

*Was Paris
Yesterday*
1925-1939

Janet Flanner

Edited by Irving Drutman

PARIS WAS YESTERDAY

1925-1939

JANET FLANNER

(G E N Ê T)

Edited by Irving Drutman

*For Daphne, who has her own
legend, with my greetings, to her
and her coming book Janet*

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"Murder in LeMans" and "Murder Among the Love Birds" originally appeared in *Vanity Fair*. "Mme. Lydia Stahl" and "Mata Hari" originally appeared in *Harper's Bazaar*. All other material originally appeared in *The New Yorker*.

Prefatory Note

The material in this volume has been selected mainly from Janet Flanner's fortnightly "Letter from Paris" in *The New Yorker*, which she started transmitting in October 1925, signed, then as now, with her *nom de correspondance*, Genêt. The period covered is from 1925 to 1939. Several chapters from *An American in Paris*, published in 1940, have also been included.

The original text has been slightly amended here and there to clarify topical allusions otherwise lost in time.

Where moved by memory, Janet Flanner has made occasional additional comments, which are set within brackets.

I.D.



At the time Janet Flanner arrived in Paris in the early 1920s and joined the Left Bank American literary colony there, any one of its members (who included Hemingway, Pound, Dos Passos, MacLeish, E. E. Cummings, Gertrude Stein, Kay Boyle, Hart Crane, Djuna Barnes, and the Scott Fitzgeralds) could be found at Les Deux Magots, "aspiring to become a famous writer as soon as possible."

Nineteen twenty-five was the year Miss Flanner began her own rise to fame. It was then, under the pen name "Genêt," that she started transmitting her fortnightly "Letter from Paris" to *The New Yorker*. Though her assignment was merely to report "what the French thought was going on in France," she slowly added her own special insight and taut analysis to what she saw, heard, and read, and soon developed a wholly original brand of journalistic foreign correspondence: precisely accurate, highly personal, colorful and ocularly descriptive; "the peculiar excellences of Miss Flanner's prose" (Glenway Wescott) have since illumined French life from *crime passionnel* to vernissage, from Montparnasse to the Chamber of Deputies, from Lindbergh's triumph to the lurid intricacies of the *Stavisky affaire*.

"Modern art," she wrote in 1926, "supposedly painted only to annoy the bourgeois, succeeded finally in annoying the artists assembled for the Quinn auction." A 1939 article entitled "Tourist" began with equally enlightened aplomb: "The late Jean De Koven was an average American tourist in Paris but

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(Continued from front flap)

for two exceptions. She never set foot in the Opéra, and she was murdered."

Genêt wrote in that first decade and a half for the most part in short takes (her way with an obituary is mordant, witty, appreciative—somehow always perfect), but the over-all effect is of a huge and stunning pointillist canvas, capturing unforgettably the whole era from Josephine Baker's Paris debut to the sirens wailing at the outbreak of war. ("... no one alive today can know which side's dead men will win the war," she wrote in February 1939. "The setup in Europe today is a struggle between the active and the passive. Everything else . . . is simply a trimming.")

With an introductory reminiscence and textual annotations by Janet Flanner, and illustrated with New Yorker spot drawings, Irving Drutman's selection of her "Letter from Paris" columns here makes *Paris Was Yesterday* a worthy predecessor in time, and successor in publication, to the National Book Award-winning *Paris Journal 1944-1965* and the recently published *Paris Journal 1965-1971*.

JANET FLANNER was born in Indianapolis, attended the University of Chicago, and went to Europe in 1921, where she has lived ever since, mostly in Paris. The author of *The Cubicle City* (a novel), *An American in Paris* (a collection of New Yorker profiles), *Pétain: The Old Man of France*, and *Men and Monuments* (art monographs), she has also translated books from the French, including two by Colette. A member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, Miss Flanner received an honorary Doctor of Literature degree from Smith College in 1958 and has also been decorated with the Legion of Honor.

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John D. Schiff



Michael de Lisio's terra-cotta sculpture of Janet Flanner at a Paris costume party, circa 1929. She wears Sir Bache Cunard's top hat, to which are attached two masks.

Jill Krementz



Janet Flanner in New York, 1972

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