

Book Reviews

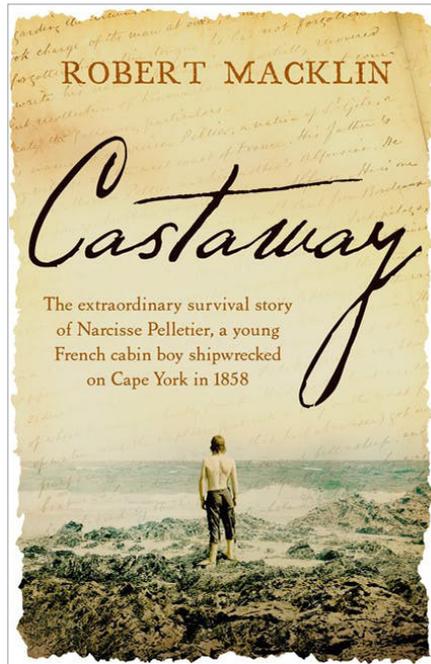
Robert Macklin, *Castaway: The extraordinary survival story of Narcisse Pelletier, a young French cabin boy shipwrecked on Cape York in 1858*, Sydney, Hachette Australia, June 2019, 336 pp., rrp AU\$ 32.99, ISBN 978-0-73363-849-7.

This is not the first book to have been written about Narcisse Pelletier and the seventeen years he spent with the Night Island (Utaalnganu) people in Far North Queensland, after being shipwrecked as a fourteen-year-old French cabin boy. In 2009 Stephanie Anderson's historical work, *Pelletier: The Forgotten Castaway of Cape York*, was published. It consisted primarily of a translation of Pelletier's story, as told by him to Constant Merland on his return to France in 1875 and published one year later. In 2013 François Garde's fictionalised account of the same story was published in French and translated into English by Aneesa Abbas Higgins in 2015. Robert Macklin's version sits comfortably between the two genres.

While drawing heavily on the information provided by Anderson and extensive other academic and archival resources, Macklin has managed to create a ripping yarn that is as close to factual as he has been able to ascertain. He has achieved a balance by combining meticulous research with evocative and imaginative descriptions. More than once I found myself simply admiring the beauty of the writing and the way I could instantly picture myself in the setting, whether at sea as a young Narcisse, in the middle of a Frontier War, or hunting dugong with the Night Islanders. Macklin's use of French and the local language throughout the narrative helps to create a strong sense of place and culture, and some well-chosen photographs firmly anchor this adventure story in reality.

The book opens with Narcisse's departure from France, his life on board as a cabin boy, the story of the shipwreck and how he came to be abandoned on Cape York in 1858. Part Two presents a potted history of early Australia through to the exploration and arrival of the Europeans. The book follows this structure throughout, alternating Narcisse's story with the Queensland

Frontier Wars to great effect. Australia's shameful and appalling treatment of the Aboriginal populations during colonisation clashes shockingly with the kindness shown to Narcisse by the Utaalnganu people who took him in. Macklin recounts the violent conflicts between Indigenous Australians and the white settlers as the latter push further north to take more land. At the same time, his detailed descriptions reveal the complexity of these historical events, with corruption, brutality, resistance, and alliances on all sides.



Narcisse gradually becomes Amglo as he adopts his Night Islander identity. From his early struggles with the language and culture of his rescuers, we follow his progress as he learns to hunt, develops friendships, starts to understand totems and the complex kinship system, learns the local language and takes part in various tribal rituals, including initiation. His status as an Utaalnganu man now confirmed, he goes on to have three wives and two children during his seventeen years there. Amglo's forced 'rescue' by Captain Joseph Frazer and his return to his village of Saint-Gilles in France via Sydney, Noumea and Paris, is a sorry end to this story.

We feel for Narcisse's confusion as his thoughts turn to France and his family on the return journey, and as the French language slowly starts to come back—'though at times the language of the Night Islanders stood like fierce *gendarmes* between his brain and his mouth' (p. 260). Amglo transitions back to Amglo/Narcisse and finally to Narcisse/Amglo, but never fully back to just Narcisse. He marries once more, then ends his days as a lighthouse keeper and a clerk at Saint-Nazaire, where he can stare across the ocean and dream of his previous life, until his death in 1894 aged just fifty.

In his opening Author's Note, Macklin explains how he came to write *Castaway* and how he went about writing it. He makes it clear that his desire was, as far as possible, to reveal the truth about Aboriginal society in Far North Queensland at that time and to reveal the white settlers' desire to eradicate them. With this final book in his Australian History Quartet, Macklin achieves his overall aim to further our understanding of First Australians, and does it in a way that honours the quotation at the beginning of the book: 'The imagination is the power to disimprison the soul of fact' (attributed to Samuel Taylor Coleridge).

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Acknowledgement

I had the good fortune to meet Robert Macklin, quite fittingly, on a boat trip in the Kimberley during 2018, when *Castaway* was almost finished. My interest in the project was both personal and professional, and I am delighted to have seen the book come to fruition. We were therefore very pleased to have been able to welcome Robert in conversation with Elaine Lewis, co-editor of *The French Australian Review*, at The Melbourne Salon in August 2019 (see note in *French Australian Review* N° 67). Readers may also like to listen to the podcast of Robert's interview about the book on SBS French Radio (in English) at <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/robert-macklin-castaway>.

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(Eds: See also Stephanie Anderson's article on Garde's book:
<http://www.sogip.ehess.fr/spip.php?article421&lang=fr>)



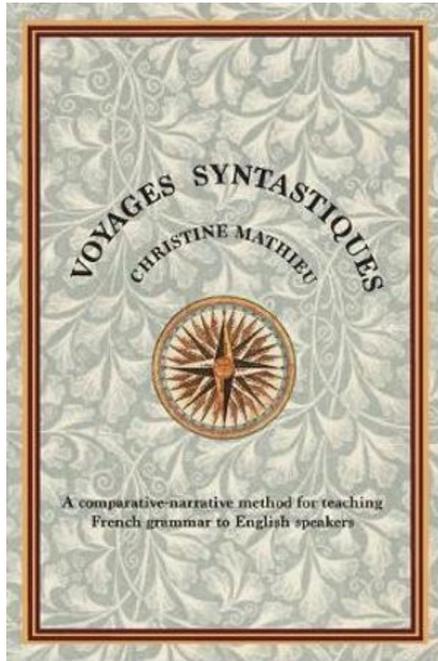
Christine Mathieu, *Voyages Syntastiques: A Comparative-narrative Method for Teaching French Grammar to English Speakers*, Kyneton, Littlefox Press, October 2019, 309 pp., rrp AU\$ 60.50, ISBN 978-0-64808-385-6.

In *Voyages Syntastiques*, Christine Mathieu reflects on the nature of language and language acquisition whilst advocating for the use of a comparative-narrative approach to the teaching and learning of French in Australian compulsory schools. Her leading argument is that the explicit teaching of grammar based on critical reflection on the nature of language and its links to cognition and culture is best suited to engage students in meaningful language learning directed towards personal, social, economic and linguistic/cultural empowerment.

The book draws amply and convincingly on the author's rich experience as both a learner and teacher of several languages. It is an innovative and refreshing book in that it closely weaves together theory and reflective narrative, thereby building a rationale for the author's proposed approach to teaching foreign languages.

Voyage Syntastiques is divided into two parts, together comprising nine chapters. The four chapters in 'book one' offer a selective review of the literature on the nature of language, language teaching and language

acquisition as well as an overview of what the author means by ‘comparative-narrative’ instruction. In ‘book two’, over the remaining five chapters, the author maps out the teaching of French grammar essentials based on her suggested method.



In book one, Mathieu’s selected literature involves a critique of Krashen’s Natural Method against which she demarks her main argument. She recognises value in Krashen’s positioning that genuine and meaningful communication is key to student successful engagement in language learning. However, the author laments the shortcomings of the Natural Method based on her own experience of teaching languages. That experience has shown her the need to teach grammar explicitly, and from a comparative perspective, in order to empower students to speak and write meaningfully. The main strength of the book is that it is based on the author’s experiential language teaching. A very welcome initiative given that the gaps between the field of Language Education/Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories versus the actual practice of teaching languages is an on-going and unresolved issue.

Nevertheless, as an applied linguist and language teacher myself, I would have welcomed a discussion on not only leading concepts in foreign language education/SLA literature, but also concepts which have forced me, as a language teacher, to review my practice. For instance, the notion of ‘interlanguage’, first put forward by Selinker (1972) whereby language learners construct the foreign language they are learning as one assembles pieces of a puzzle in order to create, in their own time and terms, meaning that makes sense, is very useful. Pienemann’s (1998) ‘Processability theory’, based on the notion that learners can only produce syntax they are able to process is also most useful in guiding one’s practice, including dealing with errors. Both the concepts of interlanguage and processability theory put the learner at the centre of language acquisition, assisted but not driven by the teacher.

Mathieu’s critique of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) throughout the book is very valuable as it comes from a practitioner’s perspective. However, it seldom acknowledges the work of scholars who in the past have unveiled the limitations of CLT, calling for the inclusion of more reflective grammar learning and of the role of culture in language. For example, Krashen’s (1993) seminal work in *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* redrew the boundaries of foreign language learning for generations to come, giving it the high educational objective it deserves as a vehicle for understanding the workings of language and culture in human interactions and society at large.

In Europe, post CLT, leading authors in the field of foreign language education such as Byram (1996) and Risager (2006) have argued for the inclusion of an intercultural perspective in language learning. That perspective involves departing from CLT or at least extending it to include critical reflection on the nature of language (including grammar) and culture. In Australia, ‘Intercultural Language Teaching’ (ILT) as first coined by Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet (1999), and further developed by Liddicoat & Scarino (2013), positions *language* as a dynamic system of meaning-making which students have to learn to interpret in various and changing cultural contexts. Critical reflexion on the nature of language and culture is core to intercultural language teaching and learning, a stance (rather than a new method) now well established in the Australian languages curriculum for compulsory schools.

Mathieu's discussion on the links between language and culture, particularly in chapter IV, could have been enriched by references to branches of Discourse Analysis. For example: Contrastive Rhetoric (see Connor et al., 2008) which helps see the cultural and intercultural nature of discourse structures, and Wierzbicka's (1988) 'ethnosyntax theory' which is also helpful in understanding the interface between grammar and culture.

As suggested by McNamara (2008), in a very practically oriented field such as language education, it is easy to forget the enduring relevance of theoretical perspectives, from the past and current times, which support language education of a higher order as Mathieu's comparative-narrative method proposes. Essentially, this method is a call for reflective grammar learning anchored in a comparative analysis between the target language and the learners' first or common language, in this case English.

Teachers of French will find the author's mapping of the essentials of French grammar based on her comparative-narrative perspective very useful though not always new. Throughout the discussion of these essentials we keep hearing the author's teaching voice emanating from her rich experience of classroom practice. This, as previously stated, is the book's main strength.

Voyages Syntastiques is a stimulating read which is sure to achieve its aim of inspiring language teachers to dare to embark on less travelled paths. The author succeeds in demonstrating that, fundamentally, language learning and teaching are a matter of mind, heart and spirit coming together to create new possibilities for understanding the world and self.

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Jayne Tuttle, *Paris or Die: A Memoir*, Melbourne, Hardie Grant Books, December 2019, 249 pp., rrp AU\$ 32.99, ISBN 978-1-74117-674-2.

Jayne Tuttle first went to Paris when she abandoned her Honours Year after being dumped by her then boyfriend. She was studying French—because she hadn't known what else to do, and Paris called. She worked as an au pair, living in the maid's room on the top floor of her employers' apartment building. Then her employers decided to move to Switzerland; her tourist visa was about to run out and she was running out of money. So the Paris adventure came to an end.

Back in Australia she decided she wanted to be an actor, went to drama school and then found herself in the competitive world of trying to get acting jobs. Paris started calling her again, but how remote it was. How expensive. She could never afford the fees for the Jacques Lecoq School, let alone the cost of living in Paris.

Fate intervened. Tuttle received a French Government two-year grant to attend the Jacques Lecoq International Theatre School. School fees

were covered, a monthly allowance would be paid and she would have accommodation at the Centre des Récollets, an old monastery near the School.

Jayne Tuttle's memoir of the next two years of her life in Paris is lively, witty and infused with the enthusiasm and insouciance of youth. She grabs hold of life, eager to experience it all. She makes deep friendships, she falls in love with a Frenchman, they have passionate sex, but struggle to see into each other's soul.

The school and the daily classes provide the rhythm to her life. Then there are many boozy nights with friends and her fellow students at the bars and cheap restaurants along the Canal St Martin. The relationship with the Frenchman—she calls him Adrien—develops. He introduces her to some of his friends, as well as to his mother.

This is a book that is as much about life in general as it is about life in Paris. How does she come to terms with her own identity in a city where she keeps running up against a sense of cultural dislocation? How did the smile in her voice mean that someone could immediately understand that she is not French when she speaks? French people don't have smiles in their voices, but does she really want to change that? Can she ever control her impulsive behaviour, be more restrained like Adrien's friends? Still she desperately wants to stay in Paris.

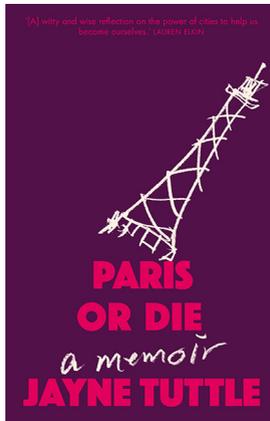
I want to stay here, where the trees change. Where it snows. Where nobody wears helmets or obeys the road rules. Where killing yourself by smoking is a fact of life, where being an intermittent actor is a normal job. Where being alone isn't lonely anymore, where I can just walk and walk and look at things and come home feeling full on life, like I've gorged myself just from looking. [...] Where bookbinders and buttonmakers and violin-shapers still work away quietly in their shops, where Sundays are still Sundays and the city is calm. Where some days I dress up for the city and not for anybody else, put lipstick on for her, some eyeshadow, my nicest shoes, and just walk in her. [...] Where I feel more alive than ever before.

How those feelings resonate with me, and surely with so many others, who have lived in Paris for any length of time.

Who are we when we live in another culture? Do we change or does it allow us to become ourselves? What happens when a fierce and burning physical passion comes up against the solid rock of different social and cultural expectations? And underlying all of this is the question: is it possible to run away from loss?

The author trips lightly over all these questions, but they are all there in the silences, in the departures of friends, as she lies in bed at night, in her desperate need to stay in Paris.

This is a very optimistic book. It is fun, racy and at times gut-wrenchingly moving. Jayne Tuttle has a vivid writing style and she captures Paris in its beauty and ugliness.



Since the period described in this memoir, Jayne Tuttle has spent ten years going back and forth to Paris. Her (Australian) husband is a musician and he was able to work there as she did, writing and working in the advertising industry. When a daughter came along they had a third person's needs to listen to and during one of their six-monthly stints in Paris, she decided she really wanted to live in Australia 'for good'. Jayne and her husband bought a bookshop; they have settled 'at least for now' (*The Guardian* 23 December, 2019). I wish them well.

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