Dr Peter Sutherland Hambly FAHA

1935 – 2025

It is with deep sadness that the Australian Academy of the Humanities acknowledges the death of Peter Sutherland Hambly, FAHA. Elected to the Academy in 2009, he was an eminent researcher in nineteenth-century French literature and its political and social contexts. He received the "Médaille de reconnaissance du Département de l'Allier" in 1991 for his work in reviving scholarly interest in the work of French poet, Théodore de Banville. He was also awarded the honour of "Chevalier dans l'ordre des Palmes académiques" by the French Government in 1992, in recognition of his distinguished services to the discipline of French Studies.

Peter Hambly's research trajectory can be traced back to 1956, when he was awarded an Honours degree (First Class) in French language and literature, in the Department of French at the University of Adelaide. Under the leadership of J.G. Cornell, the Department fostered a program of ensuring linguistic fluency and deep cultural knowledge by teaching all its subjects in the French language and then encouraging its graduate students to complete their studies in France. Armed with "near native" competence, Peter followed this tradition and took up the offer of a French Government scholarship to pursue postgraduate study in Paris.

In 1960, he obtained a first-class doctorate at the Sorbonne, with a thesis on socialism in the Rougon-Macquart novels of Émile Zola. Following this, he took up an assistant lectureship at the University of Dundee from 1960–1961. In 1961, he returned to Australia through his appointment as a Lecturer at the University of Melbourne. He remained in Melbourne until 1963, when he was offered, and he accepted, a Senior Lectureship at the University of Adelaide. From 1964, he spent the remainder of his academic career in this University, where he taught courses in French language and literature, with a research specialisation in nineteenth-century poetry, and a passionate teaching interest in Existentialist philosophy and the twentieth-century novel, and also in

translation, for which his deep linguistic knowledge set a high standard for his students. His lectures on Baudelaire, Zola, Proust and Sartre, and, of course, French Poetry more widely, are remembered with admiration by his students as highlights of their undergraduate studies.

He was both a rigorous and an enthusiastic mentor for his graduate students, several of whom went on to become distinguished academics themselves, such as Rosemary Lloyd, herself an internationally recognized specialist of French nineteenth-century poetry, and eminent authors, such as Hazel Rowley, whose biographical writings were based on a rigorous scholarly foundation. The last of the students he supervised, Paul Gibbard, has also carved out a highly successful academic career, with a foundation in historical research.

At the time of his retirement in 1994, Peter Hambly was Head of the Department of French at the University of Adelaide, where he established a strong research culture, which he sought to maintain and consolidate through the last two appointments he made to the department in Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby. He also built up an invaluable research tool through his constant attention to developing the French collections in the Barr Smith Library. Once retired, he continued his own research as a Visiting Research Fellow and produced some of his most significant publications right up until his final days.

Peter Hambly's intensive and highly focused work in the field of nineteenth-century literature forged his reputation as a distinguished scholar, known particularly for his textual approach to the poetry of Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Banville, to mention but a few of the writers to which he devoted his linguistic, historical and stylistic analysis. However, the path he took towards mastering the finely detailed analysis that characterized his readings of nineteenth-century poetry was not the usual one. His early research as a graduate student had given him the investigative skills, the deep knowledge and a fully formed awareness of the range of ideological currents at play within those tumultuous times in which the poetry of Baudelaire and his contemporaries took root and blossomed. He focused initially on the Romantic and post-Romantic period, as his primary interest lay in the works of Baudelaire and Gautier, whose poetry had acquired a wide audience through, and given weight to, the flourishing journalistic culture of the times. By scouring the pages of French literary reviews of the period, but also its general newspapers, biographical writings and political journals and tracts, he was able to identify lexical borrowings in the works of both poets from the vocabulary of philosopher Charles Fourier. The borrowings he identified in Baudelaire's writing demonstrated the poet's sympathy with Fourier's analysis of contemporary civilisation, without denoting in his work a strict adhesion to the utopian's doctrine.

From the outset, Peter Hambly demonstrated that he was determined to challenge long-held understandings of Baudelaire's works. In his first publication, he did so by engaging in a direct debate with experts in a highly specialized publication. Peter's suggested reading of an enigmatic line in Baudelaire was strongly challenged within the very number of the Bulletin baudelairien where his note appeared, but this did not daunt him. On the contrary, he was quick to make further challenges to scholarly orthodoxy. In a note of 1971, he contested the prevailing interpretations of two poems of Baudelaire. These interpretations were built upon the notion that the poet was beholden to Christian orthodoxy, whereas, according to Peter's readings of the same two poems, firmly backed by new textual evidence, Baudelaire in that period also gave expression to his interest in social reform. In another study of 1971, Peter proposed that the poet's major work, Les Fleurs du Mal, should be read as a coherent expression of his vision, or as a constructed architecture housing both a social and a poetic vision. Peter was to pursue this line of thought throughout his career, returning to Baudelaire's interest in utopianism many times, and finally in an article of 2021, when he established how Baudelaire used the notion of sin to refer, not to a religious concept, but to Fourier's conception of sin as the evil at work in the modern world. This was a direct challenge to those who continued to see Baudelaire as primarily exercised by the Catholic dogma of original sin.

Even though Peter's initial essays invariably ran counter to established thinking on Baudelaire, they were backed up with such new and detailed information that they were soon recognized as having made a strong contribution to the renewal of the field. For example, Peter's articles were often commented on by critics in the major Italian journal devoted to French Studies, Studi Francesi, and he was regularly invited to international conferences on French poetry. Peter's 1974 essay on Théophile Gautier also opened up new horizons on the work of a poet and art critic long labelled as "minor" in the Romantic pantheon. Gautier was more often deemed a stylist who advocated for "pure poetry"' or a critic who espoused the "Art for Art's sake" movement, rather than a writer who also embraced innovation or political and social thought—and this, despite his early days as a fiery young radical. Peter cast new light upon Gautier's famous preface to Mademoiselle de Maupin in which the poet declared Charles Fourier to be one of the commanding geniuses of his day. While not excluding the irony in Gautier's tone, Peter argues for the sincerity of the poet's assessment by outlining the elements in Gautier's life that led him to find Fourier's vision compelling. These elements included his long-lasting friendships with key members of the Fourierist movement, and admiration for the work of its artists and writers, but also the hedonistic bent he shared with Fourier and his fascination with the concept of "universal analogy" that features so heavily in his verse.

These initial entries by Peter Hambly into the realm of literary study are crucial, in that they hold the key to his entire career and enable us to perceive the consistency that reigns within the impressive list of publications he produced on a wide range of authors from across the nineteenth century, backed up by an armoury of facts gleaned from a multiplicity of respected sources, and by a deep knowledge of the historical periods in which his poets lived and worked, a knowledge that over time became encyclopaedic. This in turn caused other scholars to gravitate towards him, in appreciation of the natural authority he came to acquire in his discipline. His collaborative work with others developed as a result. His generosity in that regard was unstinting. He had no hesitation in sharing his voluminous files with others and in encouraging them to use them freely in order to pursue their own ideas with confidence, as he had always done. But showing strength did not signify riding roughshod over others; empathy, encouragement and courtesy were essential features in his dealings with other scholars and enabled him to participate more and more effectively in collaborative publication as he found new sources of interest.

Peter's own publications had been largely made up of single-authored articles in highly specialized journals, or chapters and articles by invitation. He had greatly expanded his range of subjects over the years, to include the poetry of Leconte de Lisle, Mallarmé, Théodore de Banville, José-Maria de Heredia, Rimbaud, for example, and had become recognized as an expert in the writings of the Parnassian school. His style and his methodology changed little, and he continued to produce the kind of studies which had made his reputation. However, his work also came to make an invaluable contribution to a landmark publication project. In an article of 1985, Peter made the case for a critical edition of the work of Banville, a proposal that was subsequently accepted at an international conference devoted to the poet. Banville, although an influential member of the Parnasse, had until this point been largely overlooked by modern scholarship. With his colleague Peter J. Edwards, who accepted to lead the project, Peter Hambly had thus, from the outset, played a major role in steering the work to completion. Between the years of 1994 and 2009, Peter's contribution to the final set of nine volumes was substantial, and his partnership with Peter Edwards then extended to the publication of Banville's plays in three volumes, as well as a complementary volume with Slatkine Editions on Banville's bibliography. These works were received with warm critical acclaim in international academic circles, and Peter considered his contributions as the crowning point of his scholarly career.

This was not the sum total of his academic collaborations, however. He was an active member of the Editorial Board of the Australian Journal of French Studies (AJFS), in which several of his own major articles appeared over the years, and he had advised many scholars in his field through his meticulous reviews of their contributions to the journal. This activity was recognized in 1999, when AJFS published a special issue in his honour, which featured nineteenth-century specialists from

across the globe, bearing witness to the strong international reach of his scholarship. Peter also wrote detailed reviews of the published work of his fellow scholars for international and local journals as part of his ongoing mentoring efforts for others. There was one advisory role which he pursued that also owed much to his wish to assist his community—either of scholars, or of local institutions, including the Department of French at Adelaide that was vitally important to him throughout his life. Peter joined his wife Elizabeth, herself a French Department graduate and a member of the Friends of the State Library of South Australia and its Board, in promoting the publication of archival documents that identified the links between South Australian history and French exploration of Australia in the early nineteenth century. This work had commenced with the translation of a key document by French and History graduate, Christine Cornell, in the 1960s, namely the journal of Captain Nicolas Baudin's voyage to Australia, 1800-1804. With the local anniversary approaching of Baudin's encounter with Matthew Flinders in Encounter Bay, Peter proposed that the Friends Association publish new and old works by Christine Cornell to mark the event. His own translation skills served him well in the major advisory and editing role he undertook in revising these works for publication, and they also enabled him to contribute further publications to what is now the State Library's series of works on early French exploration. He was himself responsible for the publication of the Atlas of Baudin's voyage that complemented Cornell's volumes. He was also the editor of another of the Baudin expedition's principal journals for the National Library of Australia. He, like Elizabeth, was proud to contribute to a research activity that underlined his own Department's contribution to an overlooked part of Australian history, and he encouraged his colleagues to pursue that same community connection through this line of scholarly enquiry.

We extend our sincere condolences to his children, Ben and Helen, their families, his friends and colleagues, for whom his absence will long be deeply felt, but for whom his courageous life as a scholar and as a man of great generosity will continue to illuminate their lives.

Emerita Professor Frances Jean Fornasiero FAHA
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Please click here for a full bibliography of Peter's publications.