

Launch of “French Corner” at the National Library

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The “French Corner” located on Level 7 of the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library of the National Library building was launched on Friday 28 March 2008. It was jointly officiated by Mr Jean-Francois Copé, Former Minister of Budget and currently the President of the UMP Group at the National Assembly, and Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Second Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts. Mr Copé’s visit was under the auspices of the Singapore International Foundation’s Distinguished Visitors Programme and one of the highlights of his visit was the “French Corner” inauguration held at the National Library.

The French Government, represented by the Embassy of France in Singapore, contributed financially towards the acquisition of books for the “French Corner” collection. The collection includes classical French literary works and also titles in philosophy, humanities and the social sciences. The National Library Board (NLB) and the Embassy of France worked closely with one another in the selection of appropriate titles through an advisory panel. The titles were chosen to reflect the wealth, quality and diversity of French philosophical thought and literature, with the aim of giving Singaporeans better insights to the history, culture and creativity of France.

Approximately 1,000 titles by French authors, translated into English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil



Distinguished guests at the launch of the “French Corner”. Seated from left: Ms Ngian Lek Choh, Deputy CE, NLB, H.E. Holger Standerskjold, Head of Delegation of the European Commission, Ms Lim Soo Hoon, Chairman, NLB, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for MCYS and Second Minister for MICA, H.E. Pierre Buhler, Ambassador, French Embassy, Dr N Varaprasad, CE, NLB and Mr Michel Cywinski, Conseiller Commercial, Adjoint Chef de mission, French Embassy

are available at the “French Corner”. The bulk of the titles are in English and include authoritative French works like *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* by René Descartes, *Being and Nothingness* by Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, *Tristes Tropiques* by Claude Levi-Strauss and *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* by Jean Baudrillard.

A bibliography listing of the titles selected for the “French Corner” has been compiled by the National Library and is available on the websites of both the Embassy of France (<http://www.ambafrance-sg.org/>) and NLB (<http://www.nlb.gov.sg/>).

The National Library will also be looking into a series of related programmes such as literary activities,

book recitals and talks that will be opened to the general public.

Highlights of Titles

Philosophy

1. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes (in 3 volumes)* by René Descartes

Descartes is famously known as the “father of Modern Philosophy” and one of the most influential thinkers in history – most of subsequent western philosophy could be said to be a reaction to his writings. This 3-volume set is a new translation based on the best available Latin and French texts, and is considered an authoritative, comprehensive and readable edition of Descartes’ philosophical writings in English.



An interesting French translated title that caught the attention of our guests. From left: Mr Jean-Francois Copé, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, H.E. Pierre Buhler and Dr N Varaprasad



Mr Jean-Francois Copé and Dr Vivian Balakrishnan symbolically mounting the plaque to signify the launch of the "French Corner".

2. *Being and Nothingness* by Jean-Paul Sartre

Sartre was a novelist, playwright, existentialist philosopher and literary critic who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1964, but declined the honour in protest of the values of bourgeois society.

His 'Being and Nothingness' challenges all previous assumptions about the individual's relationship with the world and concepts of human freedom, responsibility and action. It is one of the most significant books of the 20th century that had a resounding impact on culture and literature worldwide.

Literature

3. *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo

A novelist, poet and dramatist, Vic-

tor Hugo is one of the most important French Romantic writers of the 19th century. 'Les Misérables', an epic story about social injustice, is one of his most well-loved works, which displays his gift for language and for touching the human heart.

This outstanding work is rich in meticulous historical description and character portrayal, and produced an array of characters – the street urchin Gavroche, the rascal Thenardier, the criminalised Valjean, the prostitute Fantine and her daughter Cosette – which have entered the pantheon of literary dramatis personae.

Social Thought/Anthropology

4. *Tristes Tropiques* by Claude Levi-Strauss

Claude Levi-Strauss is an anthropolo-

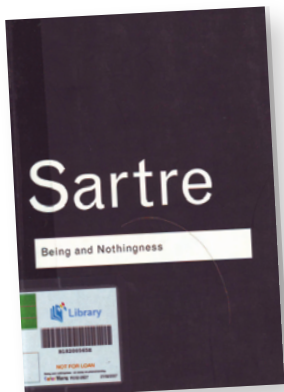
gist who developed structuralism as a method of understanding human society and culture. 'Tristes Tropiques' was Levi-Strauss' groundbreaking study of the societies of a number of Amazonian peoples and an exploration of his own intellectual roots as a professor of philosophy.

One of his most readable works, it endures as a significant anthropological study, a vivid travelogue, a great literary work and a highly engaging memoir infused with philosophical reflections on sociology, geology, music, history and literature.

5. *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* by Jean Baudrillard

Philosopher and sociologist Baudrillard was one of the foremost intellectual figures whose work combined social theory, philosophy and an idiosyncratic cultural metaphysics. A sharp critic of contemporary society, culture and thought, Baudrillard was a prolific writer who served up extensive and exciting commentary on some of the most salient cultural and sociological phenomena of the modern era.

'The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures' is a classic text that showed his prescience for highlighting vital subjects long before others, being one of the first books to focus on the process and meaning of consumption in contemporary culture.



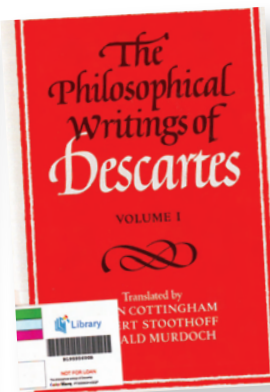
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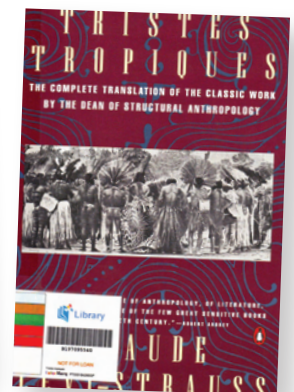
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