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CHAPTER THREE
The Striptease at the Dead Heart of Douglas Kennedy’s *Piège nuptial*,
Or How to be a bit French around the Edges

ALISTAIR ROLLS

The nature of the paratext is to lend itself to and to facilitate ambivalence. Its own identity is to be always already double, an emblem of self-alterity. For Gérard Genette, the paratextual elements of a text are those which transform a manuscript into a book, an object to be presented to a reader.¹ Such a privileging of the book as artefact over the text as site of production may seem opposed to a deconstructionist agenda. Indeed, Derrida himself sees the book as a limiting structure; it is the physical constriction of the text: “[A]s I understand it [...] the text is not the book, it is not confined in a volume itself confined to the library.”² For Derrida, then, it is the nature of text to extend beyond itself, into the contextualization provided by the reader; this is how the text seeks out its differentiation from self. This positing of the text as always also beyond itself is the very essence of deconstruction, it allows Derrida to declare, for example, that “there is nothing outside the text [il n’y a pas de hors-texte]”, by which he means precisely that “there is nothing outside context”.³

At face value, Genette’s work on the paratext could not be more different: it accentuates the disconnection, drawing up a taxonomy of the many layers of the book that separate the text from its reading context. And yet, Genette himself, in the dermal layers of his own seminal work on the paratext, admits the inversion of this principle via the parasitism of deconstruction: the second (and first substantive) footnote on the first page of *Seuils* is to none other than J. Hillis Miller, one of the Yale School’s high priests of deconstructionist analysis.⁴ If Genette’s own insertion of this footnote into the very skin of his own work is designed to inoculate it against infection with “the critic as host”, he must also be aware of the danger of contracting the disease of para’s polysemy; it is, after all, a “double antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority”.⁵ With this in mind, we can see how these same paratextual elements—the cover, epigraph and, we should add, the opening and closing dermal layers of the diegesis proper (which term is obviously thrown into question by the duality of the paratext as inside and outside the text)—also serve to transform Derrida’s book, or the literary work in Roland Barthes’s sense,⁶ into an object whose potentiality for meaning-making is immanent, into a text, an immanent-transcendent space in which virtual meaning is actualized by the reader—or contextualized, to draw on Derrida’s schema—as an instance of meaning production or

⁴ Genette (1987), fn. 2, p. 7. Our use of the term ‘dermal layers’ here refers to the opening and concluding sections of a text, which fit less obviously into Genette’s classification of the paratext but which serve to predispose the diegesis to certain reading praxes.
⁶ In the present chapter we shall draw on Barthes’s work on myth, but it will be clear to readers that our understanding of text is informed by the distinction between the readerly and the writerly text that he sets up in *S/Z* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973).
reading. The paratext is therefore exemplary of that osmotic tendency of textual meaning to cross the borders between one text and another (intertextuality, as developed by Julia Kristeva), and a text and its context (paratextuality, as classified by Genette and examined here). It is the liminal space in a text, or book, which can thus be seen to function metonymically as that part of a text that draws attention to the entirety of that text, or book, whose identity is predicated on the co-dependence of immanence and transcendence, construction and deconstruction.

In Douglas Kennedy’s *The Dead Heart*, identity is something that both lies in the centre and at the edges. That is to say that the centre calls out to the reader, seducing her into stepping across the threshold, almost against her will, to confront the absence of the textual centre and to fill it with meaning. For, while Kennedy’s text is not quantitatively absent as in the case of Paul Fournel’s *Banlieue* (see Gascoigne, above), its centre, or plotline proper, is distinctly, and we should argue self-referentially, lacking in literary quality compared with the thriller-like staging of its premise (and this desertion on the part of the novel also, of course, maps neatly onto the desert centre of the Australian continent). This seduction, typical of such modernist forms as the novel-as-diary that present themselves as painful only to encourage a reader to adventure into the text more actively, as discoverer-producers rather than passive consumers of meaning, functions in Kennedy’s novel most obviously on the threshold of the text, and for good reason—the novel is set in the desert centre of a country whose population is almost entirely coastal and thus located on a peripheral strip that presents something of a paradox: it is the most densely populated, and increasingly the most iconic, site of Australianness; and at the same time it is a limen where Australia transitions into non-Australian territory. In the case of this, Douglas Kennedy’s first novel, the bridging of the gap between the outermost limits of the text and (the concept of) its dead centre is a mercilessly driven marketing strategy. And this is especially the case in France, where Kennedy has done all he can to pass for an indigenous author, which is to say that the marketing of his texts in France appears to skew, even eschew, his identity as American in Paris, instead revelling in his apparently universal rootlessness, which sees him equally at home in Paris, Berlin, London or Maine but, most particularly, in travel. In other words, Kennedy is keen to market himself as an author in transit; as such, he is himself always already in translation and thus quite pointedly part of the paratexual apparatus of his works. Indeed, the deluxe version of the latest French translation of *The Dead Heart*, *Piège nuptial* (2008), comes with a DVD-of-the-book, which is rather appropriately dubbed into French; that is to say that the original English of Kennedy’s lengthy soliloquy is overlaid with a French translation such that a double soundtrack is created: the original and translated soundtracks simultaneously produce a double meaning in a cacophony that is, ultimately, rather difficult for either the Anglophone or Francophone viewer to understand. Best of all, the DVD-of-the-book turns out to have nothing specific to say about the book, other than a brief introductory passage about the virtues of travel in an unknown, barren land; it is, rather, a DVD-as-reading-of-the-book, an oblique interpretation suggesting that *Piège nuptial* is both itself and not itself (just as it is a film that is both about and not about the book that it accompanies), both translation and original at the same time.

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7 Douglas Kennedy, *The Dead Heart* (London: Abacus, 1995 [2009]). The novel was first published in London in 1994 by Little, Brown and Company. The novel was first translated as *Cul-de-sac* into French by Catherine Cheval for Gallimard’s Série Noire, in which it appeared in January 1997. It was subsequently retranslated by Bernard Cohen as *Piège nuptial*, in which form it was published in Paris by Belfond in 2008. For more details on the novel’s French odyssey, see the following chapter of the present volume.

8 *Douglas Kennedy ou l’Éloge de la fuite* was directed by Armelle Brusq for L’Envol-Arte in 2008. A DVD of this film is included in the deluxe 2008 edition of *Piège nuptial*. 

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The film itself is a rather wonderful display of self-reflexive authorliness, as Kennedy moves from one shot (in Maine) to another (in Paris) without ever really saying anything about his books or doing anything other than drink coffee. As mentioned, this is a celebration and marketing of the absence of fixed identity and, ultimately, the absence of writing. And while Kennedy flits from city to city, talking about and around writing, he wishes to make it known that his rootlessness is, perversely, nowhere more grounded than in France, where unlike so many other Anglo-Saxon authors who have had more success there than ‘back home’, he really is a French author (cut to said author ostentatiously ‘doing writing’ in the Métro and then at the Opéra). In another interview, Kennedy, for whom travelling across Australia is the ultimate way of getting in touch with one’s self (as translation), suggests that when writing a thriller “on crée son propre cul-de-sac”. Cul-de-sac is, incidentally, the title of the first French translation of The Dead Heart. We might suggest therefore that this title represents the French translation of Kennedy’s admission that he was finding himself as an author with this first novel. Its absence has since been filled by his success, and the new translation can perhaps be seen to take his experimental Frenchness to the level of a more genuine at-home-ness in his favourite place to be read and to be seen to be writing.

As we shall see, The Dead Heart is predicated on the opposition of a ‘surface tension’ and a central core that is relatively lacking in substance. This plays out in the transition from a hard-boiled beginning is the highly charged double space of Darwin into the simple conceit and rather one-dimensional plot of the central desert. It is tempting to read Kennedy’s emergence as an author (and marketing phenomenon) through the lens of this same transition: the premise (and promise) of the thriller tradition that gives way to a lack of substance. Arguably, the initial French translation of the novel as Cul-de-sac, with its stylized us of noir language, further highlights the (highly marketable) thriller-like beginning of the novel, which then carries the novel. As Vuaille-Barcan will demonstrate below, once the substance of the author has grown, compensating for the inadequacies of the debut novel, which—paradoxically—made his name, the new translation, as Piège nuptial, shifts in tone away from the polar towards the more neutral voice, and nobler tradition, of ‘literature’.

As Brian Nelson has demonstrated, literary translation is always an interpretative act. In light of this, Kennedy’s re-translation into French can be read as a highly reflexive recuperation of this interpretative act on the part of the author and marketers of The Dead Heart. And, of course, nowhere is this double motion of text-becoming-book-becoming-text more clearly marketed than in the paratext. In this section of the present volume, therefore, we aim to respond to a question raised by Genette, almost as an afterthought, in the concluding dermal layer of Seuils, where he ponders the place of translation within his paratextual schema. In other words, by moving from the first to the last page of Genette’s discussion of the paratext, we aim, paratextually, to deconstruct Douglas Kennedy’s The Dead Heart through the parasitic absence-presence of its French (re-)translation. Whether or not we can get to the heart of the issues of identity posed by this phenomenon (Kennedy’s identity as author, text and marketed product), we shall at least lend a critical frame to a question that so many French readers must be posing about this author: “Ne serait-il pas un peu français sur les bords ?”

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11 Of the three paratextual practices that Genette admits to having left out of Seuils, the first is translation (the other two are serialization and illustration): “La première est la traduction, en particulier lorsqu’elle est plus ou moins revue ou contrôlée par l’auteur…” Genette (1987), p. 373 (original emphasis).
But before we examine the paratextual trappings of this second translation into French of Kennedy’s journey away from and back to the edge of Australia, we shall consider the latest avatar of the English ‘original’. The 2009 edition of The Dead Heart reflects the relatively newfound fame of the author ‘back home’, in his mother tongue: almost all the specific Australianness of the novel, which previous editions of the novel had celebrated with tourist-brochure-style images of road signs displaying stylized kangaroos, is discarded in favour of conformity to a series that is recognizable first and foremost as ‘Kennedy’. The outback becomes very much background in this new cover; in the foreground, as on the other novels in this series, is an unashamedly photoshopped image of a young woman, seen from behind in this case. (The rear flap shows two other novels by Kennedy, The Big Picture and The Job, both of which have a young woman on the front cover, seen from behind and from the side, her face obscured by sunglasses, respectively). This stylizing has the effect of denaturing the image, removing the woman from the context of the novel, onto whose background she is patently superimposed. In the case of The Dead Heart, this has the advantage of suggesting a certain treachery of this woman appearing from the outback, which will initiate the major plotline of the novel. The effect of the relegation to the background of outback iconography is to challenge the Australian identity that has contributed so strongly to the development of the quasi-mythic status of the novel known in France as Cul-de-sac.

The idea of original text, or the origins of the text, is therefore problematized as early as the front cover. The signs of deception and trickery of the front-cover art are reinforced by the rear-cover blurb with its reference to the seductive powers of the “dumbshit map” that brings Nick Hawthorne from Boston to Australia. The explanation that follows accuses Australia of being treacherous, but it is its mythology that leads readers and map-buyers astray. And it is precisely the myth of Australia that is referenced by the cover blurb, which entices the reader with its promise of “surf, sex and swill”. This triad has a clear double function: first, it taps into the British idea of the Mediterranean summer holiday with its “sun, sea and sex” and thus sells the novel’s exoticism to non-Australian Anglo-Saxons; second, it taps into the new myth of Australia, which the novel immediately reverses by leaving the coastal strip in search of the dead heart. As such, Nick travels back in time, somewhat against the trend of fictional representations of Australia’s own myth of itself, which has seen Australian identity, while remaining a complex tension between centre and periphery, shift progressively from

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12 There is clearly a way in which the inverted commas around ‘original’ are being used here in that vaguely, and often derided, poststructuralist way to suggest that there is no originality, no normality in the production of text; we should like to add to this the fact that Abacus, the UK publisher of The Dead Heart is an imprint of the London-based Little, Brown Book Group, which is itself an Hachette UK company. Hachette, of course, is a ‘French’ publishing group. The original English version is thus, in a way, French.

13 Following its initial publication in the traditional black and yellow of the Série Noire in 2002, the Folio Policier version of Cul-de-sac (2006) adopted the same type of iconic Australian imagery for its cover art as used for the English original. Following the deluxe edition that marked the 2008 publication by Belfond of the new translation, whose cover art is the subject of this chapter, the paperback edition of Piège nuptial has also (since 2009) returned to this stereotypically Australian cover style. For more on the history of the various avatars of the translated text, see [http://www.polarnoir.fr/livre.php?livre=liv372](http://www.polarnoir.fr/livre.php?livre=liv372) (accessed 10 June 2010).

14 The inner sleeve of Belfond’s paperback ‘pocket’ version of Piège nuptial (2009) refers to “le mythique Cul-de-sac”. This recent edition returns to a cover image that is almost identical to that of its French predecessor; additionally, the book comes wrapped in a red paper band that announces the affiliation of the new text to the myth of the old one: “Nouvelle traduction du roman paru sous le titre Cul-de-sac”.

15 It almost goes without saying, of course, that this now universal use of the triad cannot be divorced from that particularly French use of three adjectives where one would suffice and that most French of all triple mottoes— liberté, égalité, fraternité…
the bush to the coast over the course of the last century. For its part, Darwin is a-typical of this new coastal myth inasmuch as it appears to be the abrupt end of the inland; its inhabitants appear more rural than urban, or “bushmen” as Kennedy describes them. While the inclusion of sex and swill in the cover blurb is justified as early as the novel’s opening lines, the reality of surfing in Darwin is neatly summarized by Justin Avery in his blog “Surf the Dream”. Responding to questions from bloggers who have been unable to get information on good surfing spots in Darwin, Avery points out that 1) there are a lot of Tiger Sharks in the waters off Darwin; 2) there are the Box Jellyfish, which are almost impossible to see in the “dirty waters”; and 3) there are the Saltwater Crocodiles. For the surfing blogger undaunted by this North Australian triad, he then casually throws in his clinching argument: “there is no surf in Darwin”.

Darwin offers a dramatic problematization of liminal space, offering no grey areas, simply the abrupt meeting point of bush and beach, of radical difference. Paratextually, the blurb offers a double reflection of the text: it misrepresents it insofar as there will be no surf in the story; on the other hand, it entraps the reader in just the same way as the map of Australia lures the protagonist (if you buy this book for the surfing, then like the protagonist you have made “a serious mistake”). While this may not appear at first glance quite the hosting of the nihilistic reading within the metaphysical reading of text that J. Hillis Miller had in mind in “The Critic as Host”, it does show how the paratext can establish the counter-currents of the text within. The dedication and epigraph that follow continue the destabilizing of any uniform textual identity. The dedication to the author’s son, which arguably runs against the highly consumer-driven strategy of the cover images, is followed by an epigraph that further polarizes Australian identity. From Genette’s perspective this is a typical allographic epigraph: it is a quotation from a text written by another author, imported into the text under study. In this case, it is taken from a Federal Government-funded outback survival guide. As a parasite, it is a site of multiple tensions. On the one hand, it reinforces the paradox of mythical Australian identity inasmuch as the outback is clearly defined as the Other, that space where people do not live. From the perspective of a French identity, which Kennedy is striving so hard to cultivate through his (re)translation of the text, this doubling of national identity is more striking than the divide either between Paris present and Paris lamented, represented and mythological (le mythe du vieux Paris), or indeed between Paris and the provinces (or la France profonde): in Australia there is quite simply a space where one can survive and another where one cannot. While, on one level, the French are not unaware of this dichotomy, there is a also a way in which the myth of the bush continues to capture the French imagination, which, as demonstrated in Fornasiero and West-Sooby’s chapter below, is no more clearly displayed than through the cover designs typically chosen for French translations of Australian novels. Finally, in terms of paratextual strategy, what Genette terms the “effet-épigraphe” —the importance of its simply being there—is here

16 For a discussion of the decentring of Australia’s identity in the context of Australian literature, see Alistair Rolls and Vanessa Alayrac, “Changing the Tide and the Tidings of Change: Robert Drewe’s The Drowner”, Southerly, 62.3 (2002), 154-67. Australian crime fiction has also followed this path, leading from Arthur Updike’s bush into Peter Corris’s Sydney and, more recently, Peter Temple’s Melbourne.

17 The Dead Heart (2009), p. 3.


19 One might think, for example, of the highly successful use of Indigenous images in the marketing of the French translations of Arthur Upfield’s works. On this, see also John Ramsland and Marie Ramsland, “Re-assessing Arthur W. Upfield’s Napoleon Bonaparte Detective Fiction”, in Alistair Rolls (ed) Mostly French: French (in) Detective Fiction (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 93-120.

highlighted, and subverted, by a misspelling of the name of the other author.\textsuperscript{21} Whether this is an oversight or part of an attempt to put an autographic stamp on the allographic epigraph, to mould it into a wider textual strategy of deceit, this flawing of the epigraph serves to undermine the Australianness of the ‘original’ and to establish the paratext, quite reflexively, as a site of two-directional exchange. Not only, therefore, does this act seductively, in Barthes’s sense, to engage the reader in the production of the writerly text, and thus towards an actualization of the virtual, nihilistic otherness of the text, but it also alerts the reader to the difficulty in jumping from paratext into text or diegesis proper; in this way, the paratext is extended, its edges deliberately blurred.

This disconnected identity, or identity as disconnection, is quite literally stamped onto the text in the first line of the novel: “I had never seen so many tattoos”\textsuperscript{22}. The opening paragraph throws protagonist and reader alike into an Australia for which the cover images had not prepared them. Furthermore, this paragraph operates a paradoxical encoding of the story as both thriller and anti-thriller. For, when Nick meets the \textit{femme fatale}, it is he who walks into her office, and she is wearing entirely the wrong clothes. Indeed, this Australian stripper is wearing very little, and he is only just in time, which suggests that the story has already begun: “I’d walked into this joint in time to catch the start of her act.” Clearly, this both is and is not in the same register as Rick Blaine’s famous recollection in \textit{Casablanca}: “Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine.” As Rick and anti-Rick, Nick is in a double space, to which, to judge by the butterfly tattooed on her buttock, the stripper clearly belongs. And yet, not unlike a butterfly, she flits between two identities. The tattoo, after all, reminds the reader that her identity is skin-deep: she is a \textit{mise en abyme} of the novel itself insofar as she has nowhere to go from here, no outer layers to shed and, thus, nothing to offer but her own sparsely embellished skin; she is also like the paratext, a signer of self-alterity. This double presence, simultaneously inside and outside, counterbalances the apparent lack of noir fetishism of the stripper’s sexuality: “And she looked seriously out of love with life—perhaps because she was paid to let a bunch of toxic bushmen look up her wazoo.” The directness of this gaze, its indifference to the castrating power of the truth of the female genitals, would indeed stand for a non-fetishistic, and ‘normal’ sexuality (in the Freudian sense) were it not for the woman’s role as paratexual performer—she is ‘out of love with life’, precariously balanced across the gap between text and non-text. If Nick’s entrance is into a text that is always already begun, it is because the novel’s textualty extends backwards into the paratext, a striptease that is already underway. The stripper is, in other words, already exposed beneath the divestiture of turned pages.

It is our contention that this use of dermal layering as striptease adds, more than it strips, dermal layering; indeed, the original English text appeals, albeit under the trappings of nonchalant humour, to a noir tradition that if not French is at the very least at home in France.\textsuperscript{23} In this way, the original prefigures its translation through a desire for (French) otherness. For, if Kennedy’s use of the French term \textit{femme de nuit} in the following reference to Darwin’s prostitutes is less than innocent, it is because \textit{femmes} are \textit{fatales} insofar as they

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{21} The author of the text in question, \textit{Stay Alive}, is given in the National Library of Australian catalogue as being Maurice Dunlevy, not Dunleavy as it appears in \textit{The Dead Heart}. \url{http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2172162} (accessed 24 May 2010).

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{The Dead Heart} (2009), p. 3. All the quotations from this passage that follow in this paragraph are taken from this same, first page of the novel.

\textsuperscript{23} For a more detailed account of the ‘Frenchness’ of detective fiction as a genre, see the editor’s introduction and Alistair Rolls “An Uncertain Space: (Dis-)Locating the Frenchness of French and Australian Detective Fiction”, in Rolls (2009), pp. 1-15 and 19-51, respectively.}
symbolize a double truth, functioning as they do according to Freud’s theory of the fetish. In this case they are Australians aspiring, however humbly, towards Frenchness: “the occasional *femme de nuit*—all hot-pants and peroxide and chapped lips”. Under the sign of the butterfly, they represent textual becoming; their paratextual function recalls a site of heterogeneity in the Deleuzian sense, where they, and the text, are always already Australian-becoming-French and French-becoming-Australian.

*Piège nuptial* presents the reader with a plain black cover. The only image is a hint of black fishnet stocking. The French translation appears, in this way, to align itself much more clearly with the dress code of the noir tradition. The black dress that invites the male gaze to look at the legs of the *femme fatale* immediately couches her in the fetishistic space where her truth is both symbolized and veiled in the text, both known and re-imagined by the detective. The use of fishnet connotes a particularly French, and thus wilfully sophisticated, brand of seduction. The reader quickly discovers, however, that this corner of fishnet is in fact a cutaway. The window exposes a female body beneath, which the reader is encouraged to undress by lifting up the outer cover. In other words, the paratext is packaged as an unpackaging, a striptease that requires only the initiation of the reader’s gaze (and then hands) to begin. What the lifting of the cover reveals is a culture shock, a cross-dressing of social codes.

The second jacket cover, the one beneath the removable black dress, reveals that the black fishnet belongs to a pair of pantyhose worn beneath a pair of black shorts (perhaps not unlike the prostitutes’ hot-pants) and a faded singlet. In short, the French sophistication of the black dress and fishnet stockings appears to have been replaced by an unsophisticated look, which one might assume is the novel’s ‘true’ Australianness. Such an assumption would, however, be rather hasty, overlooking not only the mythology of the striptease and its paratextual function both here and in the ‘original’ text but also the social coding of the clothes themselves. The following description is taken from Yves Delaporte’s French study of punk dress in the 1980s:

> Mais la technique la plus originale, et peut-être la plus choquante pour le ‘bon goût’, est l’assemblage des éléments les plus disparates, entraînant la destruction du système vestimentaire, c’est-à-dire des relations habituelles entre pièces, caractéristiques non seulement des habits de la majorité de la

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24 For Freud, the fetish stands in the place of an absent truth, one that has been shown to be a myth but to which the fetishist is still able to cling, and a present truth; more precisely in Freud’s case, the fetish allows the subject to negate his desire for his mother to be phallic and the traumatic knowledge that she is not. For a more detailed examination of fetishistic noir and French *fatale*, see Alistair Rolls and Deborah Walker, *French and American Noir: Dark Crossings* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

25 The Dead Heart (2009), p. 9-10.

26 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari develop this type of becoming at the interface with difference through the image of the wasp and the orchid. See *Mille Plateaux : Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), p. 17. For a comparable Deleuzian take on national identity, see the first chapter of Andrew McGregor, *Film Criticism as Cultural Fantasy: The Perpetual French Discovery of Australian Cinema* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 11-24. McGregor conceptualizes a connectedness of national identities, according to which he describes the interconnecting lines of flight as examples of the “‘slipperiness’, ‘shifting’, or ‘blurring’ of national cultural boundaries” (p. 20).

27 A close-up view of a black fishnet stocking was deemed sufficiently seductive, in a so-Frenchy-so-Chic way, for it to be used in 2007 in Australia by the Hilton hotel chain to advertise their Provocateur package. For more on this, and to compare the image used in the Hilton advertising and Kennedy’s French cover, see the following webpage: [http://hiltonsydney.com.au/sleep/inspired/Packages/provocateurPackage.aspx](http://hiltonsydney.com.au/sleep/inspired/Packages/provocateurPackage.aspx) (accessed 23 May 2010). The wearing of fishnet stockings is still considered by young French women to convey seduction. To see how this aspect is tempered, but not contradicted, by the practicality of wearing them (how and in what weather conditions), see such sites as [http://www.candymoderne.com/vogue-des-bas-resille-163/](http://www.candymoderne.com/vogue-des-bas-resille-163/) and [http://www.jadefromparis.com/2009/01/les-bas-rsilles-cest-le-mal.html](http://www.jadefromparis.com/2009/01/les-bas-rsilles-cest-le-mal.html) (accessed 2 December 2009).
population, mais également de ceux des autres groupes marginaux. Chaussettes trouées sur des bas résille, porte-jarretelles sur un pull lacéré, jarretières de mariée (blanche) ou de prostituée (noires) passées par-dessus un pantalon, pull long utilisé comme robe : autant d’innovations qui se montrent autrement plus destructrices de nos manières d’habillement que, par exemple, le blouson à tête de mort des Hell’s Angels.28

Perhaps more interesting than the revelation that a mixed dress code is designed to shock our sense of vestimentary good manners is the idea that youth culture of this type is as likely to occur in France as it was, and presumably still is, in Anglo-Saxon countries. As Delaporte continues, there is a difference between the composition of alternative dress codes in Paris and the provinces, in which the constitutive elements of one identity (be it punk, rocker or Hell’s Angel, etc.) can be incorporated into another to make it more acceptable, or less unacceptable, in the non-Parisian context:

En raison de la plus forte pression sociale et de la difficulté à se procurer certains éléments vestimentaires, on porte rarement l’habillement complet du groupe dont on se réclame ; il y a par conséquent amenuisement, et souvent disparition, d’une des plus importantes caractéristiques sémiologiques de ce type d’habillement : la discontinuité du signifiant.29

The suggestion might be that the external cover, which seems to market a typical noir thriller in the plain black livery of the Parisian Série Noire, has to divest itself of certain paratextual characteristics in order to pass as an Australian thriller. Again, this is to move too quickly. The paratext itself calls out to us, forcing us to consider the hermeneutics in play; indeed, the interpellatory force of the paratext can be usefully analyzed via Barthes’s understanding of myth, which “a un caractère impératif, interpellatoire”.30 Seen in this light, the call of myth is not unlike Genette’s effet-épigraphe, except that where Genette sees in the epigraph a necessary contextualization, the force of myth in Barthes’s schema hinges on an equally necessary decontextualization. We should argue that both contextualization and decontextualization are at stake in the paratext-effect. For if, like myth, the paratext calls out to the reader, it does this through its self-alterity, its paradoxical, double status as book and not-book. As Barthes describes, we do not call a Basque house ‘Basque’ if it is present to us in the Basque country; if we come across it in Paris, on the other hand, it calls to us and we call it, in this case, “un chalet basque”.31 Furthermore, this house, as a direct result of its disconnectedness from its usual surrounds, takes on for us “l’essence même de la basquité”.

In the case of Piège nuptial, for all the Americanness of its author and the Australianess of its setting, the work calls us and forces us to name it ‘French’ because of, and not in spite of, its troubled status as translation (as French in a non-French context as well as non-French in a French context).

Barthes’s work on mythologies can also help us to explain the shift from the plain black cover (French) to the cross-coded second cover (French and Australian). In his essay “Strip-tease”, Barthes immediately qualifies the striptease as a Parisian affair; or, at least, the

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29 Delaporte, p. 60.
kind of striptease in which he is interested is the Parisian variety. And this striptease, Barthes tells us, is itself predicated on a contradiction. The act of undressing the female form, he explains, is linked to a process not of sexualization but of de-sexualization. In this respect, its use of layering recalls that used retrospectively by Freud’s fetishist, and which also underpins so much of classic noir: it is designed to counter the primal fear of female nudity; it inoculates and titillates via a partial de-nuding of a threat, as Barthes describes it, of the “Fais-moi peur” variety. Like a fetish, then, the display of the mechanics of the striptease are enough to provoke “à la fois l’idée de sexe et sa conjuration”. The Parisian striptease, then, is lengthy and couched in strict protocol, its own accessories and stereotypes, which defuse—and deconstruct—the ultimate goal:

Seule la durée du dévêtement constitue le public en voyeur ; mais ici, comme dans n’importe quel spectacle mystifiant, le décor, les accessoires et les stéréotypes viennent contrarier la provocation initiale du propos et finissent par l’engloutir dans l’insignifiance : on affiche le mal pour mieux l’embarrasser et l’exorciser.

Here, we should argue, it is the nudity of the dead centre itself that is ‘embarrassed and exorcized’ by the front cover’s striptease. As striptease, then, the paratext colours the reading praxis that is then deployed in the text itself, throughout its length; by offering a strong preliminary display it covers the whole text, continuously counteracting the uncovering that is the necessary consequence of reading. Furthermore, it empowers the reader to combat the difficulty of the text, thereby encouraging an active engagement with the text (as opposed to simply selling the metaphysical reading or the author’s slant on the book). This reflexive display of the paratext as privileged site of self-alterity thus allows the text to grow by appealing to that otherness (its nihilistic deviation from the accepted, standard ‘reading’) that is both separate from and a part of itself. This is clearly the territory of Barthes’s own writerly text, which expands as the reader constructs it and whose meaning is not only added to but actively created as the pages are turned and the book stripped. The erotics of reading are therefore based on a textualization, an adding of layers; or, as in the case of the Parisian striptease, the most naked of literary narratives is now, and forever, veiled in the magical layering of all text: “On aura donc dans le strip-tease toute une série de couvertures apposées sur le corps de la femme, au fur et à mesure qu’elle feint de le dénuder.”

In Piège nuptial, the paratext is both Parisian striptease by virtue of its specific dress code (the “quelques atomes d’érotisme” that announce it as Parisian striptease, and which include inter alia “les bas résilles”) and its accentuated layering. This reflexive staging, or overstating, via the Parisian striptease, of Piège nuptial’s Frenchness is arguably a perverse part of its status as translation. It is as if Piège nuptial is seeking to declare its Frenchness even at the expense of an Australianness that is likely, given the French predilection for all things Australian but especially for Australian literature and tales of the outback, to ensure a healthy market share. We might wonder whether the paratextual artistry deployed here is

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33 Mythologies, p. 147. This passage from Barthes’s essay strongly recalls the journey of Nick himself who is seduced by props and eventually engulfed in insignificance; the story, too, reveals itself to be one of absolute insignificance once the liminal space of the text is passed. The exorcising power of the striptease serves, however, to work the other way, to redeem this central absence and, ultimately, Nick (and Kennedy) himself.
34 Mythologies, p. 147.
35 Mythologies, p. 147, 148.
designed less to market the novel than Douglas Kennedy himself; the striptease would thus function here, precisely as in Barthes’s essay, in which the dance “donne au spectacle la caution de l’Art”.  

36 It is arguably, then, Kennedy himself who is cast in this artistic light and who, as such, rises above the ranks of the humble writer of foreign thrillers translated for an easy market.  

The call of the paratext is at its most perverse in the case of Piège nuptial. The little black dress of the 2008 black cover functions paradoxically both to reference the French thrillers of the Série Noire (to which it formerly belonged under the title Cul-de-sac), with all the cachet that publication in this famous series confers, and to distance Kennedy’s text from them. For Kennedy appears to wish to avoid those other connotations of Marcel Duhamel’s series, which conjure titles of famous thrillers written for the most part by authors specializing in the genre; in particular, it is strongly associated with the translations of works by a number of key English-speaking authors (Peter Cheyney, James Hadley Chase, Carter Brown, all of whom, it should be noted, are examples of authors who had more success in France than ‘at home’).  

37 Seen in this light, the excessive frou-frouing of Piège nuptial’s paratext appears to draw on the genre of the thriller in order to inoculate its own textual body against accusations of formulaic writing. Even as its pages are turned and the reader quickly leaves behind the liminal space of Darwin for the dead centre and its tawdry story of a forced union, the initial vision of the black dress wards off the terrifying absence that is the plot: “[car] c’est une loi évidente que tout le strip-tease est donné dans la nature même du vêtement de départ” (148). The whole novel is thus cast in the shadow of French elegance with an undercurrent of duplicity; this is, in other words, a novel that is both sophisticated and rough-trade, canonical and popular, French and Australian.

In the case of the 2008 version of Piège nuptial, the additional outer cover also functions proleptically to recuperate, and Parisianize, the more amateurish striptease that, as we have seen, constitutes the initial dermal layer of the diegesis proper. Without the caveat of this paratextual vêtement de départ the striptease in the pub in Darwin would be starkly lacking in the two elements crucial to the Parisian variety: accoutrements and slow, confident gestures. In the case of the first, it is interesting to note that the key to the Parisian striptease is its exoticism:

L’exotisme est la première de ces distances, car il s’agit toujours d’un exotisme figé qui éloigne le corps dans le fabuleux ou le romanesque : Chinoise munie d’une pipe d’opium (symbole obligé de la sinité), […] décor vénitien avec gondole […] tout ceci vise à constituer au départ la femme comme un objet déguisé…

36 Mythologies, p. 148.
37 Stephen King springs to mind as an author always being read by someone in the Parisian Métro, but more recent examples are many (Candace Bushnell, Stephenie Meyer, Philip Pullman, J.K. Rowling). One need only look at the bestseller list in France, or the inclusion of the search term livres en français on the online website www.amazon.fr, where it is listed beneath livres en anglais, to gauge the importance of the market for translated literature in France.
38 Note the inverted commas again. Peter Cheyney and James Hadley Chase are both British authors who passed for American (see Rolls and Walker 2009), while Carter Brown’s conversion from British to Australian was set against a highly Americanized backdrop. For an analysis of the marketing strategy behind the Carter Brown Mystery Series, see Toni Johnson-Woods, “Crime Fiction’s Cultural Field: Carter Brown in France”, in Rolls (2009), pp. 53-73.
39 Mythologies, p. 148.
40 Mythologies, p. 147.
In other words, to be recognizable as ‘Parisian’ a striptease needs to be dressed up as Chinese, Venetian or, as Barthes notes elsewhere, a Spanish flamenco dance. In a similar way, Piège nuptial calls out so strongly to the book-buying public not because it is a French novel but because it is disguised as a French novel. Its otherness does not lie, as one might expect, in its difference from ‘French novels’ (this would be the Australian novel, as chalet basque, uprooted and translated into a French context) but in its difference from recognisably Australian novels. This is, after all, a novel that shatters the myth of Australia; or rather, it confirms that in Australia the (French) myth is disconnected from reality, unlike the (French and Australian) myth of Frenchness, which co-exists with the reality of the urban (and usually Parisian) present.41

The Parisian-ness of its paratextual striptease announces and symbolizes the tension of a text in permanent flux, whose identity oscillates between a Frenchness that is always already a disguise and an Australianness that is either empty or disingenuously exoticized. The French translation serves from the outset to provide a (reflexive and openly dishonest) myth that will accompany the reader into the traumatic reality of the outback story. In this way, the barrenness of the Australian outback is made natural, that is to say endurable, by the haunting presence of its (French) mythical otherness, just as the shocking truth of the female genitals is disarmed before the fact by the fetishization of the striptease: “[L]a fin du strip n’est plus alors d’expulser à la lumière une profondeur secrète, mais de signifier, à travers le dépouillement d’une vêture baroque et artificielle, la nudité comme habit naturel de la femme”.42 Inoculated, the reader is both present to and removed from the ultimate goal of the strip-inside-the-(striptease-)text, which is seen vicariously, through the crowd of Australian, and markedly non-Parisian, voyeurs.

The Darwin stripper also lacks composure in her movements, thereby failing the second criterion of the Parisian striptease. In the mise en abyme she quickly abandons all artistry in favour of the clumsiness that is the marker, for Barthes, of the “concours populaires”.43 Without the screen of artistry, the women who strip in these amateur events find themselves more obviously unveiled, with each un-layering being exactly that. To strip too fast is, to borrow a phrase from Ross Chambers, to ‘make a beeline’. “An interest in alterity”, Chambers argues, “is incompatible with getting there fast”.44 As such, a paratextual striptease that goes too fast is one that signposts the reader’s path to the centre of the text, allowing her to make a beeline to the diegesis, which can then be consumed passively and to the exclusion of self-alterity (both of the text and reader).45 The discomfiture of the Darwin stripper moves the novel deeper into the dermal layers of the text, towards the dead centre (where abnormality, and fear, will provide the new ‘natural’ order). As such, the striptease scene reveals the tenacious will of the novel to become Australian: the crowd force the stripper to remove not only her clothes but also her professionalism, her urbanity and her

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41 Ross Chambers talks of this co-presence, or “haunting” of what is present by what is represented, as a pan-urban experience, and he mentions Sydney as a place where he himself feels it. We should argue that that the disconnection would be more startling for a French citizen in the Australian metropolis, although the Sydney Opera House can now offer solid iconic competition both to France’s Tour Eiffel and its own gum trees and red earth. See Ross Chambers, Loiterature (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

42 Mythologies, p. 147-8.

43 Mythologies, p. 149.

44 Chambers (1999), p. 26. Chambers is referring specifically here to Phileas Fogg whose own beeline around the world is continually counter-posed by the loiterly sightseeing of his manservant Passepartout.

45 As one of Chambers’s “socially marginal” loiterly figures “always on the cusp of a context” (1999, p. 56-7), Kennedy’s stripper, perched on her stage between the peritext and the diegesis proper, functions as an allegory of the reader, the stripper of pages, whose own self in otherness is produced in reading, in the textual identity that is forged at the interface of reader and text.
veil-as-myth, and in so doing to become amateur. The condition of such a stripper, Barthes notes, is one “de faiblesse et d’apeurement”, which is, of course, the condition of the solitary stranger in an unknown environment who, according to Kennedy’s epigraph, “éprouvera naturellement de l’angoisse”. In this way, the paratextual stripper also points backwards, via the epigraph out into the contextualization of its being read in translation, thereby adding a loiterly, sight-seeing touch to the passage to the dead centre. By referencing the epigraph, by pointing backwards, she thus makes room for alterity within haste.

Whereas the professional, Parisian striptease desexualizes the artiste, the sporting-style striptease (of the Moulin Rouge or the “Strip-tease Club”) seeks to domesticate the erotics of the act. This too, however, can be considered “typiquement française”. For Barthes, this bourgeoisification of the striptease, with its amateur (salesgirl or secretary) performers, corresponds to the demands of the French man in the street. Such is apparently not the case in America, which goes some way to explaining the reaction of the bushmen in the bar in Darwin, whose rejection of the stripper’s beach ball and woman-next-door costume (“[e]lle était attifée en femme au foyer lamda venue passer une journée à la plage”), and her whole Beach Boys routine, is less anti-American (indeed, the other American present is delighted by the bushmen’s impatience) than anti-French:

Thus, even as the stripper is forced to do her act non-domestically and Australian-style (if we consider the rejection of the Beach Boys to be an Australian spin on an otherwise typically American reaction to the striptease), the scene’s paratexual dynamics are aligned with the French Strip-tease Club, as this dermal layer integrates the strip-joint space, which, via the mise en abyme, leads into the diegesis proper. Consequently, the transition to the under layers, to the central Australian space that is the (dead) heart of the novel, which is to say the extensive paratextual layering of the novel, operates textually—both immanently (the inescapable sameness of the bush: French, amateur strip) and transcendentally (the tendency to extend beyond borders, the framing device of travel and return: Parisian, professional strip)—according to a recognizably French method of un-layering.

Kennedy or perhaps those responsible for promoting the Kennedy brand in France (and subsequently in Anglo-Saxon countries where, as we have seen, the surf-sex-swill campaign is following suit) are, as are all good advertisers, master-inoculators. In this way, they manage to sell the French the myth of Australianness that they want to read while, at the same time, handing them a story of the breaking of that very myth. So, when in 2008 Piège

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46 Mythologies, p. 149.
48 Mythologies, p. 149.
50 Mythologies, p. 150.
51 We should point out that the paratextual striptease does involve a layer that also blends Australian and American pop music: the epigraphical reference to Stay Alive is only a slight distortion of a song by the Bee Gees. And we might also add that one Australian response to The Dead Heart was the 1997 film Welcome to Woop Woop, directed by Stephan Elliott, which naturalizes the harshness of the Kennedy’s Wollanup by turning it into a musical.
nuptial offered itself as a striptease, it was using the power of the paratext as myth to call out to its French readership and to appeal to that threshold between text and context, which for Derrida is “an incessant movement of recontextualization”. As such, the translated paratext reminds the reader of the paratext’s necessary affinity with and relation to translation. Perched on the cusp of his text, Kennedy, like his stripper, defines his Frenchness in his performance of Australianness and vice versa; this is his self-alterity. And in 2008 in France—as in Darwin—“[t]he crowd hooted their approval”.

53 As Derrida notes, “‘différance is a reference and vice versa’ (1988, p. 137).
54 The Dead Heart (2009), p. 4.