



Foreign Tongue

By Vanina Marsot
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Introduction

Paris, the storybook capital of romance—of strolls down cobblestone streets and kisses by the Seine—may not be the ideal location to mend a wounded heart. But pragmatic professional writer Anna, who has been unlucky in love in L.A., has come here with keys to her aunt's empty apartment. Bilingual and blessed with dual citizenship, she seeks solace in the delectable pastries, in the company of old friends, and in her exciting new job: translating a mysterious, erotic French novel by an anonymous author.

Intrigued by the story, and drawn in by the mystery behind the book, Anna soon finds herself among the city's literati—and in the arms of an alluring Parisian—as she resolves to explore who she is . . . in both cultures.

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you been to Paris? Do you have any notions about France and the French that this book either contradicted or reinforced?
2. The main character often finds herself stuck between two cultures, that of America and that of France, and this is especially apparent in her relationship with Olivier. What light does this book shed on what it means to be American? To be an American involved with a Frenchman?
3. How do you feel about other languages? Do you speak another language? Did you grow up hearing another language at home or did you learn one at school? Has speaking or not speaking another language affected your life?
4. *Foreign Tongue* contains a novel within a novel. Do you think the stories are similar? Do they reflect something about each other? How do you think the characters in the anonymous novel affect Anna? Do you think her choices would have been different if she'd never chanced upon this specific translating job?
5. Have you ever read anything in translation? Has this book made you think about translation differently?
6. Toward the end of the story, something is revealed that makes us understand more about the main character. Did this surprise you? How did it make you feel about Anna?
7. Discuss the meaning of the title. Can you think of other places in the novel where word play and puns are important?
8. Anna learns quite a bit about her identity throughout the book and has to make tough decisions about her happiness. Do you like where she ends up at the end? Do you think she is happier?
9. How do you view Estelle and the woman in the anonymous book? Which aspects of her personality were appealing? Do you think Anna's Americanness was at odds with Estelle? How do you think Anna and Estelle are similar?
10. How are Bunny and Monsieur Laveau different? Both of them have specific ideas about language and the art of translation. What do you think Anna learns from each of them?
11. Throughout the book Anna's clothing is mentioned and often what she wears can affect how she's feeling and how she is perceived. How does what you wear affect your attitude? What do you think of Anna's friend's theory about lingerie?

About the Author

Vanina Marsot holds an MFA in literature and creative writing from the Bennington Writing Seminars. She divides her time between Paris and Los Angeles.