



Balmain

# Bookworm

The Newsletter of the Friends of Balmain Library

No. 45 May 2011

## FOBL AGM – Friday May 27, 2011 Guest Speaker – LYN TRANTER

### *“CREATIVE WRITING COURSES ARE CASH COWS FOR THE UNIVERSITIES”*

This provocative statement made at this year's Perth Writers' Festival by one of Australia's most influential literary agents, Lyn Tranter, was in response to a question in a session on “writing at postgraduate level”. Lyn will be FOBL's Guest Speaker at our Annual General Meeting in May and has had a long association with our area. Previously resident in inner-city Stanmore, the family now lives in Balmain, where Lyn is also running her company, *Australian Literary Management*, from an office in Booth Street.

Married for more than forty years to John Tranter, a poet with more than twenty publications under his belt, and mother of newly-published author Kirsten (*The Legacy* 2010), Lyn has been part of the writing community for most of her adult life. Perhaps some might remember the name “Elizabeth Swanson”, for many years a popular literary gossip columnist for the *Australian* newspaper? Tranter wrote under this *nom de plume*: perhaps to conceal a name already well-known in the small world of Australian literature; or possibly to keep a clear divide between serious pursuits and ephemeral journalism.

Already a seasoned traveller, having left her childhood country town to work and hitch-hike through Europe and across Asia, Lyn still heads off regularly, but now it is to build her agency's reputation and forge strong links with writers, publishers, and other literary agencies all over the world. Travel for pleasure is included too, with recent trips to New York and Umbria enjoyed by both Lyn and John.

Lyn's agency specialises in adult fiction and non-fiction, and fantasy. Her list of authors is so extensive there is space here for just a small sample. Of course both John and Kirsten Tranter are there, along with Debra Adelaide (who recently secured a six-figure translation deal

for *The Household Guide to Dying*) – *Evil Angels* author John Bryson – historian Andrew Tink – Robert Dessaix – Sarah Hopkins (Sydney criminal lawyer whose novels *Crimes of Billy Fish* and *Speak to Me* have been very well

received) – Gao Xingjian (and his translator Mabel Lee) – political journalist David Marr – Andrew Riemer – and biographer Christine Wallace. Quite a stable!

So, come along and find out just what Lyn means by that “cash cow” comment that universities hate her for saying.

Whether you are a budding or unpublished writer, a keen reader, or are just interested in learning what the rôle of a literary agency is exactly, our evening with Lyn Tranter will send you home with a new slant on how those works of literature we all know and love end up on the shelves of bookshops and Balmain Library.

– Herma Sieper



LYN TRANTER,  
3RD AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY, DECEMBER 2005

**THE FRIENDS of BALMAIN LIBRARY  
invite you to their**

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

***Guest Speaker* LYN TRANTER**

**Friday May 27, 2011 at 7 pm**

**Meeting Room - Rear of Balmain Town Hall**

**Admission Free**

**Supper and Drinks included**

**Forgotten to renew your membership?**

**You can re-join and vote on the night!**



# About Balmain Library ...

## May 2011 News

### A Statistical Snap Shot :

Since 1st July 2010 until end of March 2011

- Just over 100,000 people have visited Balmain Library
- Currently Balmain Library has 10,871 active members
- The Information Desk has answered 23,049 information requests
- The nine author talks were attended by 130 people
- The staff have provided 27 Beginner Internet classes for the community
- The library has displayed 419 community notices
- The staff have provided 22 informational displays for the community
- 3,422 parents, carers and children have attended 109 sessions of Baby Bounce for children under the age of 2 years
- 1,230 parents, carers and children have attended 37 sessions of Story Time for children aged 3-5 years
- 220 children attended ten Holiday programmes

### The New Librarians :

Welcome to **Melinda Hammer** who is the new team-leader librarian at Balmain Library. Melinda previously worked at Sutherland Library Service.

Melinda is assisted by **Ben Carter** as the new librarian. Ben hails from Ku-ring-gai Library Service.

Congratulations to both Melinda and Ben on their success at gaining these positions.

Please come in and say 'hello' to Melinda and Ben!

As you can see Balmain Library is a very busy popular social hub of the local community.

– Marilyn Taylor  
Library Manager

### FROM THE EDITOR :

At our May FOBL Committee Meeting, we were introduced to new staff members Melinda and Ben and duly welcomed them to our Friends Organisation.

There is still one vacancy to be filled at the Balmain Branch and, once this appointment is made, it will be "business as usual" with a full complement once again.

Library users were most likely unaware that the branch was under-resourced in the last months, as the usual services continued unabated. We congratulate Marilyn and her staff for managing so well through this difficult period and thank Marion and Indira, and others from Leichhardt, for so capably filling the gaps.

All of us at FOBL are looking forward to working amicably and productively with the new team.



### Balmain Library Opening Hours

<b>Monday :</b>	<b>9.30 am - 5.30 pm</b>
<b>Tuesday :</b>	<b>9.30 am - 8.00 pm</b>
<b>Wednesday :</b>	<b>9.30 am - 8.00 pm</b>
<b>Thursday :</b>	<b>9.30 am - 5.30 pm</b>
<b>Friday :</b>	<b>9.30 am - 5.30 pm</b>
<b>Saturday :</b>	<b>9.30 am - 4.00 pm</b>
<b>Sunday :</b>	<b>10 am - 4.00 pm</b>



# A Word from the Chair of FOBL

Mariella Totaro-Genevois

*In the aftermath of ...*

## *FOBL's Book Boost*

On April 1 and 2 the reading room of Balmain Library was transformed into a book showroom, with tables set against the walls and covered in brand new books showing intriguing titles and handsome covers. The various sections on display included adult fiction – new editions of classics, Australian and international novels / authors, crime stories, and science fiction – and also covered both young adult and children's fiction.

Well, unlike the 2009 *Book Boost*, this year's event focused exclusively on expanding the fiction collection of the Balmain Library, as specifically requested by the Library Manager. As soon as the door opened people started entering the room, selecting books, putting them on trolleys for the Library staff to process. Three or four FOBL Committee members were on hand to facilitate the proceedings, have a chat, and answer questions.

It is amusing how on this occasion, as in the previous *Book Boost*, Balmanians see the event as not just a chance to choose books but also as an opportunity to voice their candid opinions regardless of them being directly related ... or hardly related ... to the occasion.

Who pays for these books? Why can't I find a specific research section in the library? Why are there no non-fiction books here? Are there enough bookshelves to contain all these books in our library? Do young adults still read books? Where are children's picture books? Who chooses which type of books to purchase? Friends of Balmain Library - who are they? How many books can one choose?

And so on and so forth. As you can see, almost any of these questions could be turned into an interesting conversation and a source of valuable insights into the relationship between people in Balmain and their Library and its collections. But that's another story... so let's not digress too much from the main topic of this article.

The fact / conclusion is that the 2011 FOBL *Book Boost* was, once again, a great success – in the sense that hundreds of new fiction books will soon be available to the people who wish to read them. In comparison with the previous occasion – when the number of books selected slightly exceeded in value the \$10,000 allocated to the purchase – after this year's event there is approximately \$1,300 left over.

As a result, the FOBL Committee has decided to engage in a new project by allocating the unused

\$1,300 to support / finance / fund the creation of a Nobel Literature Prize-winners' section within Balmain Library. This decision is consistent with the needs of the Library and will be a great addition to its fiction collection. When completed it will represent an exclusive feature of which we can all be very proud!

The first Nobel Literature Prize dates back to 1901 (Australia became a Federation in the same year). Some of the books in question are not going to be easy to locate; however, this is a long-term project that can be realistically approached by beginning with the 2010 Nobel Laureate, and then going backwards in time.

As we all know, the Nobel Prize for Literature is awarded to an author for his / her total body of work rather than for just a single book. This fact will give us additional flexibility in selecting what to buy to represent each author.

Australia is proud of being a successful multi-cultural society, and to celebrate this unique feature by giving the Balmain Library the chance to hold in its collection literary works by the best authors from all around the world definitely seems an idea worth pursuing.

Don't you think so?



Herta Müller (2009)



Mario Vargas Llosa (2010)



[www.fobl.org.au](http://www.fobl.org.au)

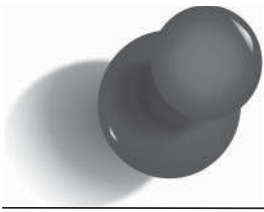
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# Book Groups' Notice Board !

## OPERATIONAL CHANGES ... FOR ALL BOOK GROUPS

There are many book groups operating in Balmain and it would appear that over a considerable period the library had assisted by reserving books according to the groups' schedules. Recently, however, FOBL has become aware of changes of which members need to take heed.

Because of the number of book clubs, and the demand for a lot of books at very specific times, the old system is no longer viable. Book group members now need to reserve books in the same way as that for "ordinary" reservations. (This can be done online, in person, or by phone – and enables books to be tracked while providing the same level of service to all borrowers.)

Marilyn Taylor, Leichhardt Library Manager, is keen to organise a list of all book clubs with contact details to allow the following:

- If all the book clubs send their list for the following year in, say, October / November, the library can then compile them and send the complete list to ALL the book clubs – as this may allow for some changes to the months selected – such that no two book clubs are reading the same book within the same month.
- Staff would be able to advise on the availability of the titles, and / or order books as may be required.
- The reading lists for each of the book clubs could be up-loaded to the library's website.

Book club contacts should e-mail Marilyn at [marilynt@lmc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:marilynt@lmc.nsw.gov.au) with their information.

All library members should also ensure that their library contact details are current:

- e.g. that they include e-mail addresses and mobile phone numbers.

This allows messages to be sent alerting readers to book availability.

Book clubs have been grateful for individual attention in the past and, while changes are now necessary, contact with the library as above should ensure smooth running of your group.



## FOBL's OPEN BOOK GROUP



FOBL'S "Open Book Group" has some interesting reads for the coming months:

14 <sup>th</sup> June	<i>Lilian's Story</i>	Kate Grenville
12 <sup>th</sup> July	<i>Country Driving: a Journey Through China from Farm to Factory</i>	Peter Hessler
9 <sup>th</sup> August	<i>Room</i>	Emma Donoghue

It would seem that there is something for everyone in the OBG's selections. Although publication of *Lilian's Story* dates back to 1985, prize-winning local author Kate Grenville's novel based on real-life "ratbag" \*\* Bea Miles will always be a good read.

China is a country that is currently undergoing a new phase, so the final book in this writer's "China trilogy" should open a few windows onto this complex culture. Hessler was the long-time Beijing correspondent for *The New Yorker* and, having gained his Chinese driving licence, spent the next seven years on an extended road trip documenting how change has affected "ordinary" people.

And at great remove from these two works, *Room* was inspired by the Josef Fritzl case and is therefore disturbing and confronting. But it also demonstrates our capacity to cope in the most extreme situations and, ultimately, to rise above them. Donoghue is quoted as saying:

"My conscience wasn't troubled. I knew the chills would be justified – the book has serious questions to ask".

Everyone is welcome to join the group for one or all of these selections. Held on the second Tuesday of the month at 1 pm in the Meeting Room, Balmain Library, discussion is followed by afternoon tea, providing a chance to socialise, or to continue discussing issues around the works.

\*\* from Keith Dunstan's work on Australia's eccentrics – *Ratbags* (1979)



# MEMBERS' INPUT



## Storytelling on a Grand Scale

On Friday 25<sup>th</sup> March, FOBL invited Philip Coxall to speak about the processes involved in the creation of Ballast Point Park (Walama).

Philip's personal reflections on the planning and development of the park left audience members with a need to contemplate this gem of a gateway to the Parramatta River with new eyes – and fingers and feet – in exploring the grand story of the landform, and the poetry of the detail on the headland.

He very effectively used PowerPoint© pictures to carry us through the planning and to interpret special features of the park. Every detail speaks to a theme – from the local recycled wood used for benches and structures, to the wall displaying artefacts from Menevia House which occupied the site from 1852 to 1928.

Even the massive walls emphasise how the park has been recreated from materials used in the past. Built with rubble packed into wire baskets, the walls conduct the park user through different levels and open out vistas on Sydney stories. The Caltex contract for remediation prevented retaining the rubble from the demolition and remediation process directly on site, so it had to be bought – and brought – back from the tip. As a result, the workers added their own little treasures we can now rediscover, including Philip Coxall's own 21<sup>st</sup> birthday gift – a 1970s pewter mug.

Over supper, committee member Bronwyn Monro spoke to a couple, newly settled near the park, who expressed delight in hearing the story told of the design rationale. It seemed a rather unusual park to these two, but the talk put it into perspective. Another observation, from a different source, was to do with the park's relationship to the other headlands in its view – firstly Ball's Head and the new park created behind it and, secondly, Barangaroo, which had just had some startling planning decision pushed through prior to the recent State election. Both Philip and the audience were hopeful, but not overwhelmingly confident, that Barangaroo will also tell a great story for Sydney.



Ballast Point Park

Telling the story that the past needs to be heard while pointing to the future of Balmain, and the city in which it lives, was an enthralling contribution to the FOBL Talks Series, and the audience heartily appreciated Philip Coxall's presentation, as well as his generosity in sharing his thoughts and experiences with us.

– Jim Monro

## BOOK REVIEW:

### THE SCHOPENHAUER CURE by IRVIN YALOM

This is a novel with a difference. It deals with the battle of wills and intellect between a 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and a 20<sup>th</sup> century psychiatrist and shows them in an imagined relationship. Not only do you get a psychologist's exploration of an encounter group with its fascinating insights of human nature, but you get a profile of Schopenhauer – the details of this German philosopher's life linking the two ideas beautifully.

Psychologist Julius Hertzfeld is influenced by the work and opinions of Schopenhauer, believing him to be his "soulmate". But when something personal threatens his life, he realises his work with his therapy group is at risk. These themes weave an intriguing tale that makes the book "un-put-downable". From the first page you are aware that here is something interesting, something that has not been explored before in this way. As the novel develops, the tension in the group, together with its leader's own personal problems, makes for gripping reading.

Irvin Yalom is Emeritus professor of psychiatry at Stanford University School of Medicine and theorist of the idea of group therapy, so his characters are based on real people from the hundreds of groups he has run. He shows his understanding of the human condition, with all its frailties from his own work experiences as a practising psychotherapist and teacher, and writes novels as a way of "teaching".

The novel would do well also in a book-group situation. Just its title would elicit much discussion and debate not to mention the narrative content itself, which is a mine rich for exploration. Irvin Yalom has other novels among his medical writings. Two earlier works, *When Nietzsche Wept* and *Lying on the Couch* also reflect Yalom's day job and, though quite different from *The Schopenhauer Cure*, are also in the "must read" category.

– Erika Burke



Don't forget to recycle your 'Bookworms' by giving them to friends and relatives - and encourage them to become a FOBL member!

## Can you help FOBL?

Our long time honorary auditor, Tim Potter, has retired after giving many years to our organisation. His help and advice was greatly valued and appreciated and we wish him well.

The running of FOBL is carried out exclusively by volunteers so we are now in need of one more!

Are you able to carry out our annual financial audit? Our records are well kept, all payments are made by cheque, we are not registered for GST, we bank with one institution, and our investments are simple. In other words, auditing our finances would take just a couple of hours once a year.

This task must be carried out by a Chartered Accountant or Certified Practising Accountant who is certified to sign off on financial audit reports.

Obviously we would like this work to be carried out pro bono or, if this is not possible, at a reduced rate. FOBL has recently had to pay for auditing – but we don't feel this is the best use of members' funds.

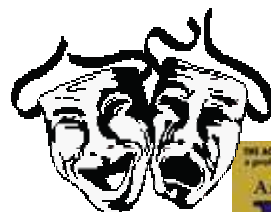
Over the years FOBL has done everything possible to allocate funds almost exclusively to enhance library services, and it is important that we maintain this intention.

So ....

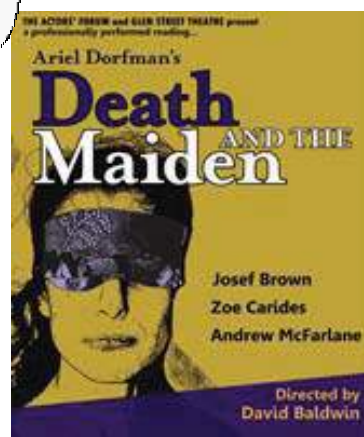
can you help, or do you know anyone who would be willing to help?

If so, please contact the Treasurer, Annette Waterworth:

on Ph. 9810 2226 OR amwaterworth@gmail.com



## ACTORS' FORUM



### Thrilling Theatre ...

If there is one play not to be missed in the Actors' Forum repertoire this year it is *Death and the Maiden* by Chilean-born playwright and essayist **Ariel Dorfman**. Not surprisingly, after its premiere in London in 1991, it won both the *Time Out* Award and the 1992 Laurence Olivier Award, both for best play. I say "not surprisingly" because, after all this time, the Sydney production at the Wharf Theatre still resonates with me. Its three cast members, Helen Morse, John Gaden, and the late Frank Gallagher, fine actors all, had me on the edge of my seat for the entire play. With no interval to break up the tension, and a taut ambiguity to keep me guessing, Dorfman's moral thriller is still one of the most memorable works in my play-going experience.

This new, performed, play-reading will see another trio of fine actors tackling this difficult work. **Andrew McFarlane** is probably best known through *The Sullivans* and *The Flying Doctors* and, most recently, as Donald Mackay in *Underbelly II*, but his stage credits include *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Also well-known from rôles in film and television is **Zoë Carides**, winning a Helpmann Award in 2005 for Williamson's *Influence* and starring in the satirical local government drama series *Grassroots* for the ABC. Both actors have also appeared in Actors' Forum productions but the multi-talented **Josef Brown** will make his debut for the company with *Death and the Maiden*. Josef performed in the leading rôle of Johnny Castle in both West End and Australian productions of the acclaimed musical *Dirty Dancing*.

- Herma Sieper

*DEATH AND THE MAIDEN* - by Ariel Dorfman

will be presented as a professionally performed reading

**Where?** Mayflower Hall, St Andrew's Church Balmain  
- Cnr. Curtis Rd and Darling Street

**When?** Sunday, May 29 - 2 pm

**Admission:**

\$20 - Concession \$15

**TICKETS ON SALE AT DOOR ONE HOUR  
BEFORE PERFORMANCE**

# ACROSS THE DITCH

A personal probe into New Zealand's literature



Sitting in the plane on the way back from our nearest neighbour, that skinny little country full of sheep, it occurred to me that this trip would take, give or take a couple of minutes, the same time as a drive from Balmain to my son's home in Canberra. And, when I mused a bit more about this proximity, it also struck me how little we take notice of New Zealand literature. Incidentally, the book on my lap, picked up for a few dollars in a Palmerston North second-hand store, was by an author I had not previously heard of – Adrienne Jansen's *Floating the Fish on Bamboo*. I am now anxious to read her first, and previous, novel *Spirit Writing*, as I liked *Floating* very much indeed.

For more than twenty years, I have crossed the ditch on a fairly regular basis and, during that time, my interest in the literary output of that small country has grown exponentially. Like most readers, Katherine Mansfield was probably the first I had read, and she left when quite young. Ruth Park's *Muddle Headed Wombat* series may actually have beaten Katherine, but I heard it as a radio serial, so that really doesn't count. In the second-wave feminist seventies, when so many female writers were resurrected by publishing houses like *The Women's Press* and *Virago*, I discovered Jean Devanny's *The Butcher's Shop*. Sylvia Townsend Warner (like Devanny, active in 1930s communist activities) and the difficult and painful books of Janet Frame also came into view around that period.

At Macquarie Uni in the eighties, a semester of Post-colonial Writing introduced me to Witi Ihimaera and his sad and haunting *Tangi*, with the Maori narrator returning home from Wellington to attend his father's funeral, or "tangi", a ceremony lasting several days and requiring much of a young man who has withdrawn from his own culture. Published in 1973, *Tangi* was one of the first published works of fiction by a Maori. It would only be another thirteen years before Keri Hulme was to win the Booker Prize for *The Bone People*, but I was not so enthusiastic about her work. Much later Ihimaera came to enjoy a much wider appreciation when his 1985 prize-winning children's novel, *The Whale Rider*, was made into a film. Nine years before, Alan Duff, another Maori writer, came into the limelight when his controversial account of the violent behaviour of urban Maori was turned into the film *Once Were Warriors*.

Duff's anger hit a nerve with many New Zealanders but, arguably, it marked the beginning of a more positive attitude towards New Zealand's first people.

So, when I began to visit the Land of the Long White Cloud, I decided to begin with some of the stalwarts for my reading journey. With Mansfield and Warner under my belt, I chose two men – Frank Sargeson and C. K. Stead – who were recent enough not to feel too dated. From there, I accidentally discovered Maurice Gee and ploughed my way through *The Plumb Trilogy* – which turned out to be a great idea because these three novels, centred around one family, covered virtually a century of social and political history, thus giving me a good grounding for coming works. In fact, I am still working my way through this author's oeuvre, and ... he is still writing! Michael King's autobiography of Janet Frame led me to *The Penguin History of New Zealand* and, after seeing a late-night documentary on Maori TV a few weeks ago, will lead me forward to his biographies of some very powerful Maori women of the early period.

To read the literature of a country while getting to know its landscape and people results in an enhancement of both. Each time I return to New Zealand I search out local writers in bookshops, op-shops, and on the shelves in libraries. It never ceases to amaze me that, in all the years I have attended Sydney Writers' Festivals, representation from that land just three hours and ten minutes away is so paltry; and that there is no separate shelf of New Zealand writers, both fiction and non-fiction, not to mention poetry and drama, in our library. Leaving the best until last, my current favourite kiwi is Lloyd Jones, author of the prize-winning *Mister Pip* and now *Hand Me Down World*, which is receiving rave reviews. His back-list is well worth investigating for such gems as *The Book of Fame*, a factional account of the 1905 New Zealand Rugby World Tour, and the disturbing *Choo Woo*. For someone who has no interest in sport, and is turned off by pædophilia, it is the mark of a good author that I found them both immensely satisfying.

What I've mentioned here is just the tip of the iceberg! My plan is to keep a sharp lookout for new writers coming through and also to question the organisers of our Writers' Festival: why the shameful dearth of invitations to our cousins across The Ditch?

– Herma Sieper

# FROGOPHILIA

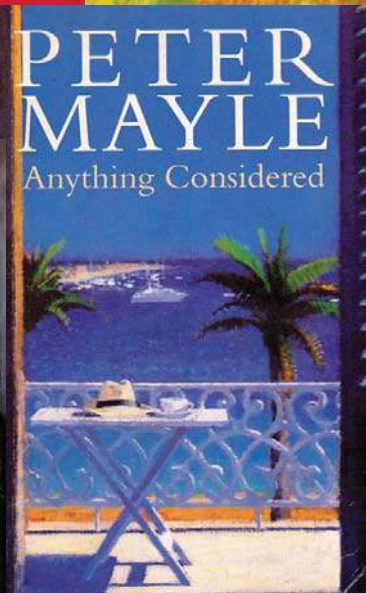
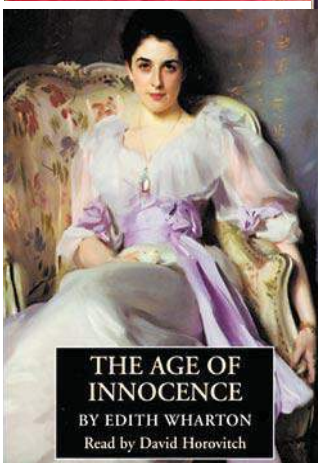
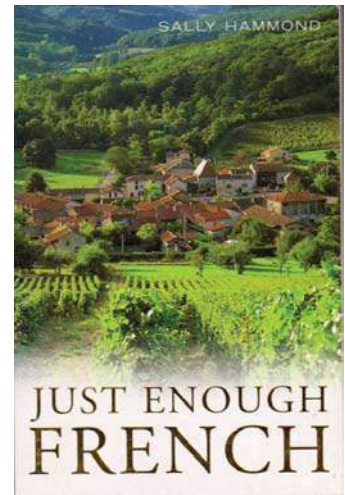
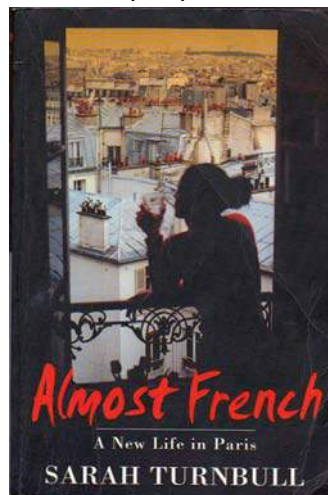
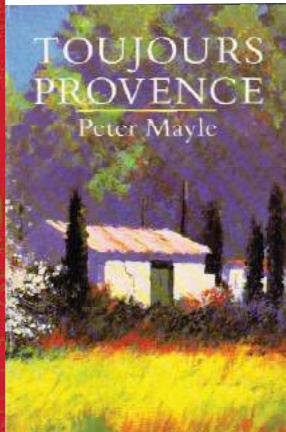
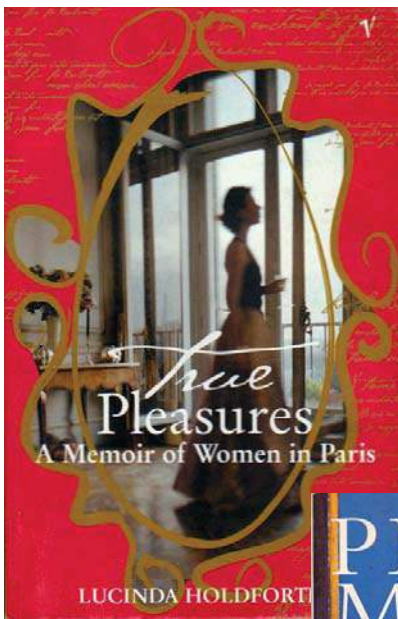
## Is there something in the mineral water?

The stream of books about Paris in particular, and France in general, never seems to end. Having spent many of my formative years learning and teaching French, I can't resist having a prowl through these books to see what's going on in "la Belle France".

For a recent holiday read I found a battered old copy of *True Pleasures: A Memoir of Women in Paris* by Lucinda Holdforth. It is an interweaving of what was happening in the author's life – she is Australian – and the lives of the women she researched: Colette, Edith Wharton, Marie Antoinette, Coco Chanel, and so on. She went to the places they had frequented, talked to people connected with them, and put together a very interesting social history which, incidentally, gave one a useful list of related books to track down. I had planned to leave this book at my holiday place in New Zealand but in the end I couldn't part with it. Instead I added a heavy copy of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, a throw-out from Taupo Library, and consequently ended up having to talk my way out of an excess baggage fine!

For light relief I also took a copy of Peter Mayle's novel *Anything Considered* – which leads off with an advertisement: 'UNATTACHED ENGLISHMAN: *Mid-thirties, personable, fluent French, seeks interesting and unusual work, preferably in the Aix / Avignon area. Anything considered except marriage*'. Mayle is best known for his books on Provence but he also did a novel or two – including *Hotel Pastis*. Light as a soufflé - and very funny indeed.

The Provence connection reminds me of an earlier book on this region of France – perhaps the beginning of that stream of books about Poms and Yanks moving to villages in Provence, Tuscany, and so on, buying some decrepit dwelling and spending years in epic battles with local tradesmen. I believe that the original one, first published in 1935, might have been *Perfume from Provence* by Lady Winifred Fortescue. Slightly over the top but still quite an engaging story. She and her husband Sir John (who, incidentally, wrote a huge history of the British Army), got such a lousy pension from the Queen that they had to move out of England to a cheaper place!



More recently we have the new bunch to escape to France: Mary Moody having a midlife crisis in *Au revoir* and *Last Tango in Toulouse* – in my view, only to be tackled with a bottle or two of red. Then we have Sally Hammond with *Just Enough French*. This is a travel book – well written – and dated 2002 so it could be useful for intending travellers who have a month to spare in France.

The one I found quite intriguing was *Almost French – Love and a New Life in Paris* by Sarah Turnbull. The author, an Australian, fell in love with a Frenchman and relocated to Paris to be with him. She details her problems in coming to terms with the profound differences in how she and he viewed the world, and her struggles to adapt to living in an alien culture. A good window on the predicaments of an expatriate.

A bientôt,

– Jan Aitkin