

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
RECEPTION HOSTED BY AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR TO FRANCE
AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, PARIS
12 NOVEMBER 2008

Thank you for your warm and generous welcome to Michael and me this evening. And, on behalf of all Australians, I respond with affectionate greetings to you, our friends and fellows.

How special it is to join you here - I can't help but think of Edith Wharton when I'm in Paris.

In her book, *Fighting France*, published in the year World War I ended, the first chapter is titled, *The Look of Paris*.

It's early August 1914, and she's motored north from Poitiers into your city. Her prose carries me with her: completely, robustly, yet with a gentle caress.

I must share these broken snippets with you:

"It was sunset when we reached the gates of Paris. Under the heights of St Cloud and Suresnes the reaches of the Seine trembled with the blue-pink lustre of an early Monet.

The currents of summer life ebbed and flowed with a normal beat under the trees of the radiating avenues.

The great city, so made for peace and art and all humanist graces, seemed to lie by her river-side like a princess guarded by the watchful giant of the Eiffel Tower.

The next day the air was thundery with rumours. Nobody believed them, everybody repeated them. War? Of course there couldn't be war!"

Well, of course, there was war.

And I come here - in its now gentle wake - to this country for which I feel deep affection - to quietly observe and honour:

- . the courage, the sacrifice, the triumph and despair of Australian men who fought and died on French battlefields;
- . the easy camaradie enjoyed by Australian and French soldiers;
- . the open-heartedness of the French people;
- . the historic Armistice: nation and future-affirming; yesterday, 90 years ago;
- . indeed, all that the marvellous images in your exhibition, *Souvenirs Australiens*, so movingly depict;
- . and, our rich and enduring friendship of nations:

. a bilateral relationship that spans trade and investment, defence cooperation, science, culture and the arts;

. the breathtaking Musée du Quai Branly that I was so fortunate to tour on Monday -

. what a celebration of the world's indigenous cultures, their cherished place in the evolution of the human race, and their uniting influence in our global community.

My friends, this is my first overseas trip since commencing in my role as Governor-General of Australia.

I feel so immensely privileged to be in a position that offers boundless opportunity:

. for furthering international cooperation and community engagement;

. and participation in the gathering of people and organisations from vastly different worlds, sharing a common ethos.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will keep fond memories of my stay here over the last few days.

I take up Ms Wharton's words again when I say of your citizens:

"No people so sensitive to beauty, so penetrated with a passionate interest in life, so endowed with the power to express and immortalise that interest..."

Thank you for your *largeur d'esprit*.

And now may I propose a toast to Mr David Ritchie, the Australian Ambassador to France, and to the French people.