Prior to its discovery, Australia was a favourite setting for imaginary ideal societies in classical French utopian literature. Despite historical experience and empirical evidence, the utopian paradigm has persisted in French writings on Australia throughout the period of colonisation and settlement and remains relevant in contemporary representations of this cross-cultural corpus. This study seeks to demonstrate the ongoing importance of the utopian paradigm in contemporary French writings on Australia through criteriological and intertextual analyses. A comparison of current representations of utopia with those apparent in previous descriptions of the antipodes reveals some unexpected avatars of the utopian paradigm in French writings on Australia.

Long before the Dutch first documented its existence in 1606, before the Portuguese and French inscribed it on various maps dating from around 1540 to 1570 as “Java la Grande,” and well before the

1 Though Willem Jansz’s voyage on board the *Duyfken* from New Guinea towards Cape York constitutes the first documented sighting of the great southern continent, this discovery was not included in any contemporary printed cartographic source, map or globe, as Jansz believed himself to be still on the coast of New Guinea. However, the manuscript charts show that this voyage is in fact the first known European discovery of the *Terra Australis*. For a more detailed study of the role of the Dutch in discovering Australia, see Schilder, 83-115.

2 Whether or not the Portuguese navigator, Cristovao de Mendoça, or the French navigator, Jean Parmentier, did actually discover the Australian continent during their voyages in the 1520s is uncertain, but its depiction as “Java la Grande” on the “Dieppe maps” which appeared mainly between 1540 and 1570 gives rise to such speculations. Helen Wallis traces the history of this hypothesis.
British claimed it in 1770,\textsuperscript{3} Terra Australis had already been discovered, constructed and mythologized in the European imagination. Five centuries before the birth of Christ, as the ancient Greeks conjectured that the earth was round, so too developed the notion of a Great South Land which effectively counter-balanced the European continent. Building upon their hypothesis, Ptolemy’s Geographia presented a description of an undiscovered land stretching across the southern hemisphere, merging with Asia and Africa to form a massive Terra Incognita (Estensen 5-6). It was not until Magellan’s circumnavigation of the world (1518-1522) that the mysterious continent was definitively detached from all known land masses and forced to retract further south, becoming Terra Australis Nondum Cognita.\textsuperscript{4}

Terra Australis was therefore originally the hypothetical projection of an antipodean continent, the existence of which was dictated and justified by forces of opposition and equilibrium rather than scientific research. This reasoning was extrapolated to suggest that an Australian society would necessarily represent an inversion of European society, and that its inhabitants would bear the signs of this alterity in their physical appearance. The resulting images of antipodean monstrosity range from upside-down people, who use a single huge foot as a sun-shade to protect them from the blazing heat, to humans with animal heads, or a head sunk into their chest,\textsuperscript{5} from hermaphrodites (Foigny) to flying men (Rétif de la Bretonne). The novels which depict these imaginary projections of Australia and its “wildlife” also represent some of the first examples of the utopian genre. And yet, in contrast to other founding utopian texts such as Thomas More’s Utopia, Tommaso Campanella’s City of the Sun, or Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis, which each present an ideal land perfected by social and political reform, the antipodean utopias portray a radically different society that is the inversion of the European model, but not necessarily positive.

\textsuperscript{3} Captain James Cook’s voyage to Australia to claim it as a British colony following William Dampier’s reconnaissance missions is described in detail in his own journals of the expedition.

\textsuperscript{4} This new designation of the Terra Incognita is featured on Abraham Ortelius’s world map of 1570, as cited in Estensen 8.

\textsuperscript{5} These typical antipodean mutations feature in Hartmann Schedel’s Nuremberg Chronicle (1493).