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## Ann Mah

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About this Person

**Nationality:** American

**Occupation:** Writer

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### PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Married. **Education:** Graduated from University of California, Los Angeles. Studied culinary arts in Bologna, Italy, 2005. Earned Level 2 Award in Wine and Spirits (with distinction), Wine and Spirits Education Trust. **Addresses:** Home: Washington, DC; Paris, France.

### CAREER:

Food and travel writer. Viking Penguin, New York, NY, assistant editor.

### AWARDS:

James Beard Foundation culinary scholarship to study in Bologna, Italy, 2005.

### WORKS:

### WRITINGS:

- *Kitchen Chinese: A Novel about Food, Family, and Finding Yourself*, Avon (New York, NY), 2010.
- *Mastering the Art of French Eating*, Pamela Dorman Books (New York, NY), 2013.
- *The Lost Vintage*, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2018.

Contributor to periodicals, including *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Fodor's travel guides*, *International Herald Tribune*, *New York Times*, *South China Morning Post*, *That's Beijing*, and *Washingtonian*. Contributor to anthologies, including *The Best American Travel Writing 2017*.

### Sidelights

Novelist and food and travel writer Ann Mah is a Chinese American living and working in Paris and New York City. She earned a degree from the University of California at Los Angeles, received a James Beard Foundation culinary scholarship to study in Bologna, Italy, then moved to New York City where she worked as assistant editor at publisher Viking Penguin. A foodie and world traveler, Mah has published articles in *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Fodor's travel guides*, and *South China Morning Post*. In 2003, she lived in Beijing, where she worked as a staff writer and dining editor for *That's Beijing*, an English-language entertainment magazine.

In 2010 Mah published the novel *Kitchen Chinese: A Novel about Food, Family, and Finding Yourself*. Reminiscent of Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*, Mah tells the story of Chinese American Isabelle Lee who, after getting dumped by her boyfriend, moves to Beijing to live with her older sister Claire, a lawyer, and to revive her journalism career. Since she can speak only "kitchen Chinese," Lee settles for a job as a food critic for a magazine. As she searches for identity in a new country, Lee reconnects with her sister, falls for dashing Chinese pop star Jeff, befriends her neighbor Charlie, and delights in traditional Chinese delicacies like Peking duck and Mongolian hot pot.

Mah's lush descriptions of Beijing and the sumptuous food along with "Isabelle's struggle with how others perceive her distinguish Mah's first novel," according to Kristine Huntley in *Booklist*. A *Publishers Weekly* writer said that Isabelle's experiences in Beijing, "coupled with her chick lit arc, provides a refreshing and fun narrative."

In 2013 Mah published her travelogue, *Mastering the Art of French Eating*. Mah's husband is a diplomat who travels frequently and often operates out of Paris. When he was sent to Iraq for a year, Mah made the most of her solitude in France by seeking out the perfect pain au chocolat and learning the secrets of andouillette sausage. Mirroring the life of fellow diplomat's wife Julia Child, Mah explores France's culinary favorites such as boeuf Bourguignon, soupe au pistou, and crispy buckwheat crepes.

Mah's descriptions of the importance of each French dish "are beautifully woven together with her reflections on culture, identity, love, and marriage," said Courtney Greene in *Library Journal*. The result, according to Greene, is a thoughtful read that sparkles with humor and delight. "Consistently passionate and emotionally resonant, Mah's prose brims with true love--not only for her adventures in and around the fragrant Parisian marketplaces, but also for daily life," according to a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor.

*The Lost Vintage*, released in 2018, tells the story of a sommelier named Kate Elliott. Kate has been trying unsuccessfully to pass an important sommelier exam. She decides to travel to Domaine Charpin, a French vineyard owned by her ancestors, to improve her knowledge of wine. There, she reconnects with relatives and old friends. Kate also learns the story of her great-aunt Helene's difficult experiences during and after WWII.

In an interview with a contributor to the *Librarian Talks* website, Mah discussed the inspiration behind the story. "I first visited Burgundy in 2010 to research an article on Thomas Jefferson's favorite vineyards in France. The minute I set foot in the region, I was captivated by the vine-covered slopes and charming villages. And if I sensed ghosts there, hovering amid the beauty, they only added to my fascination. I think the seed for this novel was planted then." She commented on her research process in the same interview, stating: "It was important to me to be able to write accurately about the wine world, so as part of the research for this book, I took classes through the Wine and Spirits Education Trust, which is the same organization that administers the Master of Wine program."

A *Kirkus Reviews* writer remarked: "Mah deserves credit at least for raising a still-taboo subject--the barbaric and unjust treatment of accused female collaborators after the Allied liberation of France." The writer described the volume as "an unusual but imperfectly realized blend of trivia and tragedy." However, Thane Tierney, critic on the *BookPage* website, asserted: "*The Lost Vintage* never feels forced or heavy-handed, and her vivid prose unlocks the musty aromatics of a long-abandoned cellar full of secrets for even the least sophisticated of palates." "Mah's engaging story resonates on many levels," commented Deborah Donovan in *Booklist*.

FURTHER READINGS:

## FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

### PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, February 1, 2010, Kristine Huntley, review of *Kitchen Chinese: A Novel about Food, Family, and Finding Yourself*, p. 26; August 1, 2013, Amye Day Ong, review of *Mastering the Art of French Eating: Lessons in Food and Love from a Year in Paris*, p. 16; May 1, 2018, Deborah Donovan, review of *The Lost Vintage*, p. 65.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, September 1, 2013, review of *Mastering the Art of French Eating*; April 15, 2018, review of *The Lost Vintage*.
- *Library Journal*, August 1, 2013, Courtney Greene, review of *Mastering the Art of French Eating*, p. 114.
- *Publishers Weekly*, November 9, 2009, review of *Kitchen Chinese*, p. 29.

### ONLINE

- *Ann Mah* website, <http://annmah.net> (October 19, 2018).
- *Bonjour Paris*, <https://bonjourparis.com/> (August 16, 2018), Janet Hulstrand, review of *The Lost Vintage*.
- *BookPage Online*, <https://bookpage.com/> (June 19, 2018), Thane Tierney, review of *The Lost Vintage*.
- *Librarian Talks*, <https://thelibrariantalks.wordpress.com/> (June 19, 2018), author interview.
- *Reading Reality*, <https://www.readingreality.net/> (June 28, 2018), Marlene Harris, review of *The Lost Vintage*.
- *University of Chicago Press* website, <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/> (April 1, 2014), author profile.\*

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