

French Affair, A: The Paris Beat 1965-1998 (平装)



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Mary Blume brings her insight, humor, and unique perspective to bear on the French--their leaders, their cars, their museums, and more--in this collection of 66 essays from her "International Herald Tribune" columns over the past 33 years. 11 line drawings. 4 photos.

Even the most dedicated expat rarely manages to completely fit into an adopted foreign culture. It's precisely this quality that allows American Mary Blume to so thoughtfully observe and record Paris, the city that's served as her home for over three decades, though its ways may still mystify her. In *A French Affair*--a collection of essays published in the *International Herald Tribune*--the columnist deftly captures the quirks and changes that are visible only to those who live in France, though they may be most interesting to those who don't.

In these commentaries--ranging from the opening of invention conventions to the mire of bureaucracy that accompanies the naming of a street (which may only be named

after dead people, preferably deceased for at least 15 years)--Blume unveils the French quest for perfection in a world that's perfectly imperfect because of French design, and how the logic of Descartes's descendents--regarding such points as grammar--is sometimes extreme to the point of being irrational. She captures trends, from the fashionable la ratte potato to the metric system. She records notable moments---the death of a designer, the opening of a charm school for men--and notable people, such as Renoir's jet-setting son and Simone de Beauvoir. Of course, this being a book about France, Blume occasionally delves into food, be it the inner workings of a soup kitchen or the launching of cooking classes taught by royalty. With these witty and insightful short snippets, Blume provides small, crystal-clear windows into true French life--a rare accomplishment from an expatriate or a native.

--Melissa Rossi

Blume, an International Herald Tribune columnist, lived in Paris for more than three decades, during which these columns were written. In total, these snippets of life in Paris present the city in all its complexity. Her portrayals bring to mind Sanche de Gramont, who in his classic *The French* (1969) forever brush-stroked Parisians in a grating cultural study. Blume, though, is a more concise de Gramont (succinctness, of course, is forced upon her by the discipline of her craft) and also a more sympathetic one. Her focus rests on such items as the first Parisian charm school for boys, the last old-time soup kitchen in Paris (when one customer was offered a Gauloise cigarette, which he turned down, saying he only smoked Marlboros!), or Mouna, an "acrobat of ideas" who is trying to turn the Luxembourg Gardens into another Hyde Park Speaker's Corner. These and 58 other essays and reviews offer sweeping insights from both Blume's outsider status as an American and her insider status as a three-decades resident. Illustrated with witty and stylish cartoons by Ronald Searle.

Allen Weakland

Blume has lived in France for over three decades. Here is a collection of 61 of her International Herald Tribune columns, which includes commentary on French social and cultural life and profiles of writers and film directors. She describes, among other things, a museum built in honor of the bearded lady of Thaon, Clementine Delait; a street still waiting to be named; and an uprising led by the regulars of a restaurant who do not want things to change under the new management. All of which read like absurdist comedy. Illustrations by Ronald Searle enhance the irreverent and perceptive text. These essays give us an insider's view of things quintessentially French, but a collection of columns, by nature, tends to be dated. Not an essential purchase.

ARavi Shenoy, Hinsdale P.L., IL

A collection of essays on life in France, by an American who's lived there since 1965. Everyone who's ever been there, as well as some who haven't, has an opinion to offer about France. If one goes by the number of books published about France in the United States, Americans, in particular, seem fascinated with the French way of life. Perhaps it's the sophistication of the French, their seemingly effortless sense of style. Maybe it's the food, or the wine, or the language, or the art. Or maybe, as Mary Blume so aptly demonstrates in the title of her book, a visit to France is like a love affair, remembered accordingly with regret, with affection, with passion, frustration, or disgust. The essays in this collection were written over the course of Blume's thirty years as a columnist at the International Herald Tribune, and offer a welcome perspective that of an American who, while intimately familiar with France (and in particular with Paris), remains enough of an outsider to comment clearly and honestly

on what she sees. The book is assembled in three sections. It opens with ``Paris France," which includes diverse commentary on the people, places, and customs of the city; continues with ``Rites and Rules," which illustrates some of the country's idiosyncrasies; then concludes with ``Words and Images," in which the author expands her geographical area of reference in interviews with some of Europe's most celebrated artists, writers, photographers, and filmmakers. Blume is a gifted journalist who sits back and lets her subjects describe themselves; in this way she evokes some marvelous responses from, for instance, Marguerite Duras, who says, in inimitably French fashion: ``I have a certain idea of myself. One can call it pretentious, I don't care. It's what I think." Ronald Searle's whimsical drawings, interspersed throughout, are a perfect complement to Blume's observations. Francophile seeks affair, for short or long-term? This book meets all requirements.

Jane Kramer European correspondent, The New Yorker Mary Blume writes like an angel and thinks like a devil -- which the French will tell you is the hallmark of a civilized mind. Reading Blume, I like to imagine Montaigne or Montesquieu curled up somewhere with the same story and a glass of, say, Diamond Creek cabernet, savoring both, trusting both, enchanted to discover that the new world of their dark and most exotic fantasies had finally produced such remarkably kindred clarity and style. Blume is the one American writing in Paris who comes anywhere close to the great essayist tradition that once defined the culture but that most native Parisians have in fact lost -- one that proceeds from wit, wisdom, erudition, and above all from an understanding that the deepest ironies are gentle, and amount to an embrace that includes us all, in our folly, faults, and poignant, blundering affectation.

"America and France have always had a special relationship. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the two have enjoyed a love affair of sorts, with all the love/hate dynamics that suggests. From Benjamin Franklin charming Louis XVI to Jackie Kennedy enchanting Charles de Gaulle, the two peoples have fascinated and repelled each other. Mary Blume has cultivated her own love affair with this often inscrutable land - France."--BOOK JACKET. "Quintessentially American, she has managed that fine trick of not assimilating, and yet coming to know, in the fullest sense, the place and the people in all their often sublime and sometimes ridiculous complexity. In the pieces themselves, whether she turns her penetrating lens on Frenchmen or their money or their socks, whether a bearded lady or Simone de Beauvoir, street performers or members of the Academie Francaise, whether the newest chic potato or the eternally chic St. Germain de Pres, whether the events of May '68 or the last presidential elections, she sees what would pass unseen - were she not there to notice it."

--BOOK JACKET.

Mary Blume is a columnist at the International Herald Tribune and the author of Cte d'Azur: Inventing the French Riviera.

length: (cm)21.4 width:(cm) 13.7

作者介绍:

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