



CULTURAL SERVICES
FRENCH EMBASSY
IN THE UNITED STATES

France Honors Jeanine Parisier Plottel



On Monday, December 17, Gérard Araud, Ambassador of France to the United States, presented Jeanine Parisier Plottel with the insignia of Chevalier of the Legion of Honor during a ceremony at the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York City. The Ambassador's remarks are below.

It is a privilege for me to welcome you all tonight on this very special occasion as we gather here to bestow the Legion of Honor upon Jeanine Parisier Plottel, a distinguished scholar, acclaimed professor, and admirable patron of French arts and literature.

Dear Jeanine,

In 1960, your Ph.D. thesis on Paul Valéry's dialogues was published as a book by the prestigious Presses Universitaires de France. Even though your academic pedigree was already pretty impeccable at the time, how could you have guessed that in 2018 you would join said Valéry among the ranks of France's highest order?

A consummate dix-neuviémiste and especially vingtiémiste, not only have you brilliantly pored over France's greatest – Mallarmé, Duras, and Raymond Roussel who seems to be a personal favorite – you are also an integral part of that fascinating generation of brilliant scholars about whom I have no doubt thousands of books will also be written. You were very close to Michel Riffaterre – Mike, as you endearingly called him – Monique Wittig and Mary McCarthy, and the beautiful, heartfelt texts you've arranged in their honor demonstrate that you're not only a bright mind, but also an admirable friend.

But tonight is your time to be praised, and although I can hardly compete with your way with words, I'll do my best to pay tribute to your outstanding career and achievements.

You were born in Paris to Léa, a dentist, and Maurice (Parisier), an engineer (he too, in fact, would become a chevalier of the Légion d'honneur). Your family fled war-time terrors when you were a young child. Once in New York, you pursued a brilliant education, first at the Lycée Français then on to Barnard College for your B.A. and then Columbia for your M.A. and Ph.D. in French Literature – what's more, with distinction. Your career in academia was highly promising, and has indeed provided you with incredible opportunities and high responsibilities – and you've always proved up to the task.

Upon completing your Ph.D., you lectured at CUNY's City College for a year, before teaching at Juilliard School of Music. In 1965, you went back to CUNY, this time to Hunter College — and you were there to stay, to say the least! Your loyalty and dedication to the institution is admirable, and along with your prolific publications and brilliant lectures it makes you a respected key figure of New York's intellectual scene. At Hunter, you've successively been the Director of Language Laboratories, Chairperson of the Department of Romance Languages, while being promoted to the Holy Grail of academia, that much-esteemed title of “Professor”. You also taught in the French Doctoral Program at the CUNY Grad Center, where you directed the 20th Century Conference for no less than 14 years.

Needless to say you contributed immensely to the university's prestige. First of all, of course, through the high quality of your teaching and research, as evidenced by your rank of honorary life member of the MLA. You're the founding editor, publisher, and a contributor to the New York Literary Forum, and have written numerous books on French and Comparative Literature, regularly presenting your research in the United States and abroad. For the quality of your work, you were awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, as well as many prizes

from CUNY. Your substantial, thorough analyses range from Balzac and Proust to Camus' intertextual strategies, encompassing occupied France, Surrealism, and more recently Houellebecq in connection with the 21st-century Zeitgeist. Just for the sake of tongue-twisting virtuosity, I won't fail to mention "Semioschizocomicobuttonanalysis", a chapter you wrote for a collective book on new perspectives on intertextuality.

You've brought great minds to your university and college, thanks to your impressive experience in organizing colloquiums, conferences, and lecture series, while raising funds for such programs. You notably obtained funding from the Florence Gould Foundation, enabling you to organize an international colloquium on Mallarmé held at Hunter College and City University's Graduate School and University Center, which was accompanied by a Hunter College Leubsdorf Art Gallery exhibition. Suffice it to say that it's not your habit to do things half-heartedly! Among your numerous accomplishments, I'll mention a colloquium celebrating the 300th anniversary of Jean de la Fontaine, a Quebec Film Festival, and help with the funding of the Academy Award-winning Hotel Terminus, Marcel Ophuls' praised documentary. You brought the most influential thinkers to CUNY, such as your dear friend Monique Wittig, who dazzled your colleagues and would swing by your office to make sure you watered your plants properly.

Not only were you a dynamic researcher dedicated to sharing and promoting French Literature, you also took on administrative duties to assist with college and university affairs. Your commitment to quality education and academic freedom makes you an invaluable asset to the United States, and a worthy embodiment of French educational values. It is these aspirations that guided you as you directed the New York State Conference of the American Association of University Professors, wishing to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education, and ensure higher education's contribution to the common good.

What's more, for ten years you served as the elected Chairperson of the Department of Romance Languages at Hunter College - the largest language department in New York. A skillful, versatile scholar, you considerably enriched and facilitated the life of students and faculty, managing budgets, hiring personnel, setting curriculum policy, supervising teaching and representing the department in the college and the community. For all of these reasons, CUNY is lucky, and I can imagine very proud, to have you.

The same goes for France, whose prestige you considerably enhanced here in New York. Your passion for French Literature is equaled only by your generosity in fostering it. In 1996, you joined the committee of FACSEA, which later evolved into the French-American Cultural Exchange, a nonprofit organization and key partner of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, striving to expand French-American dialogue in the arts, education and cultural exchange. After twenty years of unfailing commitment pointing once again to your integrity and thoughtful devotion, you were appointed to the Board of Trustees. You notably helped develop French Voices, our program promoting literary translation from French to English. No fewer than 117 books, accounting for the diversity and relevance of contemporary French and Francophone literature, benefited from your literary expertise and yearly donations. You have been a loyal member of the Advisory Board to the Columbia University Maison Française and Department of French for several decades. You have faithfully served your alma mater, Barnard College, as a trustee.

Your support for French arts and culture is manifold. In 2008, you created the Prix Plottel with your husband Roland Plottel, an award bestowed by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres to encourage high-quality works in Classics. Through this generous initiative, you've assisted such innovative projects as the digitization of the corpus of physicians of Antiquity, Imperial Roman minting and the promotion of Latin and Greek in secondary education.

Jeanine, France presented you with the rank of Officer of the Order of Academic Palms in 1998. Tonight, the truly outstanding caliber and commitment of your dedication to French Literature, and your dedication to French and American education, call for a renewed and justified celebration of your career path. In your tribute to Michel Riffaterre, you called him *un grand professeur*, emphasizing his hard work, brilliance and amazing presence. I think we can apply the same phrase to you, since the sustained quality of your work, your long-standing dedication, and your sense of community all make you a formidable intellectual – not only French, but profoundly bicultural. And thus, it is my absolute honor to count you among the worthy ambassadors of French arts and culture here in the United States, and to bestow this medal upon you.

Jeanine Parisier Plottel, au nom du Président de la République, et en vertu des pouvoirs qui nous sont conférés, nous vous faisons Chevalier de l'Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur.

(Source : <http://frenchculture.org/awards/9273-france-honors-jeanine-parisier-plottel>)