



LOUIS AUGUSTUS TRIEBEL

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1890-1985

In 1957 Louis played the amiable host to members of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association, gathered at the University of Tasmania for their fifth Congress. He introduced himself to me when I was in the Library, keen to share with a younger colleague a moment of browsing and reflection at the shelves. Many years passed before I came to appreciate more richly that encounter as a sharing of literary experiences and to realise that each of us had then been at the opposite poles of our careers, myself merely a tertiary teacher of two years' standing, whereas he had just retired from his Chair after decades of teaching and research, an inspiration to his students — although his writings stress how greatly they inspired him — a luminary in his university and a trusted guide in the Realm of Literature for thousands of ABC listeners.

Louis was born in London on 13 October 1890 and educated at the Polytechnic School and at London and Grenoble Universities. After six years as a student at University College, he completed an M.A. by research in 1914. His mentors included the Germanists, Robert Priebsch and John George Robertson; among his fellow students was Edna Purdie, later Professor of English at Bedford College.

In the first World War Louis served with the 3rd City of London Regiment and the Royal Army Medical Corps. The Hell of Flanders in 1915 will colour many passages of his creative writings later in life. After the Conflict he began a career in teaching which took him ultimately far from Europe.

Louis's friendship with John Robertson deepened both socially and professionally in the twenties; in fact, he became a regular visitor to his London flat in Regent's Park Road. The professor was a comparatist, astride the fields of German, English and Scandinavian Literatures; he strove to give Modern Languages a distinct identity among academic disciplines, and to this end he had founded the *Modern Language Review* in 1905. Robertson's Australian-born wife, Ethel Florence Richardson, was by the twenties a distinguished novelist, writing under the pen-name of Henry Handel Richardson.

With the encouragement and assistance of Robertson and Priebsch, Louis prepared for publication the first scholarly edition of the *Crocodilstechen* or *Comedy of the Crocodile*, based on the surviving manuscripts, and furnished with a linguistic, literary and historical introduction. It was accepted by Oxford University Press and appeared in 1925. The Crocodile Hunt in Nuremburg by patricians and burgesses constitutes a remarkable epitome of the farce as

a literary genre in late-sixteenth-century Germany.

The publisher David Nutt released Louis's two-volume *Glotta Dictionary, English-French and English-German* in 1926, and Heffers of Cambridge his *Phonetic Chart of the Sounds of English, French and German* in 1927. In this post-war period Louis had established himself as a modern language teacher in High Schools in the London area and when, in 1926, his life took a new direction with his emigration to Australia, it was not long before his skills were being appreciated at Sydney Grammar School. He served there as Modern Language Master from January 1927 to March 1934. In 1930 the second edition of his *Handbook to Public Examinations in French* was released by the Melbourne and Sydney Publishing Company.

Throughout his rise to eminence in Australian scholarly circles, Louis continued to give expression to his love of German Literature. Articles and essays with such titles as 'Faust, who was he?', 'A Universal Genius: Goethe', 'A Refugee', and 'Thomas Mann and the Nazi Revaluation of Literature' attest to Louis's sense of topicality, love of the whimsy in criticism and earnest desire to make better known hidden aspects of favourite literary figures.

Further, in the course of earlier investigations in German and Swiss archives, Louis had discovered fresh material about the German Theatre in the late sixteenth century. The results of his research were published in 1954 by the Melbourne University Press, with the title *Rasser of Alsace*. It was the first comprehensive study in English of the *Spil von Kinderzucht* by Johann Rasser of Ensisheim in Upper Alsace. The importance of the staging and its boy actors for the history of theatre are underlined, while a survey of contemporary English, French and Swiss satire serves as a backcloth to German stage humour.

Louis's scholarship and initiatives were not confined to German Language and Literature. In 1934 he had been appointed Lecturer in charge of Modern Languages at the University of Tasmania. In this new environment he became a benign and progressive force for the expansion and consolidation of Modern Languages in the community both in Tasmania and on the mainland. He joined numerous organisations and often became chairman, President or Vice-President, so popular was his guidance and enthusiastic his support. I select the following for mention, but there were others: the Goethe Society, Alliance Française, French-Australian Association, Tasmanian Society of Teachers, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, State Library and Bursaries Board, Free Library Movements Council, Schools Board of Tasmania. He was the first President of the Tasmanian Branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers; he was also a co-founder in 1950 of the body that today bears the name Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association, and in 1956 he was among the men of learning who launched the Australian Humanities Research Council.

One also observes the extent to which French historical matters arrest Louis's attention once he is in post in Hobart. Perhaps it was the pull of the Island's own rich history, perhaps it was the intellectual pursuits of a colleague at

Melbourne University, Dr A. Carey Taylor, who was on the point of publishing a study of Charles de Brosses (1709-1777), a French ethnologist who had written papers about the lands and peoples of the South Seas.

In 1937 Louis edited with C. W. Macfarlane a small collection of extracts in French from the writings of Françoise Péron, Alexandre Dumas and the Comte de Beauvoir. The Australasian Publishing Company of Sydney printed them under the title of *French Explorers in Tasmania and in Southern Seas*, and a glossary included notes on the marine fauna and flora. The presence of Dumas may have been considered by some critics as 'unholy' and 'untoward', until they had read the short story 'Les Baleiniers', set in Hobart Town in the 1830's and 1840's. Louis's presentation of the extracts for the educated public in Modern Languages and History had the blessing of the philologist and traditionalist, Professor G. G. Nicholson, of Sydney University, who assisted in the revision of the texts for publication.

During the Second World War, in 1943 to be precise, Louis gathered, with the assistance of Jean Batt, a second slim collection of extracts and published them with the title *French Exploration of Australia*. The objectives were boldly enunciated: 'The primary aims of the preceding series of extracts relating voyages in Australian seas have been to make accessible original sources from which to trace the progress of French exploration here and to show its importance, geographical, commercial, colonial and international, scientific and literary'. The log-books and diaries used were those of La Pérouse, D'Entrecasteaux, Baudin, Péron and Dumont d'Urville. A hard-covered edition of the same texts translated into English appeared in 1957 with a Preface by His Excellency Renaud Sivan, the French Ambassador. He praised the editors' efforts 'to outline the history of the French contribution to closer knowledge of the Austral Lands and, more particularly, of Tasmania'. Liaison with visiting French authorities continued for years after the cessation of hostilities. Expeditions to the French Antarctic base in Adélie Land nearly always called at Hobart and were invariably welcomed by Louis.

His writings and public speeches on French topics in these years were continual and widely acclaimed. The Australasian Publishing Company printed an anthology of them in 1952, called *Facets of France and French Literature*. 'My purpose', wrote Louis, 'is to help the reader to gather something of what the French tradition has contributed to civilisation and to lead him to appreciate the significant things in French life and achievement.' And as one permits oneself to wander with Louis over the mosaic of French Literature, one is buoyed up and delighted by his anecdotes or perceptions of Tristram and Iseut, Ronsard, La Bruyère, Rousseau, Daudet, Saint-Exupéry and one is invited to muse on great literary and cultural movements such as Humanism, Symbolism and Modernism.

Louis's articles, papers and speeches appeared over the years in numerous Canadian, American, British and Australian journals. Any serious bibliographer will need to make a start in the pages of the following: *Aumla*,

Australian Christian World, Australian Highway, Australian Teacher, Babel, Blackwood's, Canadian Modern Language Review, Concept, Contemporary Review, Diogenes, Eagle Magazine, Educational Record, Meanjin, Papers and Proceedings of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Quarterly Review, South Atlantic Quarterly, South Australian, Southerly, Tasmanian Education, Tasmanian Journal of Education, Twentieth Century, Voice.

Academic honours that he cherished were his membership of the Royal Society of Teachers, his D.Litt. awarded by the University of Tasmania in 1939, the British Council Scholarship and the Dominion Fellowship he held at St. John's College, Cambridge in 1952. The French Nation recognised his sustained number of tributes and active support through two World Conflicts and in peacetime by awarding him the Médaille de la France Libre and appointing him to the Ordre National du Mérite.

We must now reach back in time to his London days, in order to be able to bring into focus the third strand in his intellectual life, his contributions to Australian Literature. Could Louis's interest have had its germ in those visits he paid to the Robertsons? We may now, years later, never know the answer for certain. We may also never know the real reason for his emigration to Australia. One would like to think that the achievements of Henry Handel Richardson were one source of inspiration and motivation.

When Louis took up his lectureship in the University of Tasmania, he came under the direct influence of two leaders in the field of Australian literary criticism. The first was A.B. Taylor, Professor of English there from 1926 to 1956 and E. Morris Miller, Vice Chancellor between 1933 and 1945. Louis turned his attention to Australian novelists and poets. In 1950 Cheshire's of Melbourne published forty-four assorted essays under the sinister portmanteau title, *Fisher's Ghost and other Essays*. Among the finest and entertaining for a non-specialist such as myself are four about Walter Murdoch: 'The Essential Murdoch', 'A Serious Humourist', 'The Australian Touch', and 'Murdoch's Homecoming'. Murdoch himself provided a Foreward and Morris Miller a Preface for the collection and both underlined Louis's ability to communicate a love of literature and establish 'a literary fellowship' between the reader and his favourite writers.

Two other essays about a different person must arrest our attention: 'Myself When Young', and 'Henry Handel Richardson'. In the first, a wary reader may catch Louis in the act of blending the refinements of the essayist with the lyricism of an autobiographer. In the second piece the lyrical element is more marked, for it was penned at the time of her death in 1946. Louis recounts with nostalgia his visits to her home and throws light on the surroundings in which she worked as a novelist. Even thirty years later, she filled his thoughts. One of Louis's last major essays, if not his very last, was a warm, human tribute to her, entitled *Henry Handel Richardson, Australian Novelist and Lover of Wisdom*. The Genius of Louis's Universality as a literary critic and essayist illumines every page. His essays have earned him a place in Australian Literature.

A future generation of scholars will recognise more clearly his significant contributions to Modern Languages in his adopted land, to their image in Australian Universities and to the intellectual life of the community. We were all made aware of his unwavering support for our new Academy when he attended the inaugural meeting in the National Library of Australia in 1969. We last saw him in our midst at the Annual General Meeting in 1974. He died in Hobart on 22 February 1985 after a long illness.

K. V. Sinclair