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What's gender got to do with it?

The preceding chapters have focused largely on memoirs of France by Australian women, which comprise the majority of the corpus and among which clear groupings and patterns emerge. What then of the men's memoirs? The corpus includes the work of six male authors, amounting to nine books, since John Baxter has written several sequels. This chapter starts by exploring this subset of memoirs in more detail, before looking at the presence of gender as a theme in the corpus. While male–female relationships are a prominent theme among the female authors, the topic is developed in only one of the men's memoirs. The chapter concludes by tracing the association of France with femininity and its identification as a site conducive to women's self-actualisation.

Australian men's memoirs of living in France

Perhaps the clearest demographic pattern among the male authors of the corpus is the fact that almost all were already published authors, well-established in their particular field, before embarking on their French memoir. The fields of specialisation range from film (John Baxter), through food (Stephen Downes, Shannon Bennett) and music (Christopher Lawrence, Stephen Downes) to the less predictable field of motoring (Tony Davis). Only Bryce Corbett (in his early thirties at the time of publication, so somewhat younger than the others) was previously unpublished: *A Town like Paris* was his first book, although

he has since co-written a number of memoirs for others, starting with the Paris memoir of his wife, Shay Stafford (2010). Most of the male authors, then, were able to trade on the success of their existing career in order to publish their tale of life in France, indeed for Downes, *Paris on a Plate* was just one of three books he published in 2006. This was the case among only a minority of the female authors, Stephanie Alexander and Mary Moody in particular being already well-known. For two-thirds of the Australian women (17 of 25), the French memoir marked a first foray into publishing and public life.

Perhaps it is because they are less numerous that there are few obvious patterns among the Australian men's memoirs of France. Each is interesting in its own way, but unlike the women's memoirs, they say little as a group about Australian fantasies or projections of France. Certainly the ideal of luxury domesticity is absent from the memoirs. Yes, Baxter waxes poetic about beautiful walks; yes, Bennett exclaims over fresh produce and good food. But none of the male Australian memoir authors aspire to the postfeminist lifestyle analysed in Chapter 5. Rather the books echo wider, more established myths of travel to Europe or of Anglophone adventures in France. They do it with wit, verve and humour, but ultimately there is little here in the way of a distinctive discourse binding them together. And unlike the women's memoirs, there is little focus on constructing a new self. The small number of male authors makes it possible to discuss each in turn.

Traditional myths

Baxter is the most senior of the six male authors, and is the only one in the entire corpus who could be seen as part of the Clive James generation of expats, espousing the discourse of the cultural cringe. Born in the same year as James, Baxter as a teenager 'began to accumulate derogatory quotes about my native land and scatter them through conversation' (2002, 43). He saw Europe as the cultural centre of the world and Australia lagging far behind it:

like the Hawaiian tsunamis that petered out on Bondi Beach as modest swells, the upheavals that revolutionised art and culture on the other side of the world were ripples by the time they reached us. (2005, 17)

He writes of leaving a cultural backwater when he departs Australia: 'In my jaded view, Australians swam like fish and thought like sheep. I wanted out' (2005, 18), a view not shared by the other authors, and identified by Sonia Harford as a discourse of the past (Harford 2006, 6, 119, see Chapter 11). His memoirs abound in perspicacious analyses of French culture, history and food, and humorous anecdotes, without a great deal of introspective focus.

In *F. Scott, Ernest and Me*, Tony Davis perpetuates an equally entrenched myth, that of the writer in Paris, but ironises it at every turn, starting with the title and the prologue: 'In the service of an outrageous cliché, he moved to the world's premier city of art and literature to look for a down-and-out garret' (1) where, like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, he could produce his magnum opus. The book he eventually publishes, however, is instead a memoir of his time there, also produced in the knowledge that 'Writing a book about Paris is almost as big a cliché as writing a book in Paris' (19). This sets the tone for the memoir, which plays with conventional myths of France and calls them into question.

In addition to recounting his writing progress, unusually, much of the memoir is devoted to his sustained efforts to master the French language. He recruits Francophone partners for English–French conversation exchanges, explains his frustrations and details painstaking incremental progress. Through this process, he develops subtle analyses of Parisian culture and its contradictions, going beyond the myths of slow living, elegance and intellectualism. He identifies the dual pace of the city 'in which people racing through the streets at wide open throttle could exist side-by-side with others sitting in cafés and restaurants and in no hurry to go anywhere' (101), the juxtaposition of elegance and negligence (74), and the coexistence of intellectual refinement and banality, identifying 'the parallel, Sartre-free France' (196) in the form of home shopping television.

His perceptive memoir in fact recounts a learning journey: learning French, understanding the complexities and paradoxes of French culture, and learning the value of tenacity. The most introspective part of the book is the conclusion (327–29), where he decides that tenacity in writing, finishing what he set out to accomplish, is his real success, not being published, and not recognition by others. Davis's conclusion amounts to an affirmation of self, but there is no sense in which this is the formation of a new self, or a new life, let alone a French life.

Food and nostalgia

While Baxter evoked the cultural cringe, and Davis the myth of the struggling artist in the French garret, Downes and Bennett draw on the mythology of French cuisine. Generation is a salient factor when comparing Downes's *Paris on a Plate* and Bennett's *28 Days in Provence*. Both authors are food writers: Bennett an acclaimed chef, Downes a restaurant critic. Both spent time in France as young men, Downes as a journalist in Paris where he married a Frenchwoman, Bennett while working in Monte Carlo where he trained under Alain Ducasse. Both narrate a short stay in France: Downes 12 days, with one chapter per day; Bennett 28 days, recounted as a daily diary with recipes. Their writing is however poles apart, and the differences are at least partly attributable to demographics: Downes writing at age sixty, with extended family in France and dual nationality; Bennett writing in his thirties, bringing his Australian family with him to France.

Nostalgia is a significant theme in both books. Bennett's allusions to the past come closest to the theme of belatedness—that is, celebrating a past way of life that is on the point of vanishing, a common feature of nineteenth- and twentieth-century travel writing by Europeans (Holland and Huggan 1998, 23; Forsdick 2005). This is, however, ironised in that he treats the entire expedition in the manner of a reality TV show. In an entry called 'My Rules of the Game', he outlines the challenge of the 28-day 'experiment' (7):

I will now set out the ground rules for you. All the food my family and I will be eating in the Luberon has to have been grown or raised locally, and sourced from the *marchés paysans*. [...] Obviously, no produce can be used out of season and nothing can be processed. [...] all I want to do is live like a Provençal did 50 or even 100 years ago. (5).

Of course some concessions need to be made for the experiment to be tolerable: coffee, sugar, the use of 'two wall-mounted ovens, a steamer, two double fridges, a chargrill and a walk-in wine cellar' (11), not to mention the swimming pool. The challenge is qualified:

All I care about is a long-held ambition to live a better life: simpler, with more satisfaction and purity, yet with all the luxuries I have worked so hard for. (7)

Note that 'better' recurs, as in the women's memoirs, but is defined here in terms of slow living rather than style or beauty.

The paradox of the memoir is the speed at which all this is accomplished. Where Peter Mayle spent a year in Provence savouring the slower pace of life, Bennett has compressed it into a 28-day trial version of the simple life for the cosmopolitan reader. The midday meal is taken at an Australian pace and in the form of grabbing a sandwich (131). While Bennett observes that 'no one is on the conveyor belt of life here' (183), he himself doesn't slow down, but 'refuse[s] to take a nap in the afternoons—it just doesn't feel right—so I decide instead to test out my Nike/iPod running sensor' (184). Aware of the contradictions ('What can I say? It's the modern world!', 184), aware that in France he and his family are 'a bunch of foreigners' (168), he performs the slow life in short bursts for his audience of readers.

Stephen Downes also pursues nostalgia in *Paris on a Plate*, and also a version of nostalgia connected with food. His yearning for the past, however, is not a paean to a mythical past that existed before he was born, but rather a Proustian attempt to recreate the sensations of his youth in France. It is nostalgia for Downes's own past. As he wanders through old haunts he notes, 'Nothing has changed here since the days when I took meal breaks from Agence France-Presse. I hope nothing ever will' (174), but he is doomed to disappointment when he tries to relive his first Parisian meal. Unlike his experience at the age of 25, where a diner at the next table gave him lessons in seasoning his salad correctly (20), this time 'Nobody watches me eat, I am not required to make my own salad dressing, and the past cannot be relived' (32). His nostalgia is entirely personal, as opposed to Bennett's attempt to recreate a fabled past of culinary simplicity.

Baxter, Davis, Downes and Bennett draw on myths of France that differ from those recurrent in the memoirs by Australian women. Bennett's is the only lifestyle memoir among the male authors, as he attempts to create, temporarily, a mythicised way of life, and finds himself on a 'path of new understanding' (208), but none of these four consider their time in France to be an opportunity to construct a new life or new self. For that we need to look to Lawrence, for whom the French memoir is an opportunity to explore a turning point in his identity. What, then, does a men's makeover story look like? What kind of self-transformation is France used to achieve?

A midlife turning point

Christopher Lawrence, as befits a music broadcaster, uses the metaphor of swing to characterise his project. With self-deprecating humour about a looming midlife crisis (2004, 70) and the thought of his memoir joining the shelves of 'change-of-life books' (51), Lawrence explains that he has come to France for a couple of months 'Just to swing, like ... like jazz. Find a good rhythm. Play a better song' (70). He describes swinging as 'syncopating life, [...] coming up with a freewheeling new improvisation on that old tune' (27), and elsewhere as 'lead[ing] a richer, fuller life' (163). Its first requirement is to abandon his Protestant work ethic and 'hang loose' (58), but the nebulous project of learning to swing paradoxically requires leaving behind his 'addiction to thinking' (45) at the same time as requiring intense introspection on his progress. Lawrence echoes the memoirs of British and American writers, of Peter Mayle and Michael Sanders, who moved to the south of France to savour a slower life. Although he notes that 'Learning to do nothing with unashamed flair was going to be hard work' (58), this is a far cry from the women's memoirs of the effort to achieve a beautiful life in France and the disciplined pursuit of style and elegance.

Unlike the female authors discussed towards the end of this chapter, Christopher Lawrence is not seeking French role models. Indeed there is little sense in which France has a particular role to play in achieving the change Lawrence desires, other than blandly providing somewhere nice to solve one's problems: 'I had this notion that when life's dissatisfactions mounted up, you should stop everything, go away somewhere nice and figure it out' (152). Expatriate Anglophone eccentrics, tourists and occasional locals all offer opportunities for caricature and pithy observations, as they aid Lawrence in his quest to change the rhythm of his life. Summing up his newfound milieu, he writes, 'It all added up to something that may not have been definitively French, but was certainly unusual' (65). Although the final words of the book indicate that, at a curry party with his expat friends, Lawrence fleetingly achieves his goal of swinging (220), ultimately, he finds himself 'with nothing more to offer [...] about the lessons learned from protracted self-reflection than a question mark' (187). Far from a significant turning point in his life, it appears that Lawrence's time in France enables him to arrive at some measure of acceptance of his introspective tendencies, while allowing him

to write an entertaining tale. His memoir thus echoes to some extent McCulloch's conclusion of philosophical self-acceptance, except that Lawrence has arrived there through relaxation rather than self-discipline.

A blokey memoir

Bryce Corbett's memoir is unique in the corpus in its unabashedly male-centred outlook. The youngest author of the entire corpus at the time of publication (in his early thirties), Corbett finds himself fitting into an expat culture of drinking and parties. Upfront about his sexual exploits (the most obvious difference with respect to the other memoirs), he is reflective about masculinity, as well as providing insights into French culture and Australianness.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Corbett distances himself to some extent from Australian constructions of masculinity based on a preference for beer and football over women, and finds in France a refreshing opportunity to escape these norms. He characterises himself 'as a confessed member of that rare breed, the Australian male who is largely uninterested in sport' (87) and enjoys in Paris a quality of friendship between men that he never found in Australia where 'my friendships with other blokes had only rarely extended beyond the bottom of a schooner glass' (160). But these friends are expats; he has relatively little close contact with local Francophones and he has no desire to emulate the French male whom he considers to be 'about as sexy as a garden gnome and laid-back to the point of being horizontal' (237) with 'appalling fashion sense [and] acute halitosis' (66). Having distanced himself from Australian norms of masculinity, he remains ambivalent towards French ones. He also ends up developing a negative view of French women, whom he sees as in constant sexual competition with each other and characterised by nervous anxiety (235–36; cf. Turnbull 2002, 178).

How then is France configured in the Australian men's memoirs? No particular theme binds these books together as a group. Instead we can identify adherence to wider myths: the Australian cultural cringe, the writer in Paris, the Maylesque move to the south of France, nostalgia for the past. They show a diversity of experience, of desires and of projections of France, and some of these differences appear to be age-related. The discourse of a new life is less present than among the women's memoirs. In other words, there is little in the way of a common thread, such as the positioning in relation to a postfeminist vision of France seen among the women's memoirs.

Gender as theme

Corbett's attention to questions of gender is striking in that it is not a preoccupation of the other male authors, whereas it is a prominent theme among the female authors. For Katrina Lawrence and Lucinda Holdforth, it becomes the central theme of the book; Sheryle Bagwell and Sarah Turnbull each devote a whole chapter to questions of gender, and most of the women make regular comments on the topic. Only a small handful—Alexander, Coulson, Cutsforth, Hammond—do not really engage with it at all.

Epitomising feminine style, the Frenchwoman is almost universally admired by the authors, and for several authors (Archer, Holdforth, Webster, Paech) she is clearly a model to follow. There is less consensus concerning the image of the Frenchman and far less commentary: Corbett's lack of admiration for French men is shared by his wife and co-author Shay Stafford, who finds them overly romantic for an Aussie girl, while Bagwell (2006, 21) and Taylor (2005, 189), on the other hand, comment on their stylishness. What garners considerably more attention are relations and communication between the sexes, which are seen as less polarised than in Australia (Lawrence 2017, 108).

Male–female relations

Several women discuss what they see as a French expectation that men and women will speak out and discuss issues on equal terms, (Turnbull 2002, 177; Holdforth 2004, 82; Williams 2017, 80; Lawrence 2017, 216), with Williams concluding that 'gender relations in France are a stratosphere away from Australian society' (2017, 129). This is seen to go hand-in-hand with a rejection among Frenchwomen of confrontational forms of feminism, culminating in a lack of willingness to identify as feminist (Turnbull 2002, 175–76; Bagwell 2006, 199, Lawrence 2017, 93). They refer to a French belief that communication between the sexes can be intelligent without forgoing seduction and femininity (Holdforth 2004, 82; Turnbull 2002, 177–78). Holdforth, Moody, Cashman and Williams all report men showing appreciation of older women in France. Many remark on the prevalence of flirting and banter, Bagwell describing it as 'playful badinage that rarely descends into the sort of degrading wolf whistles and leers on the street that pass as flirtation in some other countries' (2006, 205), and Corbett enjoying the fact that '[m]en and

women practise it with the same level of gusto' (2007, 233–34) and that 'rather than it being the means to any particular end, it is a veritable pastime itself' (234). Turnbull remarks that French conversation between men and women unfolds in the form of light-hearted banter 'as though it's a game and the men are just playing their part' (2002, 177–78). Others echo the idea that male–female relations in France involve a certain amount of game-playing (Holdforth 2004, 51) or even 'old-fashioned gender role-playing' (Bagwell 2006, 208). But whereas some see it as unthreatening and marking the ease of cross-gender relations, game-playing poses difficulties for others. It takes time for Nadine Williams to accept her partner's participation in the flirting, and neither Bagwell's friend Ralph nor Bryce Corbett appreciate the extent of the manoeuvres. Corbett finds himself 'confounded by a set of rules I didn't know and confused by behaviour I didn't recognise' (2007, 238) and after a simple date becomes 'an exercise in strategic mind games' (238), he decides to avoid participating in the arcane 'rituals of Gallic male-female interaction' (239) by avoiding relationships with French women.

On the other hand, once Katrina Lawrence accepts that flirting is 'a national game' (2017, 67), she decides she can learn the rules:

As decidedly non-Parisian as I felt that morning, I didn't think it was something I couldn't learn, that these subtle seduction instincts were exclusively innate to Parisiennes. I had a hunch that courtship remained very much a coded affair; when there are rules, anyone eager enough can learn how to play, with time and practice. (72–73)

Several writers contrast French game-playing with the straightforwardness and down-to-earth nature of Aussie girls (McCulloch 2008, 112; Moody 2005b, 64–65; Bagwell 2006, 209; Stafford 2010, 208). At the same time, several note less warmth and a lack of complicity between women, and conclude that the emphasis on flirting and seduction combined with a cult of beauty lead to female insecurity and rivalry: 'while men and women might feel at ease together, *les françaises* seem to feel uneasy about themselves' (Turnbull 2002, 178; cf. Corbett 2007, 236; Holdforth 2004, 51; Williams 2017, 103). Gender roles and gender relations, then, are seen as a key point of difference between France and Australia, especially by the female authors. But the observations go further and—when coupled with historical examples—lead the authors to see France as representing particular possibilities for women.

France as feminine, a space for women

Observations about gender roles and relations lead to characterisations of entire countries, and an overall assessment of France as a more feminine country in contrast with Australia and Anglophone countries more generally. Ellie Nielsen defies grammatical gender in using the masculine pronoun for Australia. When queried she responds by proclaiming that 'Australia is definitely a man' (Nielsen 2007, 85). Janelle McCulloch writes that 'Places like Paris are far more feminine in feel, with lines and landscapes that are as sensual as a Dior gown' whereas 'London is and always has been a man's town' (2008, 13). Katrina Lawrence notes the 'frilly balconies' and 'street lights like vintage drop earrings' and declares: 'All you need to do is look around you in Paris to know that this city can only be a woman' (2017, 6).

Not only is Paris—and France more generally—seen by the authors as feminine, but it is considered a space *for women*. Katrina Lawrence writes that 'Paris might have mostly been built by men, but Parisiennes are her soul and spirit, infusing every stone with their stories' (2017, 265) and Holdforth notes 'how quintessentially French it is—that the French president should live in a home owned and decorated by a courtesan, the famous Madame de Pompadour' (2004, 64). Paris is seen as a city that is both particularly welcoming to women (Lawrence 2017, 7, 213, 337) and conducive to their self-actualisation. We saw in Chapter 5 that Holdforth develops this idea, using the lives of illustrious *Parisiennes* by birth or adoption (from Ninon de Lanclos to Nancy Mitford) as models for self-empowerment and for creating a beautiful life. And we saw that her use of these models fitted neatly with postfeminist discourses of a disciplined makeover of the self: cataloguing effort and achievement in the nostalgic pursuit of style, elegance and pleasure.

Two of the most recent memoirs of France by Australian women allow us to expand, develop and nuance the representation of France as a site for women's self-transformation.

Nadine Williams: *Farewell My French Love*

Like Holdforth, Nadine Williams in *Farewell My French Love* (2017) refers at length to famous women of the past as models for remaking her own life. In this sequel to *From France with Love* (2007), Williams recounts time spent in France after the death of her French husband

Olivier, during which she comes to terms with grief and widowhood, and regains a sense of independence. Her role models span the centuries: from Sainte Geneviève to Diane de Poitiers, George Sand and Simone Veil.

Farewell My French Love echoes the postfeminist themes discussed in Chapter 5—the quest for a new self, self-empowerment through consumerism, style and sensuality—with the difference that the new fulfilled life Williams seeks to craft is that of a widow in her seventies, not Cinderella. Williams' trip is a learning journey and a mission of self-improvement on several fronts—her final weeks in France are spent taking a French language course, struggling to improve her proficiency—but the most important of these is learning from the lives of historical figures. She seeks to learn from their losses 'endured with integrity and courage' (2017, 265), from their 'fearless use of power' (129), and from their determination as writers. And by the end of the journey and memoir, she feels she has managed to reforge an identity to sustain her back in Australia: 'I know that I have somehow scrounged an identity as a widow, living well, alone in Paris. The trick will be to take that feeling home on the aircraft' (262). She has achieved a sense of autonomy and empowerment: 'I have found contentment in Paris, and most important I have learnt, alone, that Olivier did not define me; that I have been the architect of my own life' (265).¹

The idea that France is the ideal site not only for a postfeminist makeover and lessons in style and elegance, but for self-transformation much more generally, and that famous French women provide models for achieving it, are themes broached by Holdforth and Williams, but most explicitly developed in Katrina Lawrence's 2017 memoir *Paris Dreaming*.

Katrina Lawrence: *Paris Dreaming*

It is fitting that the latest published memoir included in this study should draw together so many of the traits, themes and preoccupations of the corpus, and even explore some of its tensions.

1 In her declaration of independence, Williams echoes the other widow among the authors, Henrietta Taylor, whose first book was originally published under the title *Veuve Taylor* (2005) and who observes in the sequel:

During the two years here in France, I had come to the conclusion that in fact I did not need nor want a man to rescue me. They were my hands holding the reins of the white charger. I had rescued myself. (2008, 115)

For Taylor too, France is the place where self-transformation through female empowerment is achieved.

Katrina Lawrence's memoir recounts her regular visits to Paris and the corresponding changes to her identity. Like so many of the authors, she is neither a full-time nor a long-term French resident. From the outset she confesses, 'Curiously, I haven't yet got around to actually living in my spiritual home' (2017, 3). With its author a magazine beauty editor, with its pink cover sporting an Eiffel Tower, and with the tagline 'What the City of Light taught me about life, love and lipstick', *Paris Dreaming* promises to offer a predictable assortment of postfeminist themes. And certainly the reader is treated to lessons in style, glamour, elegance, seduction, shopping and a disciplined approach to beauty, with the author taking charge of her own life and choosing the path ahead.

But the memoir turns out to be more than this. As with Turnbull's and Nielsen's memoirs (see Chapters 7 and 8), the postfeminist marketing masks weightier material, here some erudite historico-cultural analysis and insights into the vicissitudes of individual identity. One of the many paradoxes Lawrence identifies in French culture is that 'France excels at doing frivolous things seriously, and serious things frivolously' (37, cf. 224, 336), and she uses this to offer metacommentary on her own writing strategy. In beauty editing:

you need to have the kind of insouciant outlook on life that allows you to see the little things as worthy of consideration, while keeping the big ones in perspective with a near-flippant nonchalance. In other words, you need to have a French way of thinking. (160)

Thus alongside the descriptions of ruffles are references to fashion as 'the lace-trimmed handiwork of pure, cold economics' and to the 'state-supported interventionist policy to create the French luxury industry' (164), and we read that it is the 'amorous branding' of Paris (129) by both the public and private sector that has made it the 'dream destination for hopeful lovers' (128). Like McCulloch (Chapter 5), Lawrence introduces an ironic distance from her subject matter, now gushing over gowns and slippers, now drawing back to dissect the myths.

Like only a handful of the authors represented in the corpus, Katrina Lawrence studied French to a high level of proficiency before her trips to France as an adult, and she is one of only three (the others are Davis and Nielsen) to mention a French ancestor (she is distantly related to Marcel Proust). What really distinguishes Lawrence's memoir, however, is the explicit focus on the diversity of the possibilities for female identification available in France. While many of the authors travel to France seeking

to remodel themselves, and latch onto a particular set of traits and daily rituals as connoting a French life, Lawrence repeatedly explores the range of roles and models available, and selects one suitable for a particular purpose—this French self rather than that one—at a particular point in time. Unlike so many of the other memoirs, this is not a before-and-after narrative, because the transformations are ongoing. Constructing a new French-inspired self is presented as a regular event, with a different remake suitable for each phase of life. Unlike the ‘revolution’ Holdforth experiences (2004, 221), Lawrence ‘recalibrate[s her] inner compass’ (7) time after time. And although her identifications inevitably tend towards the pink and frilly end of the spectrum, she makes it clear that these are not the only ones available.

Lawrence’s memoir is structured around turning points in her life, each associated with a stay in Paris, each marking a new phase in her identity, a new role to adopt. These phases are reflected in the titles of the 11 chapters: from *Fillette* for her visits at the age of five and 13, through *Jeune fille*, *Ingénue*, *Mademoiselle*, *Madame*, *Bonne vivante*, *Femme* (woman), *Femme* (wife), *Superfemme* and *Maman* to a future role as *Grande dame*. Each time she draws on different famous French figures as potential poles of identification. Even at the youngest age there are choices to be made—Marianne (13), Joan of Arc or Cinderella? (17)—choices that represent wider cultural tensions between modes of being. These tensions are pegged onto the divergent ways her parents, both lawyers, identify with France: her mother as a lifelong feminist who has nonetheless developed luxury tastes, her father as a socialist and champion of workers’ rights (12, 15). Already in the first chapter, Lawrence presents France as offering a complex and contradictory web of possible identifications: postfeminist certainly, but also feminist, political, philosophical, artistic.

As a 16-year-old seeking an identity and ‘heroines who could guide me on how to script my life’ (36), Lawrence considers the ‘upper-class chic’ of BCBG style² (30) but opts for an alternative model for her transition to womanhood in the form of Brigitte Bardot. Although already a retro style by the time Lawrence adopts the pouty lips (38), ‘the wild hair and the insouciant sundresses’ (40), what she seeks to emulate is Bardot’s ‘alluringly self-assured’ authenticity (40) and ‘the importance of feeling physically free, comfortable in your own skin’ (47). In retrospect,

2 BCBG (*bon chic bon genre*) is a slang term from the 1980s, denoting the conservative classic fashion style of the Parisian upper class.

she speculates that opting instead for the simple style of Jane Birkin might have saved her a lot of money (46). Again, there are a range of identities available, and although Lawrence's choices tend to involve flounces, they are not the only options.

Nevertheless, the options are not unlimited. At age 21, she has 'stripped off the baby doll dresses' (95) and is 'trying on some new styles for size' (96). But arriving in France, she finds that the grunge look she sees as epitomising rebellion does not translate to Paris (96) and she needs to find something more suitable. She spends her visit considering other modes of proto-feminist defiance, incarnated by George Sand and Simone de Beauvoir, and ends up replacing her Doc Martens with 'a particularly shapely pair of boots' (124) and wearing 'the pinkest of lipsticks without fearing that my feminist talk was mere lip service' (124).

In keeping with the genre, Lawrence explores models for romance, having been ditched by boyfriend Zack en route to Paris. She delves into the lives and loves of the twelfth-century nun Héloïse, Camille Claudel and Joséphine de Beauharnais, and decides they are anti-models, providing cautionary tales of 'the dangers of being one half of a couple at the expense of being one whole of a person' (158). The idea of being multifaceted becomes a theme. From Marie Antoinette, she draws the conclusion that frivolity and flounces are dangerously insufficient:

She played the Parisienne to perfection, her frilly dresses and festooned hairdos slavishly copied. But the forces of destiny were against Marie Antoinette, and she couldn't step up when history required it. She hadn't been brought up to be so multifaceted. [...] The French expect women to be more than just a pretty face, to have brains behind their beauty. (184)

Playing the conspicuously feminine card is fine, as long as one has other cards up one's sleeve, and can adapt to the situation, reinvent oneself, play another role. Lawrence contemplates the talents of Madame de Sévigné and Juliette Récamier, before settling on Germaine de Staël as a model for life at age 33. Even though her 'multifacetedness [...] was seen to be vulgar for a woman' (215), her combination of intellect, passion, politics, optimism and conversation in addition to 'flimsy muslin gowns' (216) represents the embodiment of versatility and resilience that Lawrence is seeking.

In 'a city that has been deeply infused with the spirit of so many of history's most strong, sagacious, seductive women' (6), she continues to find models for further roles—parenting, ageing gracefully—and emphasises the point that no single French life or role model is going to be useful or appropriate forever. Even the postfeminist ideals of glamour, elegance, romance and luxury domesticity are not monolithic, but exist in a range of inflections.

In *Paris Dreaming*, Paris fulfils a quite specific function, flagged in the epigraph, a quotation from the 1954 film *Sabrina*: 'Paris isn't for changing planes ... It's ... It's for changing your outlook'. When Lawrence needs to 'turn a page and begin a new phase', Paris is where she can 'find [her] new life direction' (7) and change her identity. Time after time, she has come to Paris to 'hone [her] sense of self' (213), and finds that 'whatever role I was playing at the time, Paris provided the perfect backdrop' (213–14). True to the postfeminist tenets of individual empowerment, Lawrence emphasises her own agency—she chooses the new role—more than the tales of Paris effecting a magical transformation with fairy godmother power (see Chapter 4).

The choice of roles appears to be vast. Lawrence quotes her friend, who remarks that Paris 'seems to welcome you, as a woman, with open arms, no matter who you are, or your age or your style' (213). For Lawrence, Paris is 'A city for all seasons' (337), the ultimate feminotopia. This certainly explains the range of possible selves the authors have sought, and often attained, in the corpus of memoirs, from showgirl (Stafford) to style queen (J McCulloch) to domestic goddess (Webster, Archer) to provincial writer (Cashman) to middle-aged woman (Moody, Williams) and self-assured widow (H Taylor, Williams). There is nonetheless a disproportionate emphasis on femininity, glamour, style and consumerism in the roles explored in the corpus. Even Lawrence realises that Paris does not offer the full range of identities available to women, and acknowledges that 'an ashram in India or on the sun-bleached coasts of Italy or amid the madness of Manhattan' might be more suitable venues for some to find their place in the world. (337).

France then offers multiple but not unlimited possibilities for self-projection and identification, but while these are an insistent theme in the Australian women's memoirs, there is very limited interest in the whole find-a-new-self-in-France project among the men's memoirs. Which brings us back to the question of this chapter: What's gender got to do with it? Why does an Australian woman need to go to France to remake herself? And why not an Australian man?

What's gender got to do with it?

Among the abundant memoirs by Australians of living in France, we find clear gender differences in both quantity and kind: not only are the memoirs authored predominantly by women, but gender relations and the imagination of gender identity are discussed and thematised far more in the women's memoirs than the men's. It appears that the emphasis on gender is part of the key to understanding the profusion and popularity of the memoirs. However, as noted in Chapter 2, we do not find a similar gender imbalance in the memoirs of France by authors from other Anglophone countries.

Several of the authors promote a view of France as feminine and of Paris in particular as a place for women. Sheryle Bagwell interprets this gendering as a carry-over from:

deep-seated and nebulous notions of national character that tended to label the French—and Europeans in general—as weak and effeminate, and Anglo-Saxons—and Americans in particular—as strong and macho. (2006, 213)

Bagwell cites stereotyping in the media that reinforces these images (cf. Fahey 2007); however, these notions of the masculinity and femininity of national cultures are perhaps less nebulous than she thinks. In fact, detailed historical analyses exist of the ways in which they have emerged, most notably in the case of Australia, where a chorus of cultural analyses identifies the elements underpinning the impression of Australia as more 'masculine' than European nations. Let us then pause in pondering the attraction of France for the Australian authors, and turn our gaze back to the southern hemisphere, to see what is specifically Australian about the thematisation of gender that appears in the memoirs. It is time to ask 'What's Australia got to do with it?'

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