

CAVORTING WITH STRANGERS

Great Ideas and Their Champions

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

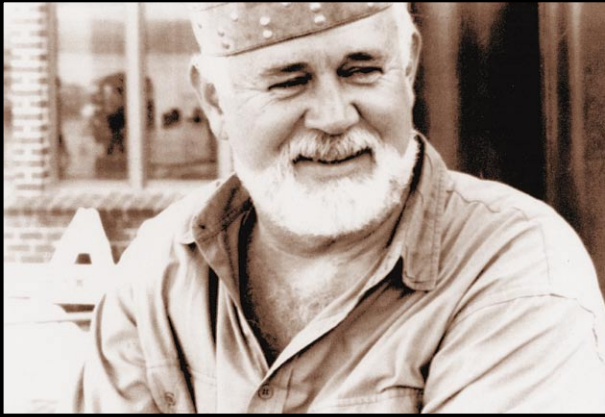



Photo by Erin Frances Butler

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— Paris —

COUSTEAU ♦ SARTRE ♦ DE GAULLE ♦ CHANEL ♦ DEBUSSY
 RAVEL ♦ MONET ♦ NAPOLEON ♦ ROUSSEAU

 Charly Brooks is downsized out of her job as an editor in a New York publishing house. Desperate for income, and not entirely committed to her current boyfriend, Charly takes a job as a Paris tour guide. To carry it off, she needs to learn a lot about French culture in a hurry, and how better than through her orientation tutor, Professor Jean-Michel Levasseur, a struggling alcoholic, who introduces Charly to a host of intriguing eccentrics who've got the deep dish on the historic figures of Paris.

In the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, Paris was home to some of the most creative people on earth, people we have been taught to honor as revolutionaries of the human spirit. But make no mistake: they were a sleazy lot. Consider this: Despite fathering the ideals behind the French and American revolutions, bringing down some of the great monarchies of Europe, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's youthful indiscretions included titillating the girls by exposing himself from the dark corners of the village square — and faking insanity when caught. And none other than Victor Hugo, it was rumored, molested his young daughter's first communion companion after Mass, while the incomparable Napoleon, hastening to Paris to save his throne, left his men to die in the Russian snow. Even Coco Chanel collaborated with the Nazis to keep her suite in the Ritz Hotel, exceeding the shenanigans of her contemporary, Jean-Paul Sartre, who simply slept with his lover's students. Conclusion? One need not bend over far to see the underbelly of fame.

Their vaunted reputations notwithstanding, these people were just as sick as the best of us. So put away those pompous testaments to their matchless qualities, and their disembodied quotes hung out on the line to impress us. This book isn't about their fresh linens, but the whispered lives of the people who soiled them. Come, please join me on a most unusual trip to Paris.

“Welcome, O Life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.”

— James Joyce