexico, before returning to France in 1853.

Céleste de Chabrillan (1824-1909)

Born Elisabeth-Céleste Vénard, she became a prostitute aged sixteen, before dancing under the name of ‘la Mogador’ (see Figure A.1). In 1854, she married impoverished aristocrat Lionel de Chabrillan before setting off for Melbourne, where he had been appointed French Consul (see Figure

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2 ‘Dans ce récit, dont le forme seule m’appartient, j’ai respecté scrupuleusement quant aux faits, aux jugements, aux réflexions, et souvent même aux traits d’esprits, le sens de notes et documents que m’a fournis l’intrépide voyageuse : j’exige qu’il soit vrai, voilà tout.’ Dumas, *Impressions de Voyage*, p. 1.
4 Dumas, *Impressions de Voyage*.
A.2). Before arriving in Australia, her scandalous memoirs *Adieu au monde* were published. Céleste and Lionel lived in St. Kilda for two years, until she returned to Paris in 1856 (Lionel died in Melbourne in 1858). In Paris, Chabrillan established her reputation as a writer, with her 1856 Australian novel *Les Voleurs d'Or* gaining instant success: she was later to publish twelve novels, twenty-six plays, seven operettas, poems and songs. Her Australian travel writings, *Un Deuil au bout de monde*, were published in 1877. Throughout her travel writing, she repeatedly expressed her disdain for the colonial society that shunned her.

![Figure A.1 - Actress Céleste Mogador in a male role](Clancy and Allen, *The French Consul's Wife*, plate between pp. 52-3.)

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9 Hone, ‘Chabrillan, Céleste de’ <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/chabrillan-celeste-de-3184/text4775>
Antoine Fauchery (1827-1861)

After a failed career as a wood engraver, Fauchery joined the Paris Bohemian circle in 1844 when he began to practise as a writer (see Figure A.3). Fauchery was in Australia from 1852 to 1856, first working unsuccessfully on the goldfields of Ballarat and later running Café Estaminet Français in Melbourne. His writings, which take the form of eight letters, were first published in *Le Moniteur Universel* in 1857. After a brief return to Paris, he revisited Australia on a French government photographic mission. During this time, he produced *Sun Pictures of Victoria* with fellow

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photographer Richard Daintree (see Figure A.4). After a brief stay in Manila, he left for China as the official photographer to the French military expedition, publishing *Lettres de Chine.*

![Figure A.3 - Cartoon of Fauchery, drawn by Nadar](image)

*Fauchery, Sun Pictures of Victoria, p. 14.*

![Figure A.4 – Fauchery’s Self-portrait](image)

*Fauchery, Sun Pictures of Victoria, p. 116.*

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Henry Russell-Killough (1834-1909)

Despite his name, Russell-Killough (later known as Henry Russell) is indeed French, born in Toulouse to an Irish father and a French mother.\(^\text{15}\) His youth was spent travelling the world: first in 1857 to North America, and then two years later to Russia, China, Australia, New Zealand, India and Egypt.\(^\text{16}\) Russell-Killough was only in Australia for a short stay, visiting Melbourne and Sydney. Upon his return to France, Russell-Killough became a passionate mountain-climber, pioneering the summits of the Pyrenees. In 1888 he was appointed the Comte de Pyrenees, with a concession at Vignemale, the highest summit in the Pyrenees.\(^\text{17}\)

Le Comte de Beauvoir (1846-1929)

Le Comte de Beauvoir spent almost four months in the Australian colonies (visiting cities and countryside in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and the Torres Strait) as part of a world tour in 1866. Beauvoir travelled with his childhood friend, the Duc de Penthievre. The two young men were welcomed by leading officials and prominent citizens, and enjoyed an insider’s view of upper-crust colonial society. Beauvoir formed a highly positive impression of the Australian colonies. First published as a volume focusing entirely on Australia and New Zealand in 1869, another fourteen editions were to follow before 1886, as well as his combined 1873 volume *Voyage Autour du Monde*, and the 1870 English translation.\(^\text{18}\) Upon his return to France, Beauvoir served in a variety of military


\(^{18}\) Ramsland, 'Impressions of a Young French Gentleman’s 1866 Visit to the Australian Colonies,' p. 3. Some editions were published under his later title of le Marquis de Beauvoir: it is unclear when or why his title
and diplomatic functions.\textsuperscript{19} After meeting a group of young Australian cadets in 1925, he wrote \textit{Des Lauriers de France à nos amis d’Australie}, continuing his glowing impression of Australia.\textsuperscript{20}

\section*{Anna Vickers (1852-1906)}

Anna Vickers visited Australia (Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart, and surrounding countryside, for six months) and New Zealand in 1879-80 with her parents and two sisters. Their extended family holiday was to visit her brother who had been working in Queensland. Whilst in Australia, Vickers was fascinated by the unique Australian flora. In the last decade of her life, Vickers became a professional marine algologist, collecting in the Mediterranean, the Canary Islands and Barbados.\textsuperscript{21} Her scientific work, \textit{Phycologia Barbadensis} was published after her death in 1908.\textsuperscript{22} The algae \textit{Vickersia Karsakoff} is named in her honour.\textsuperscript{23}

\section*{Oscar Comettant (1819-1898)}

Oscar Comettant (see Figure A.5) was a composer, music critic for newspaper \textit{Siècle}, and founder of a musical institute in Paris. In 1852-55, he visited the United States and wrote the first of his travel writings (his other travel writings include \textit{Les Civilisations inconnues} on Japan, South America and Canada, and \textit{De Paris à ... Quelque part} on domestic travel).\textsuperscript{24} Comettant was a judge for the 1888 Melbourne International Centennial Expedition. During his few months in Melbourne, he stayed at

\begin{itemize}
\item changed. \textit{Voyage Autour du Monde} included his other tomes \textit{Java, Siam and Canton} and \textit{Pékin, Yeddo, San Francisco}.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ramsland, ‘Impressions of a Young French Gentleman’s 1866 Visit to the Australian Colonies,’ p. 24.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Anna Vickers (1852-1906), <http://plants.jstor.org/person/bm000047526>.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Anna Vickers, \textit{Phycologia Barbadensis} (Paris: Librairie des sciences naturelles P. Klincksieck, 1908).
\item \textsuperscript{23} Guiry, and Guiry, ‘\textit{Vickersia Karsakoff}, 1896: 285’ <http://www.algaebase.org/search/genus/detail/?genus_id=38043>
\end{itemize}
the French Club hotel and built friendships with many expatriates.\textsuperscript{25} At the invitation of the \textit{Cercle Français}, Comettant also enjoyed a short stay in Sydney. Comettant is the most politically liberal of the travel writers, describing sympathetically the Indigenous Australians and arguing for women’s rights.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{oscar_comettant}
\caption{Oscar Comettant, painted by Philippe Catellan in 1860 \newline Bibliothèque Nationale de France}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Ernest Michel (1837-1896)}

Lawyer Ernest Michel (see Figure A.6) set out on two world tours in the last two decades of his life, first to China, Japan, India, United States and Canada; before visiting South America, the Pacific, the Mascarene Islands and the Middle East.\textsuperscript{26} While in Australia, he visited briefly Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia, and wrote from his own observations and unnamed

\textsuperscript{25} See Davison, ‘Oscar Comettant Visits Brighton,’.
second reports. Michel was a member of the geographical societies in Lyon and Paris.\textsuperscript{27} His travel writings intentionally exhorted French people to travel.\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure-a6.png}
\caption{Ernest Michel}
\end{figure}

\textit{Michel, À travers l’hémisphère sud I}, p. i.

**Octave Chemin (1844-19 ?)**

Octave Chemin was the senior engineer in charge of bridges and roads and professor at the world’s oldest engineering school, L’École Nationale de Ponts et Chaussées.\textsuperscript{29} His previous publications were related entirely to his discipline.\textsuperscript{30} Chemin visited West Australia in the late 1890s on an official French government mission to report on conditions for French settlers interested in mining in the region.\textsuperscript{31} As such, his travel writing is focused entirely on matters of economic concern, and is written in an official and rather bland style.

\textsuperscript{27} Michel, \textit{Le tour du monde en 240 jours}, p. i.
\textsuperscript{28} See for example, Michel, \textit{À travers l’hémisphère sud II}, pp. 275-283.
\textsuperscript{29} Chemin, \textit{De Paris aux mines d’or de l’Australie occidentale}, p. i.
\textsuperscript{31} The exact date of his visit is unclear. Chemin, \textit{De Paris aux mines d’or de l’Australie occidentale}, p. 3.
Henri Gilbert (1865- ?)

Journalist by trade, Henri Gilbert (see Figure A.7) set off in 1895 on a wager to walk around the world in five years. Between September 1897 and March 1898 he walked across the Nullarbor, the third person in recorded history to achieve this feat: his diary and scrapbook of photographs and signed attestations tracking his journey both remain. Subsequently, he walked from Yacka (in South Australia) to Brisbane by January 1899, although this second diary has been lost. Gilbert endured an extremely arduous trek across the Nullarbor, going many days without food or water in extreme heat, and collapsing twice (see Figure A.8). As a result, his diary entries focus almost entirely on the difficulties of the journey. Colin Dyer, who published Gilbert’s diaries, believes he remains a historical mystery, although Edward Duyker is critical of Dyer’s limited efforts to find him.

Figure A.7- Henri Gilbert outside his tent, near Eucla, Western Australia

Dyer, A Frenchman’s Walk Across the Nullarbor, plate between pp. 100-1.

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