

“I am an Australian, we are freer than anyone in France”: Two Australian Girls and their Diaries in France in the late Nineteenth Century

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At the turn of the nineteenth-century, many in Australia perceived Europe as the cradle of civilisation. While many looked to Britain as the fountainhead of Australian culture and identity, France, or rather the idea of France, also had a strong appeal.¹ Writer Christina Stead called Paris in the 1930s, “not so much the French capital as the capital of the modern world.”² France also appealed as a political ideal, revolutionary and radical, the home of independent nationalism; it was also the Paris of the freethinking Left Bank, of bohemia. It served as what Peter Kirkpatrick has called “the familiar exotic, a ready alternative to High Victorian stodginess and hypocrisy.”³

While reasons for undertaking the adventurous journey to Europe could vary greatly, from early colonial times, following the pattern of the Grand Tour, the voyage to Europe was an essential part of the construction of self for an Australian elite and an aspiring middle-class.⁴ Going to Britain – going “Home” – or the Continent conferred both social and cultural prestige and displayed financial affluence. Men were sent to England and women to the Continent, preferably France, to be “finished” and acquire the

¹ Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980* (Sydney, 1981), 96.

² Christina Stead, “Letter to Nellie Molyneux, 1 March 1929,” in *A Web of Friendship: Selected Letters*, quoted in Rosemary Lancaster, *Je Suis Australienne: Remarkable Women in France, 1880-1945* (Crawley, W.A, 2008), xv.

³ Peter Kirkpatrick, *The Sea Coast of Bohemia. Literary Life in Sydney’s Roaring Twenties* (Perth, 1992), 32.

⁴ Richard White, *On Holidays: A History of Getting Away in Australia* (Melbourne, 2005), 26–9.

vener of European refinement and culture required to establish themselves as accomplished models of colonial female gentility.⁵

In the 1970s, the Australian Eugénie McNeil (nee Delarue) recalled her first visit to France in 1902 when she was sixteen years old. She described her experience with a conventional romanticism any young Australian girl could have displayed:

What heaven to be in Paris, to be young... every day after we'd dunked our brioches in our bowls of chocolate, we sallied down to the foyer ... to explore Paris. It was not spring, the chestnuts up the Champs-Élysées were bare – but it was still the most beautiful and romantic city in the world and has always remained so to me.⁶

It is worth noting, however, that these words were in fact recorded by Eugénie's daughter during her mother's declining years.⁷ Mediated by the distance of time and retelling, one can wonder how much of Eugénie's experience was distorted after more than half a century and what nuances have been lost.

In this article I shall turn my attention to a close reading of two diaries kept by two Australian girls during their time in France. Suzanne Bunkers has called unpublished diaries “the most elemental form of autobiography.”⁸ Here I take note of literary scholarship on autobiography and diary practice which has long highlighted that, if read with attention to issues of self-construction and context, unpublished diaries can be seen as documents that illuminate life as a process, as something in the making, rather than a finished product. One of the two diaries was kept by Eugénie's own sister, Lydia Victorine Delarue, during the sisters' six months stay in Dijon and Pau between 1902 and 1903.⁹ The second belonged to a young girl named Margaret Isabella White, or Daisy, who spent two years at a boarding school in Fontainebleau near Paris from 1887 to 1889.¹⁰

The diaries suggest the plurality of connections and attachments to France that existed in the late nineteenth century. Daisy's France was the France of literature and the arts, a place where she could learn and make hers the tropes of bourgeois high culture in a prestigious finishing school. Lydia's attachment to France, on the other hand, lay in her family's history. For the Delarues, France represented the place of ancestral memory, the locus of an Australian family's mythology of origin. I start by introducing the two diaries

⁵ Ibid., 18–9.

⁶ Eugénie Crawford, *A Bunyip Close Behind Me: Recollections of the Nineties* (Ringwood, Vic., 1982) 19.

⁷ See Crawford, *A Bunyip Close Behind Me*; and Eugénie Crawford, *Ladies Didn't. Recollections of an Edwardian Girlhood* (Ringwood, Vic., 1984).

⁸ Suzanne Bunkers, “Reading and Interpreting Unpublished Diaries by Nineteenth-century Women,” *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 2, no. 2 (1986): 15.

⁹ Lydia Delarue's two diaries are located within the Delarue family papers collection in the Mitchell Library (ML) in Sydney, Australia. See “Delarue family papers and pictorial material, 1855-1982,” MLMSS 5106.

¹⁰ Although Daisy White's diary was not published during her lifetime, a critical edition has recently been published by the press of the National Library of Australia; see Daisy White, *Daisy in Exile: The Diary of an Australian Schoolgirl in France (1887-1889), Introduced and Annotated by Marc Serge Riviere* (Canberra, 2003). For convenience the page numbers in this article refer to that edition. The original manuscript is in the National Library of Australia under the call number MS 9247.

and their authors; I then examine the similarities and differences of their experiences and accounts of life in France. Finally I shift the focus from Daisy's elegant and elaborate account to concentrate on Lydia's far less reflexive prose. By contextualizing Lydia's diary I examine how her sense of self is revealed through the confrontation of her constructed colonial mentality, her imagined ideas about England and France, and the reality of personal, gendered, lived experience.

Daisy spent two years in France with her sister Dorothy in a finishing school near Fontainebleau between 1887 and 1889. She came from a wealthy pastoralist family from the Upper Hunter Valley in New South Wales. Although she felt her stepmother had exiled her to France to get her out of the way of her new family, Daisy's stay in Fontainebleau at *Les Ruches* was consistent with her class and status.¹¹ The school itself was of high calibre: Nathalie Barney, Dorothy Bussy and Eleanor Roosevelt have figured amongst its distinguished guests. In fact Dorothy Bussy attended the school just one year before Daisy arrived, and their stays overlapped.¹² The academic focus of the school on the arts and literature, coupled with its female accomplishment curriculum and the much anticipated visits to Paris, made Daisy's two years in France a cultural whirlwind. She became acquainted with the canon of French literature: Molière, Montaigne, Racine and Voltaire, to name but a few, and attended performances of the greatest plays in the French repertoire: *L'Avare*, *Ruy Blas* and many more. Her diary also shows a command of French at least proficient enough to sprinkle her account with numerous elaborate French phrases and countless clever Gallicisms.

In contrast, the reasons for Lydia's trip to France remain somewhat obscure. Lydia Delarue's grandfather was French and migrated to Australia in the 1840s from Normandy. Her own father, although born in Australia considered himself a Frenchman. According to family legend, he used to say that even "if you are born in a stable ... it doesn't make you a horse."¹³ In Australia, the Delarue family naturally first established itself at Hunter's Hill, that part of Sydney which was for a while known as the French village,¹⁴ even naming their house Berck after the place in Normandy from which the family had come.¹⁵ During their childhood, on occasion the Delarue girls would recite French songs at Church they had learnt by heart,¹⁶ dress up as Breton peasant girls at Fancy dress balls,¹⁷ and at the height of French sophistication, they used a bidet.¹⁸

¹¹ Marc Serge Rivière, "Introduction," in *Daisy in Exile*.

¹² Ibid.; See also Rosemary Lancaster, "Daisy White: An Accomplished Schoolgirl in France, 1887-1889," in *Je Suis Australienne*, 1-29; Eleanor Roosevelt, *Autobiography* (London, 1962), 19-38. Dorothy Bussy anonymously published a partly autobiographical novel describing the homoerotic tensions and desires in boarding school life, based on her own experience at Les Ruches. See Olivia, *Olivia* (London, 1950). For more on Olivia and same-sex friendships in boarding schools see Martha Vicinus, "Distance and Desire: English Boarding-School Friendships," *Signs* 9 (1984): 600-622.

¹³ Crawford, *A Bunyip Close Behind Me*, 5.

¹⁴ Anny Stuer, *The French in Australia* (Canberra, 1982), 52-9.

¹⁵ For biographical information on the Delarue family see the catalogue of the 2004 exhibition of the State Library of New South Wales: Margot Riley and Ivan Barko, eds., *Vive La Difference! The French in NSW* (Sydney, 2004); see also the Delarue family papers at the Mitchell Library, MLMSS 5106.

¹⁶ Crawford, *A Bunyip Close Behind Me*, 101.

¹⁷ Ibid., 106.

¹⁸ Ibid., 53.

But in spite of the Delarue family's origins, Lydia and her younger sister Eugénie were very much Australian girls and did not speak French before their trip to France. According to Eugénie, "thinking of [themselves] as French" was "somewhat inaccurate" but it did make them "a little 'different'".¹⁹ The rationale for the move seems to have been for the girls to be "finished" in France, but Lydia's diary is very vague on this subject. The girls attended a school in Pau as *externes* rather than *internes* and seem to have had only about thirty proper lessons of French.²⁰ It is noteworthy that neither Lydia nor Eugénie ever attended school and that their education in Australia was limited to whatever their impressive succession of "governesses" could teach them,²¹ the nearby state school being deemed "unworthy."²² The decision to move overseas occurred at a time of financial hardship for the family. There might have been a will to flaunt fate and save face by spending six months abroad, to cover over difficulties in "an Australia where class boundaries were insecure and status depended on adopted customs, behaviours and wealth more than breeding."²³

Here we have two young Australian girls: Daisy was sixteen and Lydia seventeen when they arrived in France, and each lived there respectively for two years and six months. The first lived full time in a prestigious boarding school; the other divided her time between Dijon, Pau and somewhat irregular classes. Daisy knew a great deal about France and French culture and presumably had a good command of French while Lydia struggled far more upon arrival. On her first day in France she recorded in her diary: "We had a bit of worry here could not speak any more French than Parlez-vous Anglais."²⁴

In his unconventional but influential survey Philippe Lejeune aptly demonstrated how widespread the practice of diary writing was for young girls in the nineteenth century and points to the numerous similarities one finds among such diaries in both style and content. He described the practice as filled with its own conventions and topoi,²⁵ and although the two girls came from very different backgrounds, and had received a very different education, similarities emerge in the diaries and their content very quickly. Both address the diary as a friend. Daisy calls it "my love"²⁶ while Lydia wishes it "goodnight,"²⁷ as they allow their teenage emotions to flow onto the page. Lydia takes pleasure in flirting with the Canadian soldiers who accompanied her and her family from Cape Cod to London on their way back from the Boer War and enjoys the aesthetic pleasure of the changing of the Royal Guard in London: "best of all the life Guards they

¹⁹ Crawford, *A Bunyip Close Behind Me*, 5.

²⁰ On Friday May 15th Lydia remarked, "Wrote to Mademoiselle Aubert that we should not go for our lesson. We have had 30 so now we speak fairly well." Lydia Delarue, *Diary (2)*, 1903, 67.

²¹ "Governesses" here is to be understood in a loose way as they seem to have taught the young Delarue girls little else than reading and writing.

²² Crawford, *A Bunyip Close Behind Me*, 4.

²³ Ros Pesman, David Walker, and Richard White, *The Oxford Book of Australian Travel Writing* (Melbourne, 1996), xxii.

²⁴ Lydia Delarue, *Diary (1)*, 1902, 60.

²⁵ See his unconventional but influential Philippe Lejeune, *Le Moi Des Demoiselles: Enquête Sur Le Journal De Jeune Fille* (Paris, 1993); For a recent translation of some of his influential essays on diary practice see Philippe Lejeune, *On Diary*, ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. Katherine Durnin (Manoa, Hawai'i, 2009).

²⁶ White, *Daisy in Exile*, 54.

²⁷ Delarue, *Diary (1)*, 14.

are the finest looking men I ever saw, they were just relieving the Guard and the lieutenant came up they look fine in their top boots.”²⁸ As for Daisy, her emotional and, to a point, sensual attention is directed exclusively to the absent figure of her former teacher, Mademoiselle Rollet. As Rosemary Lancaster has noted, Mademoiselle Rollet occupies a central place in the young girl’s diary and in her life. “Subliminal lover, surrogate mother, absent friend,” Rollet is an ever-present shadow shining by her absence.²⁹ It is difficult to evaluate the nature of their relationship, but Daisy herself was aware how much of it sprang from her own need for companionship: “find someone to care about I must, sooner or later.”³⁰ This was translated into ardent expressions of desire for her teacher: “I have such a fearful, gnawing desire to be with Mlle. Rollet. Only to think of it, to be her pupil, to live with her, to have her arms about me again, and to hear her sweet, strong voice saying ‘Ma petite Daisy.’ Sometimes I think I shall go wild for her ... It is very hard to be so alone.”³¹

More striking are the rhetorical similarities that emerge when comparing the girls’ descriptions of Paris. Richard White has highlighted the importance of first impressions as “a crucial bridge between imagination and experience,” the basis for future experience but also the pitch of expectations, the liminal space where preconceived ideas meet reality.³² Similarly, the two girls’ accounts of Paris should be understood within the scope of the practice of diary writing by two colonial girls transposed for the first time into a foreign environment, a practice intrinsically linked to their overseas experience.³³ Thus, it is crucial to see Paris as part of a broader rhetorical heritage rooted in ideas about Europe and France that they brought with them from the Antipodes. It is therefore not surprising to observe that the two girls apprehended and described their visits to the French capital in very similar ways.

However, as may be expected, Daisy’s account is far more elaborate than Lydia’s and again highlights the divide in the girls’ education. Daisy anticipates her visits to Paris with great excitement and recounts her trips with remarkable literary skills which also underline her academic familiarity with French history and culture:

Paris is splendid; I never saw the town so lovely before: all along the *quais* the limes and aspens are in leaf; the boulevards are shaded by beeches and planes, and the Champs Elysées – well, they beggar all description! Just one great forest of magnificent chesnuts in full bloom, all the way on either side of that lovely drive, right away down the Arc de Triomphe. The Parisians may well be proud of their

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁹ Lancaster, *Je Suis Australienne*, 22.

³⁰ White, *Daisy in Exile*, 67.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

³² Richard White, “Bluebells and Fogtown: Australians’ First Impressions of England 1860-1940,” *Australian Cultural History* (1986): 44.

³³ Ros Pesman, *Duty Free: Australian Women Abroad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 12; See also Andrew Hassam, “‘Farewell to Old England, and Now for a New Life and a New Journal’: Emigration Narratives,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 36 (1993): 23–35.

city; she sits like the queen of nations on the winding Seine, girt with green woods and broad fair meadows.³⁴

Her narrative is both historically conscious and impregnated with details that impress the visitor to the city:

At last we have had our long-promised journey to Paris ... We went straight off to see the Bastille and the Rue Ste. Antoine. It is the Champ de Mars, where the Exhibition is to be held next year. The prison of the Bastille is rebuilt very much as it was in '89, only a little smaller ... you see a whole street of queer little shops, with funny advertisements over the low, narrow doorways: one, a cobbler's [*sic*], is very curious; the shoes, boots, and *sabots* of the epoch are hung up all over the place from the high boots of the *garde du corps*, and the court ladies high-heeled satin slippers, down to the thick heavy clumpers of the artisans ... we went up to the top of the tower [the Bastille], a long, tiring climb, up badly lighted, winding stairways. From there we saw all over the Champ de Mars, which is now covered with buildings for the Exhibition. The Tour Eiffel [*sic*] is nearly finished. This second Tower of Babel is to be 375 yards high – 825 feet ... The tower looks like a piece of delicate lacework against the sky, and yet can resist a pressure of 300 kilogrammes of wind on a square metre of iron.³⁵

In comparison, Lydia's description of her stay in the capital is far less literary, the Parisian landscape and monuments take on a duller shade, but follow the same trope as Daisy's:

She took us to Rue Madaliene [*sic*] to the Cathedral Saint Madaliene it was all draped in black, gold, a large funeral service had taken place there that morning ... the shops a[re] beautiful I like the way they have of showing their goods outside also of having tea or coffee outside the streets are wide.³⁶

Today is very fine we went out at 10 o'clock first to the Trinity, then walked along the Boulevard des Capucines, [and] to the Louvre. Went through that, it is a magnificent building (The Tuileries). ... Came out went under the arch into the gardens where millions of people were.

Lundi, today set out at 10 o'clock. Went around the town I am sure we have been down every street saw the two great arches St Dennis [*sic*]. Saw the shops, the place where all the marriages and papers are kept. ... Jeudi 11th today went out to the Bois de Boulogne climbed 280 stairs to the top of the Triumphal Arch.³⁷

³⁴ White, *Daisy in Exile: The Diary of an Australian Schoolgirl in France (1887-1889)*, Introduced and Annotated by Marc Serge Rivière, 104.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 128–129.

³⁶ Delarue, *Diary (I)*, 61.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 85–6.

Carefully crafted, Daisy's numerous and lengthy descriptions of Paris and France in general are symptomatic of the broader elaborate scope of her diary. Serge Rivière has described the focus of her diary as "self-knowledge through introspection."³⁸ This is hard to refute, as Daisy could hardly be more explicit: "oh self-knowledge! How very, very few ever attain unto that excellent wisdom! Why can't I see why I do things, so that I may be able to walk upright and honest before all men."³⁹ At times she even drives herself "mad" with overthinking until she feels "perfectly sick with myself."⁴⁰ But her degree of self-awareness goes beyond introspection. She is also acutely aware of her writing practice. She explicitly writes that her diary is intended for her eyes alone: "How I should catch it if somebody got hold of this book, so full of treason, strategy etc,"⁴¹ which suggests an awareness of a potential readership and a cognizance of writing practice not found in Lydia's diary, at least not so explicitly. Lynn Bloom warns that it is "a mistake to think of diaries as a genre composed primarily of "private writings," even if they are ... a personal record of private thoughts and activities."⁴² The awareness of a potential audience, whether immediate or future, changes the nature of the writing into a document that is written, if not for others, at least with others in mind.

Daisy constructs herself as a highly cultured and sometimes self-righteous young lady who prides herself in having impeccable artistic taste: when attending a local representation of *L'Abbé Constantin* in the vicinity of the school, she judges that the play was "very well played ... for 'la province'."⁴³ Her sense of worth is often pitted against the other girls at the school: "How stupid these girls are!!! ... For the most part profoundly, and unqualifiedly, and densely, *hopelessly* stupid."⁴⁴ Considering the degree of cognizance Daisy displays, both in the exhibition of her knowledge and, more importantly, in her writing, one can wonder how much of her diary is an accurate record of her inner self, and how much is a display of what a young, accomplished young lady ought to write?

The style and focus of Lydia's jejeune diary, on the other hand, set it apart from Daisy's. Lydia's is of a much more private nature, exhibits no literary pretention, and paints the portrait of a very simple girl. The format of the diary itself is more modest, less literary and is often limited to keeping track of who sent or received letters, of parties and outings which cannot be understood without extra-textual material and is thus of a less public nature than Daisy's. Lydia Delarue comes across as a simple, somewhat naive and poorly educated young girl whose chief preoccupations are fashion and boys. Yet the naiveté of Lydia's writing holds the key to the diary's broader significance. While the differences in style between the accounts may be partly a product of education, Lydia's diary and her formulaic descriptions of Paris take on a broader significance when put into the context of her family's history.

³⁸ Rivière, "Introduction," 5.

³⁹ White, *Daisy in Exile*, 133.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴² Lynn Z. Bloom, "I Write for Myself and Strangers': Private Diaries as Public Documents," in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, eds. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A Hull (Amherst, 1996), 24.

⁴³ White, *Daisy in Exile*, 115.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

Compared to Daisy's, Lydia's descriptions of Paris are rather flat, and upon a first reading seem to reveal her inability to put her impressions to the page; yet her account of her visit to London is lengthier and more elaborate, and reveals her identification with a British imperial culture. When Lydia reaches the shores of England after what she perceived as a "memorial" long voyage (no doubt memorial in its symbolic meaning rather than for the monotony of life on-board ship) her reactions are no different than those recorded by other Australians. The first references are to the mythical "beautiful Cliffs of Dover," the "beautiful (...) colour of the grass" and the "beautiful green hills." Not uncharacteristically, Lydia's descriptions rely on poor and repetitive language, using the same adjectives and sometimes even confiding in her inability to express how she feels, conveying thus this uncritical collective understanding that England constitutes the "ideal landscape."⁴⁵ When visiting Madame Tussaud's waxwork there seems to be no question in Lydia's mind that the Royal Family itself and "Our King" – the epitome of Britishness – are as well "beautiful." These descriptive cues, as Richard White notes, reveal "the inadequacy of a colonial culture face to face with an imperial ideal."⁴⁶ The grass, the hills, the Cliffs, the Royal Family, indeed England itself can be but "beautiful," for such is the standard response agreed upon through the imperial covenant.

Once in "London Town," the little family's short visit goes through all the clichés of Australians in London in full force. At alarming speed all the sights and sites of their Britishness are consumed: Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Lords and Commons, the Chamber of Horrors, Kew Gardens, the Zoological Gardens, the Crystal Palace, the Tate Gallery and the Tower of London where they walked "up the very stairs where the little Princes were found" and "walked over the same ground where poor Ann Boleyn was executed,"⁴⁷ retracing a form of secular pilgrimage through the maze of English history.

In comparison, for Lydia Paris simply does not seem to hold the same type of cultural meaning as London or elicit the same type of intellectual curiosity it does for Daisy. Although she did spend most of her time in Dijon and Pau, Lydia's poor and limited descriptions of Paris take on a different significance, not only when compared to her jam-packed stay in London, but when contrasted with her numerous descriptions of the French country. Consider the following:

We pass the most beautifully cultivated land I ever saw miles at a stretch land all colours, small patches, red, brown, black, green, red, yellow, making the hills a magnificent picture, we fly past hay fields with stacks standing about across a river, into groves of tall trees, out on the flatter country still cultivated, not an inch wasted, Grand! We see a peasant washing clothes in another river just as a picture, more hayfields, we stop. Le Roche, nobody speaks English, we speak and receive a shrug of the shoulders. It is great fun. France is the most beautiful place I have seen yet. London is grand and fine and old and antique buildings and all that, but France is so picturesque and quaint. There is brightness and life here the sun shines.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ White, "Bluebells and Fogtown: Australians' First Impressions of England 1860-1940," 46.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁷ Delarue, *Diary (I)*, 32–43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

Overlooking the fact that Lydia is comparing the French country with the city of London, one can almost imagine her painting this “magnificent picture” with colourful brushstrokes, which make “France so picturesque.” The range of colours stands in sharp contrast with the “beautiful” but linguistically limited descriptions of green England. Although the “sun shines” in the above quotation, other descriptions undergo the same romanticization and reduction of France to a pastoral idyll in spite of the reality of the climate.

A few months later, in early December on a train trip to Lourdes, the scenery provokes similar reveries regarding the “white snow,” this “very pretty picture” finding “to complete it, a woman (...) washing her clothes on a board at the river side.” Replaced within the context of her upbringing and her family’s origin in rural northern France, the recurring imagery of the peasant woman contentedly washing her clothes in the river (and this time in the middle of winter!) suggests that while Lydia might be describing her surroundings, what she is really writing about is the imaginary France she grew up with. A France she had always known, long before embarking on her voyage. The image of the blissful peasant girls reflects the memory of her youth, when she and her sister used to dress up as “Breton peasant girls,” and even on board the ship taking them to France when Eugenie twice dressed up as a French peasant.⁴⁹ Here too, France becomes a site of consumption, though not of an imperial British compact but a return to an Arcadia at the crossroads of the innocence of childhood and of an Australian family’s mythology of origin; an origin not found in the sophistication of Parisian salons but in the rural north.

In addition to the laudatory remarks on the natural beauty of the French country side, Lydia is continually amazed at the agricultural prowess of the French peasants, the “greatest workers [she] ever saw” where “not a piece of land is not cultivated.”⁵⁰ These examples mark a form of continuity between Lydia’s inherited idea of France and the place her grandfather actually came from, relaying the image of an atemporal French country, birthplace of the Delarue family.

Like most Australians, the Delarues might have felt that they were going from periphery to centre, but if Paris was the burgeoning heart of the arts and culture they found themselves at the very rim of that centre. A place somewhat confronting for Lydia. While she understood little of the internecine conflicts of turn-of-the-century France (the Dreyfus Affair, the separation of Church and State), the Arcadian idyll she had imagined and first depicted could not entirely withstand the conservative and religious environment of Pau: “There is going to be a carnival soon but girls or ladies must not go. Oh how I wish I were a man I could be free to the world, go where I liked, be my own master, How I wish.”⁵¹

It is through confrontation with the gender norms of the traditional environment of the French country that Lydia’s sense of being an Australian is articulated, as can be seen in the significant following passage:

⁴⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁰ Delarue, *Diary* (2), 54.

⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

The Australians are free we can walk and talk it is not considered wrong to go for a walk in the park or go shopping alone or go [illegible] with anyone but her mother. *Well in France the poor girls are different in England we are free. I am an Australian, we are freer than anyone in France.* A girl comes out of school [here] she is never allowed to walk by herself anywhere even in the Park. As for speaking or walking with a young man in the street it would be considered shocking. The mother must be continually there. You must not even walk into a different room to take tea or anything as refreshment they must not go unless the mother or nurse went with her. How they get married is a wonder to me.⁵²

Lydia's sense of Australianness is intricately linked to the liberal progressiveness of her upbringing in her country of birth. Remarkably here "Australian" and "English" are interchangeable. But the distinction between Australia and England is made later, when Lydia is introduced to young English girls she does not like: "At half past 5 we went to the Church for choire [*sic*] practice. Introduce to the English girls there. English are not nice they are far too stiff I would sooner a French or Australian."⁵³ As several scholars have noted, the concurrent existence of these plural identities was not unusual, but indicative of the fluidity of cultural identities shaping Australians' sense of self in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁴ Indeed, a confident form of Australianness did not preclude an attachment and identification to the Empire.⁵⁵

France, or the idea of France, certainly had an appeal to nineteenth-century Australians. For many, like Daisy, whether they attended finishing schools or moved there of their own accord, France was a place of cultural prestige, a foreign but intimate land, a familiar and integral part of their colonial Australian cultural heritage. To others, like Lydia, it was also something more. It remained the place of family origin and a romantic ideal, and although her time there did not mean a deep explicit introspection about her sense of self, the confrontation of her received ideas about France, the place of ancestral memory, to the reality of lived, gendered experience, meant that she may have returned home with a more defined sense of what it meant to her to be Australian.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 12. My italics.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁴ Andrew Hassam, *Through Australian Eyes: Colonial Perceptions of Imperial Britain* (Carlton South, Vic., 2000), 9–29.

⁵⁵ Deryck M. Schreuder and Stuart Ward, eds., *Australia's Empire* (Oxford, 2008).