



MARSEILLES 2009

**XXIII EWC CONGRESS
& FORUM
MARE NOSTRUM V**



MARE NOSTRUM V

This forum took place in Marseilles on the 19th and 20th of June 2009.

The Forum MARE NOSTRUM V is a conference organised by the Société des Gens de Lettres (SGDL, France) in cooperation with the European Writers' Council (EWC-FAEE), with the support of the European Commission Education and Culture DG, the CNL and SOFIA (France).

The Mare Nostrum series was created by the EWC as a European forum for the dialogue between cultures in the Mediterranean area and the rest of Europe. The previous events were held in Delphi (1999), Barcelona (2001), Cyprus (2004), and Trieste (2007). Historically, Marseilles has been more than a symbol of the crossroads of cultures, and its region is an important foundation of European culture. The themes chosen for Forum Mare Nostrum V seek to explore the crossroads between literature and the Mediterranean, expanding towards Africa and the Middle-East.

SGDL is a French writers' association, created in 1838 by Balzac, Hugo, Dumas and defending authors' rights. www.sgdl.org

EWC is the Federation of 60 authors' associations in 34 countries of Europe, representing over 100 000 individual writers and literary translators. www.europeanwriters.eu





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OPENING

John Erik Forslund,
president of the EWC

Alain Absire,
president of the SGDL

Dear fellow citizens of the country of literature,

As President of the European Writers' Council, and together with Alain Absire, president of La Société des Gens de Lettres, it is a real pleasure for me to open this Mare Nostrum forum here in Marseille, the old port to the world, a forum which will be devoted, among other things, to questions related to literary translation. More or less all themes that you want to explore on the Mare Nostrum and European level are, sooner or later dependent on translations.

Coming from a small northern country myself, I know from experience, how necessary translation is; it allows us to discover other literary environments and other ways of thinking and expressing oneself. It also allows people from other language areas to better understand my country, my language, my culture. Translations give me an opportunity to better understand what it means to be a member of my Swedish society, a society whose structures, customs and methods are different, today and historically, from those of for instance the French society. I am thinking of a book like *Le Rouge et le Noir*, originally published in 1830, which has existed for a long time in a very good Swedish translation. I wonder what our common literary heritage would be if this masterpiece, a true living classic, had not been translated also into Swedish?

But apart from the cultural importance of diversity in literary expression - in different languages and in translations of good quality - translation itself gives us amounts of evidence of other kinds in its favor.

First of all, I want to insist on the value of translation in terms of its contribution to dialogue and to intercultural understanding. Translation is an unavoidable tool when one tries to build bridges between the different regions of

Europe and of the world. Last April, a first conference was held in Brussels under the aegis of the EU Commission, dealing with the problems and potentials of the literary translation sector. One of the conclusions of the conference was that literary translation is a crucial element for European culture, and that the EC was to explore all possibilities in order to sustain the profession.

I also want to remind us that the work of literary translators is in itself a job-creating profession within the book chain. It creates new publishing possibilities and generates new royalties for writers, it gives work to editors and publishers, paper-mills, bookstores, librarians etc. Though it does not belong to what we call the cultural industries in the narrow sense of the word, the art of literary translation is, nevertheless, a most vital part of the Lisbon strategy of the European Union.

So, I wish us all a good forum Mare Nostrum.

Thank you.

John Erik Forslund

It is not without a certain emotion that I wish a warm and fraternal welcome to all.

Mare Nostrum V symbolises the encounter of diverse languages, forms and literary spaces; it is at the junction of writing and action. During the course of our forum, we shall hear such writers as Gabriela Adamesteanu, Diego Marani, Daniel Rondeau and Alain Mabanckou. We shall also try to clarify what are the cultural stakes of translation in the Mediterranean area, to assess the influence of geography on the crime novel, and to reflect upon the situation of the writer in exile.

Tomorrow, we shall travel through the centuries and stroll along the shores of the Mediterranean with a musical show brought to us by the writer Yann Appery and the musician Claude Barthélemy.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Jean Sarzana who first had, back in October 2007, the idea of today's gathering here in Marseilles. My special thoughts also go to Cristina Campodonico and Evelyn Prawidlo from France's Société des Gens de Lettres; their energy and enthusiasm allowed

this project to become a reality. Finally, I would like to thank Mr. Diego Marani of the Direction Générale Education et Culture of the European Commission; Sofia, which is an acronym for the French society managing the interests of authors; and, of course, the Centre national du Livre whose support was essential for the program and the organization of this gathering.

Alain Absire



MULTILINGUALISM, INTERCULTURALISM: THE EUROPEAN VIEW

Diego Marani

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to thank you for inviting me to your Mare Nostrum symposium devoted to the dialogue between Mediterranean cultures.

For the European Commission, the dialogue between cultures is one of the most important issues in the construction of Europe. When languages talk between themselves, a common consciousness and a sense of belonging become possible, and each is enriched by the knowledge of others.

The evolution of this dialogue has never ceased on our continent. It produced the centuries of cultural diversity which we know. It allowed ideas to travel, arts to flourish, and fostered technological innovation.

But in the literary field, this permanent communication has had its most profound effects. As I read in your brochure, love of literary creation, fictional or poetic, favors the progress of tolerance and union.

When we tell stories, we reach for the the deepest part of our souls. The messages that we send out are universal. Europe invented the novel, and through this invention, it put Man at the centre of his own history. In fact, Europe also invented History itself, and thus gave Man a past and a future. At the same time the men of the Renaissance discovered perspective in painting, they took possession of their own space and became the actors of their own lives. Man learned to build his own world. Palaces and churches, but also he learned to tell stories. If we have always been builders, it is because we believe in Man and in his creativity.

Literary creation has the power of creating worlds, and it offers Man an emergency exit out of his mortal life. Finally, nothing is truer nor more durable than books. Men disappear, but the stories they wrote remain.

Proust said that fiction is “*the true life, life finally discovered and enlightened, and therefore the only life that we live.*”

The telling of a story is always a dialogue between the one who tells it and the one who listens to it. The tales of our grand-parents were a way of keeping communication open between one generation and another.

In the same way, when we read a foreign book, we establish a dialogue with this other world that we do not know.

I feel, because of my personal experience, that I may perhaps know the Finnish people a bit better since I read their Epic poem, the Kalevala. A large part of this folktale, which is also a myth, is difficult to grasp for a foreigner because of its archaic language. And also because the translation of poetry is almost always only an approximation. But the voice of a whole people can be heard there, wrapped in hermetic and mysterious words. How could we resist plunging into that other world to seize the opportunity we are given to live this other life that reading affords us?

Thus, for two cultures to communicate, translation is a necessity. In Europe, we have become used to translation. Our languages are always being translated, and what is more, they are often contaminated. For us, the actual notion of storytelling is strongly intertwined with translation. This is not a coincidence if in French, the word novelist, “*romancier*” used to mean “*translating from Latin into French*”.

And therefore, in Europe, to tell a story is to translate. The ideas that migrate from one language to another through translation change our minds and transform our societies. For this reason also, it can be said that translation is always a bearer of innovation. It triggers a chain reaction. Each culture has its own way of bringing a text to life. Each culture puts into it its own reading and its own vision. And at the end of the process, the text itself has been transformed along with its author. From this intermingling come the strength of our culture as well as the vitality and originality of European society.

And this is why the European Commission has no other choice but to put translation at the centre of its multilingual policy.

On the 20th of April 2009, we organized in Brussels a large cultural conference on literary translation and culture. This allowed the professionals of this sector to get together and exchange ideas. Translators, writers, academicians,

literary critics, but also film and theatre producers made an assessment of the situation, and then explored the perspectives of translation for the future. Numerous ideas emerged that now serve as a basis for the discussions on how to emphasize the importance of the profession, increase the general perception people have of translation, and offer the translator the dignity he deserves in the chain of production of a book. The European Commission is now thinking about its programs for the decades to come, and the elements that emerged from the the April 20th conference will be taken into account. The European Commission already encourages literary translation in many different ways.

The Culture Program (2007-2013) gives aids to literay translations from one language of the European community into another, including ancient Latin and ancient Greek. This is done in order to promote mutual knowledge of the literary and cultural heritage of the different European countries. It is part of our strategy in favor of multilingualism and of the intercultural dialogue.

The Program also tries to encourage the translation of books from countries that have joined the Union since 2004. Publishers who publish books in the lesser spoken languages have widely used and greatly benefited from this program. The number of books published in those languages represents half of the total amount of books receiving help, with a majority of Bulgarian, Slovenian, Hungarian and Lithuanian books.

Both public and private publishers have access to this financing, and for all kinds of books, from novels, tales, theatre plays and poetry, to comic books at the other end of the spectrum.

In 2008 the budget allocated to literary translation comes up to 2.3 million Euros.

The projects that are financed can each go from 1 to 10 books, translated from one European language into another. The grants can go from 2 000 to 60 000 Euros.

Several thousands of books have already been translated with grants from the previous Community's program, especially from the Cultural Program 2000. This action was prolonged with the 2007-2013 program, and we have the ambition of continuing it in the future, taking into account the new needs in this sector.

The European Commission, as I have already said, commits itself not only to help literary translation, but also to more generally promote reading with transversal projects.

In September 2009, the second conference will take place in Brussels "*Culture in motion*", an initiative meant to draw the public's attention to the many projects that have received help from the various Culture Programs.

On that same occasion, President José Manuel Barosso will present a prize for contemporary literature given by the European Union; this prize will be awarded by a jury composed of representatives of the 12 countries involved in this new program.

This prize is intended to emphasize the originality and variety of our European cultural wealth, to promote the circulation of our culture within the boundaries of Europe, and to encourage European citizens to take an interest in the work of foreign literary authors.

A consortium of the European Federation of Publishers and the European Writers' Council was chosen to organize the first edition of this European literary prize.

The first countries to participate are Austria, Croatia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden.

The European Commission is also going to launch in 2009 a feasibility study for a European literary translation award, as well as a feasibility study for actions designed to help the mobility of translators.

As you can see, within the limits of our competence and budget, we are doing everything we can to prolong a policy of promotion of literary translation within the wider range of our cultural policy.

But it is from European society itself that the largest contribution to our work can come. This is why initiatives like yours are so important to us, because they give us the evidence we can use and put forward when we want to put pressure on our member states to get them to invest more into culture.

The cultural dialogue which is put forward here today, is all the more important and precious as it bears the name of our Mare Nostrum. The Mediterranean area gives us the most palpable example of the interplay between

mutually nourishing diversities. From one shore of this sea to the other, Europe is being defined and built, including through a relationship with what it is not but still needs in order to exist. The Mediterranean Sea is known under many different names depending on the different shores it bathes. For the Arabs it is the White Sea, for the ancient civilizations it was the Green Sea, for Herodotus it was the North Sea, and for the men of the Renaissance it was the Southern Sea; it sometimes bears a masculine name, a feminine name or a neutral name, but it is always the same sea; it is ours, and belongs to all of us.

During the next two days, you are going to delve into a great variety of writings and follow various literary experiences in their singular paths. Your work can only help bind together the different cultures from the Mediterranean area and elsewhere. But in the end, more than the men, the books shall speak. Milan Kundera wrote, "Great novels are always a bit more intelligent than their authors. The novelists that are more intelligent than their novels should change trade."

So let us allow books to speak, and let us trust their wisdom, so that the shores of this sea may be drawn closer and closer. It is not a coincidence if all the great books that nourish our common cultural heritage came from these shores.



TRANSLATION, THE LANGUAGE OF EUROPE

Gabriela Adamesteanu

▲ Translation, the language of Europe

I am going to talk here mainly about Romania, the country I know best. I am sure however, that the same model can be applied, with a few variables, to other countries of Central Europe, Eastern Europe, or even on other continents altogether. After the fall of Communism, I became aware that the Western public was expecting our cultural level to be as dismal as our material conditions. A number of things are difficult to understand when you live in a democratic country. Today, in our country, we can explain to the new generations the complexities of life in democratic countries. Cultural interest remains alive in countries that live under the rule of a dictator, and this is even more true if before the coming to power of a harsh regime, those countries had enjoyed a “normal” cultural tradition, which was the case with Romania. When the conditions are difficult, arts and letters can sometimes offer some sort of compensation to material deprivation. When television broadcasts for only two hours a day, and then only to praise the dictator; when everyone knows that the press only prints false news; when it is extremely hard to get permission to travel to other countries of the same continent, literature, as well as music, the theatre or the cinema become a partial access to the forbidden world. People have large gaps of unemployed time, so they read while queueing up for hours, and hours and hours, in order to satisfy their most basic and vital needs, they read in overcrowded buses or streetcars, on trains, and sometimes even at the office.

I do not want to give you the idea that I am speaking in favour of dictatorship, nor give you the feeling that one must live in the straightjacket of a bureaucracy to become a reader. I merely want to explain the power of reading as well as the power of books. In Romania, and probably elsewhere, a European consciousness was preserved and kept alive with the help of translation. Harsh regimes outlaw certain writers and certain titles, but they can never manage to destroy the books that had remained in the closets, the chests, the

cellars, the old libraries. And those books attract the next generations who always show a certain interest for the forbidden fruit.

Translation during the Communist period

But what about censorship, do you ask? Censorship functioned in different ways when it dealt with Romanian literature, and when it dealt with translations. The censors could not exert on foreign writers, some of them long dead, the same pressure that they could exert on the Romanian writers living under their rule.

Censorship is a political tool, and the policy of the various Communist parties changed and evolved between 1950 and 1980. For books in translation, censorship was at its strictest in the 1950's, at the beginning of the Cold War. At the time, Western Europe and the United States were our great enemies. In the countries of the Warsaw Pact, Soviet and Russian culture were greatly favored. However, censorship more or less authorized foreign literature published before the beginning of the XXth century and only suppressed a few passages here or there. At the time, we read and translated lots of classics; Tolstói, Tchekov, Gogol, Tourgueniev. But also Shakespeare, Molière, Dante, Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, Dickens, and many more writers belonging to great literary traditions.

There were then enormous amounts of translations, and they were excellent from a literary point of view, done by writers who preferred to translate rather than write what the politicians told them to write. During the 1950's, social realism was the compulsory mode. Some of these translators were not allowed to sign their translations. They were former political prisoners who had been ostracized but who knew foreign languages well, and their translations benefitted from their talent. Many of the translations of the time were published over and over, and some of them are still available.

During the 1960's and 1970's, at the time of the political thaw, the forbidden literature of the XXth century became available to the public. This was the time when we were able to recover some of the literary territories that we had lost, the time of our discovery of Proust, Mann, Kafka, Ionesco and Beckett, Hemingway, Faulkner, Borges, Vargas Llosa and, some time later, Musil and Joyce. Our young writers tried to write in the wake of the Nouveau roman or Magic realism. Literary, historical, geographical and social Europe, with its overflowing catalogues was being welcomed in a new publishing house dedicated to the literature of the whole world.

In the 1980's, under Ceausescu, translation continued thanks to the Western publishers and authors who accepted to give their rights for free or sell them for very small financial compensations. Those were generous acts, and the

consequence was more readers and less money, and this bore its fruits later because it facilitated communications between the two parts of Europe, and also because it helped give successive generations a European spirit.

I would like to add that the suppression of all current news continued to remain the objective of the censors. We were able to learn many a detail about various European cities, and life in the past centuries, but we had no access to any news of the construction of Europe, the European institutions, or any form of contemporary life.

▲ One way translations

I have so far only talked about the status of the foreign books that were translated inside Romania. Which was much better than what could have been expected. Contrary to this, very few Romanian writers were translated into foreign languages, even as far back as the 1920's, the period when Romania had a few great writers, things were in pretty bad shape. Books were only translated from West to East. And though they were quite well informed of the developpements of Western culture, the Romanian writers were still not being translated. Because of a lack of funds, and also probably of desire.

Because of this absence of literary translations from our language, Liviu Rebreanu, for example, who is one of the most important novelists of the 30's, never received the Nobel Prize. One of his novels, "The forest of hanged men" was recently translated, almost at the same time as " Last night of love, first night of war" by Camil Petrescu. Inspired by the tragedy of WWI, these two books were published at the beginning of the thirties and, if they had been translated at the time, and if they had benefitted from an adequate campaign in the press, they could have stood a comparison with the novels of Erich Maria Remarque and Hemingway. But, *habat sua fata libelli*. Other Romanian writers of the same period, Mihail Sebastian, or Max Blecher have just recently found the place they deserve on the map of European literature, more than 70 years after their death.

▲ The aging of language in a closed regime

I would like to insist on the close relationship that exists between the political regime of a country and the quality of translation in that country. Languages become exhausted with the years, they become stale in the closed regimes that forbid all forms of communication between their citizens and the rest of the world. As a direct consequence of this type of situation, translations are

not very good, particularly when going from the so called “small” languages to the “main” languages, and this has nothing to do with the quality or the efforts of the translators. In the 1980’s, Ceausescu passed special laws to forbid any sort of contact with foreigners. As a consequence, the foreign languages we learned in our schools and our universities were no longer “living” languages, they aged and became old, because we didn’t use them any longer. The teachers had at their disposal a language that dated back to WWII, the last period when books and people could still circulate more or less normally. Foreign books could only be found in antique shops, which meant the books we had were quite old!

The paths that lead to translation

Literary translation is of the utmost importance, and a bad translation may ruin the chances of a book. The great translators are artists, they create something new, but there aren’t very many of those – this is the feeling I have – in our language, or in other languages. In the majority of cases, the translations are all right, they can pass, no more. Most of the time, it was the politicians who decided which of our books would be published in the West. The fate of those books was in their hands, and as a consequence, this also determined the quality of their translations. Two categories of books were allowed into the Western market.

On one side, the books whose authors were high ranking officials. In general, those books paid their dues to the power in place and reflected the opportunism of their authors; their translations have left no visible traces in the West. On the other side, the books of the dissident writers were welcomed with great interest in the West. Those were the writers who revealed a number of great translators from the Romanian into French such as Alain Paruit, who is now no longer with us. What I am saying may seem mechanical, but the quality of a translator also depends of the number of books he translates. If the publishers and the public show no interest for books coming from such or such country, nobody chooses to become a translator in the languages of those countries.

After 1989, when the borders were open, Romania discovered there were really not very many literary translators towards French, German, Spanish, or English. Because there was not much interest for Romanian books until recently, it took until now for a new generation of translators to emerge. The only exception concerns the translation of poetry, because the censors were less harsh with poetry than with fiction. Our poets were able to attend international symposiums, to meet people and work at their poetry. But this does not

change much to the picture I have given you of the situation.

I believe that the fall of the Wall is largely responsible for the diminishing interest of foreign publishers in the literature of Eastern countries. Dissidence, as a phenomenon, already belonged to the past, and the journalists, the politicians, and the investors were only interested in the present. But since 2000 and the tightening of the ties with the European Union, a new interest for culture can be felt.

▲ The conscience of belonging to Europe

Immediately after December 1989, I remember my surprise, slightly tinged with unhappiness, I must say, every time a journalist asked me what Europe represented for me. This question, it seemed to me, contained the same type of irony as Cioran's "How can you be Romanian?"

That we are not Europeans is a thought we never had during our difficult years. Our quiet certitude may have seemed strange to the citizens of Western Europe who knew nothing of Romania beside the horrible stories about Dracula and Ceausescu. In the press and on television, Romania was filed in the drawer reserved to the absurd dictatorships. It was difficult for you, living in your consumption society, to believe that we had kept alive the conviction that we were citizens of Europe. We felt European because literature anchored us in Europe.

May I remind you that the modern Romanian state was put on the map of Europe against the will of the great empires but with the substantial help of France after the Revolution of 1848; and from the start, Romania has always looked towards the West of the European continent.

▲ The change of languages

A number of Romanian aristocrats and literary personalities surrounded Proust. Their names have remained in the French cultural memory as Romanian writers, but in fact, they are French writers who never wrote in any other language than French. This was the case, at different moments and in different ways, of Cioran or Ionesco. Ionesco lived most of his life in France, a country he loved deeply. His critical articles, published in Romania, are only interesting for the history of literature. Cioran's case is a bit different. He regretted most of the books he had published in Romania, and he opposed any publication in their original form in France. Cioran built himself a new identity in France, and chose to write in another language.

I think we should not be angry at those writers who chose another language and another literature, even if the immense classic Romanian writers remain unknown. Benjamin Fondaoianu, a Romanian poet, became in France Benjamin Fondane. To justify his departure, he said Romanian literature had been colonized by French literature (this is not true, but who remembers today the writer Mihai Eminescu or the playwright Luca Caragiale?). Cioran thought that Romanian was a “small” language and that our country was only peripheral; in his eyes, it couldn’t offer any chance to a writer who wanted to exist on the European level.

But Benjamin Fondane may also have left Romania because of the rise of antisemitism. Unluckily, despite his emigration to France, he could not escape death in Auschwitz, alas. For their history, and for their language, writers pay with exile. But for Romanian writers, exile was often a second chance, and sometimes a real chance.

The dilemmas of today

The entry of Romania into the European Union, the emergence of a group of new professional publishers, and the arrival of a new team at the head of the Cultural Institute, together with the experience we have acquired from our close contacts with the cultural institutes of Poland and Hungary, the Centre National du Livre in France, and the Goethe Institute in Germany have made it possible to revive cultural interest in our country and to change its cultural climate. The Romanian Cultural Institute has launched programs designed to bring financial assistance to foreign houses publishing Romanian Literature. The Institute also gives grants to the translators; it is a good initiative, even if it comes late and if the financial crisis doesn’t exactly help the sale of books in today’s world. The number of Romanian writers who are translated, if we add together the different generations, is growing. There is more than just Norman Manea, Mircea Cartarescu, Mircea Dinescu, Ana Blandiana. Romanian writers and translators have more and more opportunities to take part in European events, each of them develops new networks, and makes new friendships that often count when publishing decisions have to be made. But the path that leads to translation for Eastern writers necessarily takes them West. One does not discover the writers of neighboring countries, one accepts them after they have been translated and published in one of the “main” languages of the West. And after the publication of a book, new problems arise: the low sales, the small space devoted to the review or the criticism of books, to which must be added the image of an Eastern country that, to say the least, does not particularly awaken the curiosity of Westerners. I want to quote,

as an example, the sentence written by a literary agent in his report on my novel "Lost morning" (my first novel, translated into French with a 20 years delay and published by Gallimard): "What could possibly be the interest of the French public for Romanian literature and history?" It seemed to me these words showed a certain cynicism, but I had to admit they were not unreasonable. Without literary agents showing interest for books from the East - no large printings - writers and translators are the only ones who can get books translated.

The choice between writing for a Romanian audience or a Western audience is a dilemma for the writers who are already translated. The expectations are different, and a translated book does not necessarily have a greater literary value.

The world is now open; it is not only open for us but also for the writers from other continents whose trajectories are similar to ours, and sometimes even darker than ours. We write a lot, I am even tempted to say that we write too much if we consider the diminishing number of readers. But we are on the threshold of a new age, and it is difficult to say what tomorrow has in store for us.

But we shall keep our enthusiasm! For today and for life!



**TRANSLATION
AROUND THE
MEDITERRANEAN RIM:
A CULTURAL ISSUE**

Martin de Haan

Before introducing the people in this panel, I would like to begin with a small anecdote... We are on the shore of the Mediterranean, and an image rises before my eyes, it is the image of the translator as a ferryman. When I used the expression “ferryman” in a manifesto defending literary translation published last year in Holland*, the French translation of the Dutch word *veerlieden* gave... “people of the quill”! This is because the word *veer*, barge, also means “feather”, and the woman who was translating immediately made the connection. It is a fact that our profession is inscribed in a dual context, we are both authors and go-betweens – for translation is not a transfer in which the text remains identical to what it was, but a transfer in the sense of transformation; to translate is to create a new text (protected by a copyright). So here we are, sitting at this table, five ferrymen, five people of the quill: Martin Lexell, who translates from Swedish into Spanish, lives in Spain, and has translated Per Olov Enquist and Stieg Larson among others; Ali Benmakhlouf, a philosopher who has published books on Frege, Russell and Montaigne, and who currently supervises the Arabic translation of *Le Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*; Hanneke van der Heijden, who is from Holland but lives in Istanbul, translates from Turkish into Dutch, and has translated Orhan Pamuk among others; and finally Khaled Osman, who was born in Egypt and lives in France, is particularly known for his translations of Naguib Mahfouz and Gamal Al Ghitani. As for myself, I am the president of CEATL (the European Council of Literary Translators’ Associations), I live in France and I translated Proust, Diderot, Houellebecq, Kundera and Echenoz amongst others. Each of us is also very active in fields other than translation, but such is often the case in our trade.

I notice that three of us translators do not live in the land of our native language. This is unusual, and I would like to ask Martin Lexell and Hanneke

* *Overigens schitterend vertaald* (2008), written by Martin de Haan and Rokus Hofstede, signed by five important Dutch and Flemish institutions. The French version was not published, but the English text can be downloaded at www.vertaalpleidooi.nl.

van der Heijden why they made such a choice, and whether their experience with cultural differentiation helps them in their work, or whether it is just one more complication.

Martin Lexell

My translating activity really started out as a necessity when I came down to Madrid to teach Swedish language and literature. I got to know my Nordic colleagues, that taught Finnish and Norwegian and Danish and Icelandic language and literature in Madrid, and we were all at different universities. Madrid has five universities and the Nordic different lectureships were all in different places. But thanks to generous subsidies, from the Nordic council, we did lots of projects together. The first thing we did was this big anthology of short stories from the different Nordic countries, and that since continued: we've done about six anthologies on different aspects of Nordic literature in Spanish, with introductions and footnotes, destined to our students. I came down in the end of the eighties, and found out that in Spain there was almost nothing translated, apart from a couple of plays by Strindberg and a few police novels. I was really quite desperate when I understood that nothing had been done, because I had to teach Swedish literature without any literature translated into Spanish! So it really started out that way, and as some of my colleagues worked in teams, with Spanish writers or translators, I decided to do the same. Since then, I've burned about four of them, I'm just starting out with the fifth one, because it's tough work (and I am tough on them...). But it's a really entertaining and rewarding experience, because translating is not a very social activity: you can get very isolated. There is a lot of fighting of course, cultural and linguistic, sometimes physical! But it's very enriching. When you reach a certain level in a foreign language, it's difficult to move on. How can you become better? A translation with a Spanish expert is a fantastic way to just keep on working with your language. When we disagree about a translation, it's like a tug-of-war! I pull towards the uniqueness of the Nordic sense and culture, and he or she pull towards readability. And the problem is that my translating colleague is often like an accomplice teamed up with the publisher. And the publisher wants readability. So I really have to be insistent sometimes, it's a give and take. At a final stage, we do a reading together. He reads and I listen, then I read and he listens. And comments are about how it sounds, because that's really fundamental.

Martin de Haan

Hanneke, you live in Istanbul, you translate Turkish literature into Dutch, and you also work together with another translator, but this other translator is Dutch like you.

Hanneke van der Heijden

I was already working as a literary translator when I came to Istanbul. I wanted to be in the middle of Turkish literature and see what was happening there. But apart from being a translator, I wanted to write articles about Turkish literature for Dutch magazines as well. It's simpler to see what's going on in Turkish literature if you're living in Istanbul than when you stay in Utrecht... The nature of my cooperation with another translator is different from Martin (Lexell)'s, because in our case, both of us are native speakers of Dutch. We worked together to write a comprehensive anthology of Turkish short stories, and yes, we had our fights as well. But I like to work on a translation together, most because of what Martin (Lexell) said: it's a solitary kind of work, sitting behind your computer all day long, and it's not always very inspiring. But what's even more important, you can learn a lot from your colleagues when you work together, since translating needs so much creativity and finetuning. When two persons look at the same text, each with its own imagination and knowledge of both Turkish and Dutch, as in our case...Very often we come to solutions we wouldn't have found by ourselves .

Martin de Haan

At the end, do you think you have one voice together, or do you try to make a division of tasks?

Hanneke van der Heijden

We have a division of tasks, but we try to make it one voice in the end. I've never heard from readers that they can see which of us translated which part. Usually we divide the chapters in a novel for example, but not by half: it would be too visible and too complicated to wipe out individual differences between the two of us. So each one translates different chapters, more or less in turns. But I remember this novel of Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, in which every chapter was told by one of some fifteen characters. In that case, we divided the characters in the book, each of us had his own set of characters, and translated the chapters that belonged to them.

Martin de Haan

The cultural differences between two languages are of course very interesting. How do you work when these differences are very important, like between Turkish and Dutch culture? Are you maybe more interested in the specific qualities of the author?

Hanneke van der Heijden

As a translator, you have to deal with big cultural differences all the time, on

different kind of levels. I think that most readers first look at cultural concepts that are conspicuously different and are therefore supposed to be hard to translate. In the early translations of Turkish literature into Dutch, there were very often explanations in the back of the book, made by the translator, trying to cope with cultural differences in the field of food and clothing. On the other hand, many translators of German into Dutch, or of French into Spanish will have the same kind of problems, but to many of us, these cultural differences pose less of a translation problem because they are not so visible at first sight. However, cultural differences are less dependent on distances or geography than we think.

Martin de Haan

I now turn to Ali Benmakhlouf who supervises the Arabic translation of *Le Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, which bears as a subtitle: *Dictionary of untranslatables*. Does the difficulty concern the concepts themselves or the cultural differences?

Ali Benmakhlouf

Le Vocabulaire européen des philosophies is a project that was carried out by Barbara Cassin, who is a research director with the CNRS; it regroups the work of over two hundred contributors who wrote articles in fifteen different European languages. Thus, there are entries in Greek, English, Portuguese, German, etc. I committed myself to translating, along with ten other translators, the six volumes of this *Vocabulary*; the first volume will come out next September. As for the subtitle, the idea is not to say that some things are untranslatable, but rather that a translation is never finished; translating is a never-ending process because reality itself is polyglot. And languages try to grasp such a reality, and this is why the gap between the initial word and its translation must be constantly bridged, again and again, and the aim is precision more than conformity.

After translating Frege from German, and Averroès from Arabic, I became very interested in Montaigne, a sixteenth century Gascon who spoke Latin and wrote in French. And my translators for the *Dictionary* speak dialects from Morocco, Egypt or Tunisia, they read French and write in Classical Arabic. When we consider what Hannah Arendt called the “world’s wavering dubiousness” this multilingualism allows for immediate idiomatic interchange.

Martin de Haan

If translating is a transfer, it is obvious that at the end of the process we are left with a different text, hence the *untranslatable*.

Ali Benmakhlouf

Yes, basically we do not translate to provide meaning: the act of translating makes meaning emerge. Diego Marani said that the translator “invents and transforms”, and this is so because the translator’s first desire is to understand the text. He wants to offer an understanding rather than impose a meaning. If we consider that a pre-established meaning exists, we run the risk of reifying it. It is a whole adventure to witness the emergence of meaning, born of the translator’s relationship to the living text.

Martin de Haan

I think it is important to underline what has just been said, because readers and publishers do not always realize that translation is not at all a “mechanical” process. It is not about the production of an identical text. Furthermore, if we admit that the European languages are relatively close to one another, we can see the difficulty of translating into Turkish or Arabic.

Khaled Osman

I must confess I am no longer conscious of the difficulty because my family moved to France when I was very young. So that I was lucky enough to benefit from a double culture – as one of the characters in *Astérix* says “I fell into it as a child”. This doesn’t mean that the cultural differences disappear, but rather that they are internalized. This context probably helps us gain a certain understanding of what happens when we change languages.

Martin de Haan

Recently, I realized that the French keyboard gives more importance to the semi-colon than to the full stop, which is in lower case on the same key. It is a fact that French texts contain a lot of semi-colons. This is not unimportant: punctuation not only gives rhythm to a sentence, it also conveys a way of thinking. The Dutch language very rarely uses the semi-colon, and this is why the translator constantly wonders whether he should leave this semi-colon, or replace it by a comma or a full stop!

Ali Benmakhlouf

We have the same punctuation problem when translating into Arabic, but linguistic competence gives us a certain latitude in our choices.

Khaled Osman

In novels written in Arabic I have noticed that punctuation is far from being the authors’ main preoccupation. The translator often needs to create his

own punctuation, and he has quite a wide range of options, because conformity is not the issue.

Ali Benmakhlouf

Everybody knows the Koran was presented without punctuation, it was recited and versified like a formula. It created an uproar of philosophical controversy, especially since a verse in a *sura* says there are “equivocal verses whose knowledge is bestowed by God [] and the men of great science say we believe in it”. Depending on whether or not you put a full stop between the brackets, the meaning changes. Averroes would have read it like this: “There are equivocal verses whose knowledge is bestowed by God and men of great science. They say we believe in it.”

Martin de Haan

Punctuation can create dreadful problems...

Martin Lexell

That is true; punctuation is a major problem between a Nordic language and a Romanic or a Mediterranean language. Swedes are not cold, I think, but Swedish is quite a cold language, it’s an iceberg language. Where a great part of the meaning may very well be hidden! It’s between the lines, and beneath the lines, and we love the full stop. It’s that Icelandic tradition of ours. And that tension, which is created between two principal clauses with full stops, doesn’t work in Spanish because the Spanish reader doesn’t know that he has to fill in that tension, that meaning between the lines... What a Swedish reader would do. So a translator constantly faces that dilemma: when am I going to remove this full stop and create a subordination? Because Spaniards love subordinations, they never end, they just go on and on... Swedish is different: we want to create a tension; we want the reader to be more active, to participate. The problem is that when you take away a full stop, you have to add something. What subordinate conjunction? Who am I to say that I am the correct interpreter of what the author actually meant? If you take a normal Spanish discourse, it’s always more packed with words than a Swedish one. Just like two sport commentators: the Spanish one will use ten thousand words and the Swedish one five hundred!

There is a story which Per Olov Enquist tells, which can illustrate this difficulty; he claims it is a Swedish story because it is a bit sad, and melancholic, and full of snow... In the dark, there is this man looking for his key, under a street lamp, in deep snow, and a kind man stops to help him, but he can’t find the key. After a long, long time, the kind man asks: “Are you sure you dropped the key here?” “No, I dropped it over there, beneath the other street lamp”.

“Why are you looking here?” “Because there is light here, the other street lamp is broken!”

That story illustrates the dilemma of the translator: shall I look where there is light? Because that’s comfortable for me, and I can make good impression on the publisher, but shouldn’t I look somewhere else, maybe?

Ali Benmakhlouf

Punctuation is already a problem in one language alone. Before being transposed, every text has its own odd specificity. This is why transposing a text is more like an interchange between two languages, rather than just a change from one into another.

Hanneke van der Heijden

Pamuk is known in Turkey for his very long sentences, but I believe that many other Turkish writers think that no Turkish reader can read them very easily, and according to many Pamuk’s translators should break these long sentences into pieces.

Martin de Haan

It reminds me of the hard time we have with Proust’s long sentences when we translate them into Dutch. There is a dilemma because cutting the phrases also means cutting the flow, the rhythm, the thinking process. It also makes me think about Claude Simon’s writings, which are sometimes just one long sentence... But what about Arabic, which is a non-European language? Is its syntax so very different from French syntax?

Khaled Osman

The notion of time is no doubt radically different. This is not a value judgment on the approach each language uses, but we can nevertheless say that Arabic does not necessarily try to *situate* the different elements of a narration. When translating into French, you need to rebuild the storyline. To such an extent that three translators of the same text could give three different and equally valid translations: translation is not an exact science.

Ali Benmakhlouf

In Arabic, the tense is the aspect. We are surrounded by the past, surrounded by the future, but the past does not come before, and the future does not come after...

Khaled Osman

We must also say that translators are not entirely free to make whatever

choice thou want: the publisher also has his say. Our decisions as translators often try to take into account the specificity of the initial language – of course, with all due respect to the sacrosanct accuracy of syntax and grammar. These choices are not always accepted by the publisher who tends to narrow down the language so that it ends up sounding like something written by someone from Saint-Germain-des-Prés! I often have to quarrel with the publisher in order to keep the right tone.

Martin de Haan

Things change a lot depending on the country. For my translations I don't want a single comma changed without my permission, whereas in Germany, an editor will work on the text in a way which will not necessarily be acceptable for the translator – the translator is, we must never forget it, the author of the translation.

Khaled Osman

I am lucky enough to work mainly with publishers who respect the work of the translator. On some rare occasions, dissensions did occur about a text. In those cases, you need to find some common ground, because the publisher is legally responsible for the translation. But that being said, in most cases, the discussions were profitable, and sometimes fascinating.

Ali Benmakhlouf

Most publishers give translators a lot of leeway, but at times, they indulge in what I call lazy sophistry, which consists in the use of the word as it is. For this reason, in Arabic translations, you can find the French words “tabou”, or “sociologia”. I regret this, because a language is enriched when it welcomes another language, through transposition or invention rather than through phonetic re-writing.

Martin de Haan

Proust wrote in one of his letters: “In order to defend language, one must attack it”. This is also very true in the translator's case: you cannot defend a language if you consider it is forever fossilized. A good translator dares challenge the stylistic conventions of his language.

But once the translation is finished, it needs to reach its public. Does the literary critic treat the same way Turkish or Arabic texts, and texts written in French or in a European language?

Hanneke van der Heijden

In the Netherlands we saw a big change in the perception of Turkish litera-

ture. It took a very long time before the first Turkish novels were translated into Dutch. Until the sixties of the last century, there was a small amount of novels translated, and most of these told about the rural setting that was also the background of Turkish migrants living in the Netherlands. Turkish fiction was not so much looked upon as fiction, but more as a kind of documentary, telling about life in Turkey. In the nineties, this started to change slowly, Pamuk's novels probably played a big role in that as well; nowadays Turkish literature is mainly seen as fiction. One of the reasons of this change is that in the second half of eighties, the Dutch slowly started to consider migrants as a part of Dutch society, not so much as 'guests workers' who would stay in the Netherlands for a short period of time only. The anthropological interest in life in Turkey diminished, leading to a more literary view of Turkish fiction. At the same time, Turkish literature itself changed in character as well. Until the eighties, Turkish fiction was very often socially engaged literature. Many authors were writing about political causes, using novels to convey their social views. After the coup of 1980 in Turkey, this political literature became hardly possible, which stimulated Turkish authors to adopt a postmodern attitude, like in Western Europe.

Martin de Haan

So you think it's better to have Turkish fiction considered as fiction and not as an image of the country. Policy makers nowadays are always talking about intercultural dialogue and building bridges between nations, but the danger is that literature then becomes instrumental to ideology.

Khaled Osman

I agree, there is always the risk of a misunderstanding in a country that receives a book from a rare, or so-called minor language. People often consider those books as documents rather than simply as fiction. They expect something else, perhaps exoticism, like at the end of the nineteenth century. We are often confronted to this when choosing a title. I am thinking, for example, of Nagib Mahfouz's book whose title was literally "the children of the area", but the publisher opted for "The sons of the Medina". But the Medina was a wrong choice in this case! On top of that, the novel is allegoric, and, in fact, the "area" symbolized the world. The thirst for exoticism has not yet ended. There is another problem in the sense that people want to see political connotations in every novel; they expect these books as one would a pamphlet, or a something that should set the world on fire. And this is not without consequences: last year, I translated the work of a feminist Palestinian woman, with a *nuanced* vision, and the novel was ignored by the medias because it could not be reduced to what was expected.

Martin Lexell

In Spain we have to fight constantly with these stereotyped images that Spaniards have of Sweden, and Swedish women above all... And in literature, we have something like two sects, the elitist one dealing with quality literature in small publishing houses, normally introduced by the translator or a university professor, who has convinced the publisher to publish, even when he objects that "it's not very Swedish, is it?" That means a tortured, anguished existentialism like in Bergman, or a bloody battle between sexes like in Strindberg. And if it's not, then it's not very Swedish. So the "raison d'être" for Swedish literature in Spain is sometimes "Swedishness".

Martin de Haan

This reminds me of Milan Kundera saying that a good novelist is writing against his country, not for it. So we should be very careful not to make the mistake of considering writers as simple products of their country and culture.

Ali Benmakhlouf

Odd or laughable situations are symptomatic of translation because we need to transgress our preconceptions about identity. Everything that strengthens identity preconceptions works against us. You talked about the problem of reception, of what was expected, but there is also the influence of the medias that encourages publishers to publish recent books. In Northern Africa or in Lebanon, in the social sciences, people will find it more logical to buy Michel Foucault than older texts, including Sartre. The latest European book reviews are conscientiously read and obeyed, and people will buy the book that is being talked about, even if it is a dreadful book... And incredibly important titles remain to be translated, I am thinking, for instance, of Montaigne, who is still not available in Arabic after four hundred years. My translation does not concern the 1500 pages of the *Essays* but tries to offer a good anthology of about 400 pages. In the same way, quite a number of books were never translated, because of the reaction or lack of reaction of the medias sometimes, and we must keep our eyes open if we do not want entire parts of the intellectual landscape to be ignored. For instance, in philosophy, all of empiricism and anglo-saxon skepticism has been swept under the rug. Hume, Locke, Lewis Carroll...

Martin de Haan

It is very interesting to know which texts are translated and which are not. And for what reasons. The problem with translations into Arabic is that very often, they are made from English translations.

Ali Benmakhlouf

It is a serious problem: we translate Descartes from English to Arabic in countries that were under British protectorate, and also Nietzsche from French in Morocco, despite the fact that they have a good German department, but the Moroccan philosophers who translate, and who, for most of them studied for their doctorates in France, have a very good working knowledge of French, and they chose, which is not without risk, to translate Nietzsche from the French, which is we may regret.

Martin de Haan

The success of multicultural dialogue can be questioned if you compare the numerous translations of European texts into Arabic, and the very few titles translated from Arabic and available in Europe. In Holland, in 2005, 75% of the translated texts came from the English language, and just a little bit more than 0% came from Turkish or Arabic. In England, only 3% of the books available are translations, 12% in France and 35% in Holland.

Hanneke van der Heijden

I think that the same is true for Turkey. There are much more titles translated into Turkish than there are Turkish titles translated into other European languages. Moreover, the body of books that is translated into Turkish mainly consist of titles from the Western European market. There are hardly any translations of Arabic or Farsi into Turkish. And if so, they usually concern titles that became very popular in Western Europe. Although these countries are very close to each other from a geographical point of view, translations are made from the English and not from the original language.

Khaled Osman

It reminds me of the absence of transversal air traffic: to fly from Cairo to Bamako it is easier to go through Paris! France pays attention to the culture of Turkey and of Arab countries, but strangely enough, this curiosity stops when it comes to the novels of these countries. It is somewhat paradoxical compared to other regions of the world where people easily read their novels but do not manifest any real interest for their cultures.

Ali Benmakhlouf

Two converging elements contribute to the unbalanced situation you describe. First of all, the Arab embassies in Europe do not try to export their culture, for example, they do not give any prizes for translations from the Arabic. The reverse exists. I have just come back from Morocco, and the French embassy and the French Book Office were giving a prize for the translation of a French

book into Arabic. The other explanation is that a large number of books are written in European languages that use Arab countries either as a location for fiction, or as a subject for investigation. In the social sciences a great number of titles concern Islam, and you can even find fiction concerning Islam written by famous French-speaking writers. But that does not dispense us from reading books translated from Arab.

Martin de Haan

It was noticed by the Dutch sociologist, Abram de Swaan, that the amount of translations depends on the power of the country. The less influence a country has, the smaller is the number of books translated from that country's language, and the greater is the number of books translated into its language.

Hanneke van der Heijden

A couple of years ago, the Turkish ministry of Culture and Tourism introduced a system to subsidize foreign publishing houses who want to publish Turkish literature in translation, mostly in European languages. Strangely enough, among the translations being subsidized there are also quite a few books which will sell very well anyway, like novels by Orhan Pamuk...

Khaled Osman

Government grants can often lead to strange choices. A government that chooses which of its national authors are going to be translated will tend to choose writers who support the regime or, in any case, the more obedient. This is why I am always suspicious when a government subsidizes translations. Grants can be a very good thing locally, for example with a program for the translation of Western writers into Arabic, but I'm suspicious in the case of the reverse.

Martin Lexell

The situation between Swedish and Spanish speaking countries is odd because of the presence of many Latin American immigrants in Sweden. Swedish books normally have to travel first through Germany and France before they reach the Spanish market. There is not much direct exchange between Spain and Sweden, but a lot of exchanges between Sweden and Latin American countries.

Martin de Haan

Government grants tend to change books into export products, which can be dangerous. I totally agree with what Diego Marani said: Europe, which is

neutral because it is not a nation, avoids therefore the temptation of favouring books as national products. It would be interesting to see if the grants that states give to publishers in other countries actually profit the translator. The CEATL conducted a survey showing that translators usually live in very bad material conditions. How is it in Arab countries?

Ali Benmakhlouf

Translators don't get grants, but we can feel a slight awakening with the recent project of a hundred translations from all over the world in Abu Dhabi, with ten French titles, all from the twentieth century. The Arab Organisation for Translation has also published a lot of good quality translations. This Lebanese foundation is supervising different excellent translations - among others, Wittgenstein and Hegel - involving specialists in science and in philosophy. And this time, the translation uses the text in its original language. Their translators are well paid, not like in Abu Dhabi. There, they get a thousand pages, and they are told they have three months to finish the translation. And they get five dollars a page.

Martin de Haan

But there is a quite obvious link between the pay and the quality of the work. In Arab countries, is the situation similar to Europe where a lot of translators need to have a second job?

Khaled Osman

I don't think the profession exists as such in Arab countries. Translations are mainly done by university professors, or by people with a double culture. To my knowledge, there is no possibility of an official representation, the work is subjected to private arrangements.

Martin de Haan

For instance, are the books that are published in Morocco read in Egypt?

Ali Benmakhlouf

Yes, because of a publishing company, the Arab Cultural Centre, based in Morocco; materially, they publish the book in Beirut, and present it in all the Arab Book Fairs, and there are quite a few of them. The Centre was chosen by *Le Seuil* and *Robert* for their translation. But otherwise, the distribution of the books published by small Arab publishing companies is a disaster. There are a few very good existing translations. For example the Syrian Ministry of Culture issued a collection of 400 titles. But those books are not distributed: you actually have to go to the Ministry if you want to get one of them...

Distribution is quite an important problem, and even the Arab Cultural Centre, which is very well known, only distributes their own books. I know quite a few very good small publishers in Tunisia, Algeria or Morocco, who have a very beautiful catalogue, but their books cannot be found anywhere.

Hanneke van der Heijden

The distribution of books is very insufficient in Turkey too. Only the three major cities have good bookshops. Outside of Istanbul, Izmir or Ankara, you need to buy your books through the Internet, on Amazon or from a Turkish Internet bookstore for example.

Ali Benmakhlouf

Luckily, human cleverness knows no bounds: all you have to do is publish a two euro book, and it will be in all the newsstands.

Martin de Haan

So, having circled and discretely started to approach today's theme, *Translation around the Mediterranean Rim: a cultural issue*, I would like us, for our conclusion, to confront this face to face. And I therefore, invite each of you, before this panel discussion comes to its end, to give us your final full stop, or semi colon.

Khaled Osman

I think we would need quite a few hours to discuss this issue in detail, but I believe it is mainly a question of responsibility. The translator has to bear part of the responsibility, but the publisher and the media must also bear their share of the responsibility for the promotion of a dialogue and an exchange between all cultures. The translator, through the suggestion of titles that deserve translation, the publishers through the selection of those he considers interesting. Mutual knowledge is created through accurate choices. Because certain choices can create misunderstandings; for instance, Egyptian authors and critics often complain that the list of Egyptian authors translated into French does not represent at all the range of Egyptian literature. Authors who are considered very good over there are not translated, whereas others, who are considered much less valuable, have considerable success in translation. Their value is measured differently, and I believe this is not specific to the Arabic language. It is generally undeserved criticism (some authors are more translatable than others). And this can be justified when you consider the fact that the French and the Europeans who are in charge of cultural activities often choose books that nourish a reassuring and unimaginative western vision of the Arab world. In this domain, everybody should face their responsibilities.

Martin Lexell

Since I started out as a teacher, and I am still teaching, I truly believed that we have to “contaminate” European citizens with foreign languages, to lead them to buy more translated books. And it is sad that Sweden decided to reduce the number of languages in secondary school. People don’t study as much foreign languages apart from English as they used to.

Ali Benmakhlof

You said earlier that a translation, when it arrives in a country, is a sign of the domination of the initial language. But in the Mediterranean countries, the loss of variety in the French language in the past thirty years has created a loss in the Arab language as well. Because to know one language well, you need to speak at least two.

Hanneke van der Heijden

In the selection of Turkish literature, we see the same lack of variation between different European countries. Most publishing houses in the Netherlands choose Turkish novels that already have been translated into English, French or German...

Khaled Osman

Literary critics are also partly responsible. For instance, we can only be surprised by the place Anglo-Saxon fiction occupies, it seems out of proportion. If a lack of balance can be understandable in fields like science, or essays, one is allowed to wonder when it comes to fiction. Is it not because critics do not dare to venture out of the grounds they know? It is certainly easier to talk about an Anglo-Saxon book because the thinnest cultural varnish can allow one say a few words about it, rather than to review a book that comes from another culture.

Martin de Haan

In the end, I would like to talk about a good project whose name is “Traduire en Méditerranée” and whose object is to make an assessment of the situation we have been discussing. I hope we will be able to discuss its material consequences in a future forum. I now invite questions from the audience.

Jean Sarzana

I would like to comment on the unequal balance between translations. We must not forget the part played by publishers. I noticed that at the Frankfurt Book Fair you can see a number of countries who consider their own literature is not very valuable, and the publishers from these countries come to

buy and not to sell. There must probably be more to gain when you follow the Anglo-Saxon trend rather than try to put forward your own literature...It is a cultural role that the publisher does not always play.

A Finnish person in the audience

Turkey was recently a honorary country in the Frankfurt Book Fair. How did it affect the export of Turkish literature? I'm asking this because Finland is going to be the honorary country at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2014...

Hanneke van der Heijden

I have seen no effect until now... After the Book Fair, none of the Turkish translators in the Netherlands got more titles to translate. I heard German colleagues translating from Turkish into German saying that they had a lot of work to do before the Book Fair, since there was a large amount of Turkish texts that had to be presented on the fair in German. But once the fair was over, everyone was jobless...

Martin de Haan

In 2004 we had "the week of the French book", invented to boost French literature (which has lost a lot of its former prestige in Holland). A lot of translations from the French were published for the occasion, but this only made the general position of French literature even worse: nowadays a lot of Dutch publishers consider the translation of French books as too risky. So this kind of initiative can be very dangerous.

A woman in the audience

Because the fields of semantics are different from one language to another, can we not conclude that a perfect, rigorous and faithful translation does not exist?

Ali Benmakhlouf

If you take two translations of a same text, they may both be compatible with the initial text but incompatible with one another. We aim at concision rather than perfection, at approximation rather than truth, by focusing and adjusting the meaning between the initial word and the translated one. And therefore, two translations can be very different. Each word contains is very contrasted, and we are always on the verge of incompatibility.

Martin Lexell

Truth is a fascinating concept in translation. There is no single perfect translation, but I do believe that there is an infinite number of perfect translations.

A woman in the audience

The reader has to be invited to fill in the gap, but there must be variations across different genres (poetry, novels, essays), and variations also between different decades and centuries.

Martin Lexell

That is one of the major difficulties that we confront as translators, because each book obviously is unique and each writer is a universe in itself. And at the same time, there is no language without culture and no writer without a context. And how do you determine what in that writer's style or language is appropriate for him and not for his cultural context. That is the eternal dilemma. Each language has its own theory on space and time. And when you start to read your work as translator, a few years later you want to change a lot...And five years after, you would do it differently again! Translations are outdated very quickly. Every generation needs its new translation of classic texts. It is a dilemma but a privilege as well. In Sweden there is a wonderful and very contemporary translation of Don Quixote and I am sure that it is a more enjoyable experience than reading it in sixteenth century language... So that's another interesting aspect of translation. We have now in Sweden six translations of Don Quixote, all very different! And I am sure that the last one is for most people a more enjoyable reading experience than reading the original.

Jean Sarzana

Sometimes, translations pose an intrinsic problem, for example, so called "cult" translations. Edgar Poe translated by Baudelaire, or that mountain of a translation of Shakespeare by Victor Hugo. I would like to ask those who took part in the discussion if they ever worked on such a translation. If they were confronted to a sacred monster, or if they ever renounced to translate a book because it was inscribed in the collective mind, and because making a new translation would mean a conceptual breakthrough...

Ali Benmakhlof

The Moroccan historian Abdellah Al Aroui wrote a book in the seventies called "The crisis of Arab intellectuals". The book was very badly translated into Arabic from the start but it was exceedingly widely distributed, and all those who read Arabic believed it really revealed the author's thought. Thirty years later, the author, himself attacked that translation and published a new translation, but those who had read the first translation remained dubious! A bad translation had inscribed the author within a certain context of concepts and placed him in a certain orientation, or even within a tradition against which he had himself battled and lost.

 **A woman in the audience**


For once, the author is the traitor, not the translator!

 **Martin de Haan**

I recently began a new translation of Proust, and I started with *Du côté de chez Swann*. The existing translation of this volume is much appreciated and was even awarded an important prize. The translator chose to stress the nineteenth-century aspect, but I don't believe that this is what characterizes Proust, who is, in my opinion, a prominent modernist. It is also the different visions one has of the work that determine the translation.

 **A man in the audience**

I have noticed the translator is often forced to resist the publisher's tendency to flatten or update certain books. We must defend the translator. He is also an author, and his work is fundamental.

 **A woman in the audience**


Yes, we must battle endlessly with publishers to avoid their tendency to format books.

 **A man in the audience**

We have in Lithuania a special award for the worst translation in the year, which is very well advertised! What do you think about the influence of such award on translations? There is such a prize in the Czech Republic too, given at Prague Book Fair. This year, the winner came to defend himself in a pretty good way, but usually they don't appear...

 **Martin de Haan**

I am not sure this can work everywhere. It's a matter of sense of humor!

 **Hanneke van der Heijden**

In Turkey some publishing houses use already existing translations of classic books, and put a fake name on the cover, as if this person was the translator. To attract attention to this problem of plagiarism, our translators' association has decided this year to give an award to a fake person, who supposedly has made dozens of translations.

 **Martin de Haan**

Thank you everybody, and bravo.



A MEDITERRANEAN PILGRIMAGE

FROM THE FOGS OF CHAMPAGNE
COUNTRY TO THE SHORES OF MALTA

Daniel Rondeau

Thank you for inviting me to come to Marseilles this morning. In fact, I started off on my Mediterranean pilgrimage over twenty years ago, and it has not come to its end yet. As time went by, what had begun as a simple pretext, writing about Paul Bowles, about Tangiers, has become one of the main preoccupations of my life and of my work as a writer. With time, book after book, the project has grown. And this is what I would like to talk to you about today. A month ago, Edgar Morin came to Malta for a conference and told me: "In fact you are a neo-Mediterranean." I can offer you an explanation of how I became a neo-Mediterranean, how I went from the fogs of Champagne country to the shores of the Mediterranean.

I grew up surrounded by vineyards, woods and books. Vineyards and woods because my grandfather was a very modest winegrower in the Champagne region of France, and I spent a lot of time with him in the pressing shed and the cellars, and I really loved my native village, perhaps unlike many people and writers who sometimes think their native village is a prison offering only a limited horizon. And yet, for me, this native village was a metaphor of the world. Through the vineyards and the skies of this village I felt connected to distant worlds. As a child, I spent my holidays with my grandparents, I lived in the vineyard, worked with my grandfather, or rather I accompanied him in the fields, and spent my mornings in his pressing shed. At the time, my parents were school teachers, first in a village, and later in a small town in the Champagne region. When I say I grew up among books, it is also because my father, a kind of secular saint – he was not a great reader, but as a teacher he had a passion for books – did something very unusual for that day and age, and in that particular social class: when I started secondary school, he opened for me an account in a bookshop, the Republican Union's bookshop, in Châlons-sur-Marne, and he told me I could buy there all the books I wanted. It was a royal gift for a child. I used to go there with my bicycle, and gaze at their shop-window. Literature was like a garden, I discovered Giono, Aragon, Malraux, Céline, Camus, Morand...

I really took advantage of the opportunity that my father had given me, I read a lot. Very early in life, I experienced something like a calling, a calling to write. The word is a bit solemn because of its religious connotations: a calling has something to do with the absolute. But as far as I am concerned, it is quite appropriate because I have remained faithful to this calling all my life. Apart from a short interruption when I was twenty, an age when I felt another urge, I dedicated all my life to books, my own books of course, but also the books of others, as a journalist, as a literary journalist, as a columnist, and later as a publisher, as Alain was kind enough to mention it, with *Quai Voltaire* and then with the "*Bouquins*" series. For six years, "*Bouquins*" was a land of friendship in which I was able, with a small but wonderful team of people, to invent books and bring back to life authors like Thibaudet or Dom Mabillon. I remember also Louis Massignon, two brilliant volumes that I started to put together and then entrusted to the care of Christian Jamblet, a great philosopher and a great writer.

I said there was another interruption when I was twenty. I was twenty in 1968, so I became a revolutionary, and I left with my wife for the Lorraine region where I worked in a factory for a few years. In fact, I remained in the Lorraine region for twelve years. I saw that yesterday you were discussing exile. I spent a large part of my life in exile, and I do not regret those twelve years spent on the edges of the Lorraine region. Those years structured me, built me, and provided me, I think, with a unique experience of fraternity. Without those years, I would probably not have developed such a lust for life.

Thus, my writing vocation appears early in life. One Monday morning, I arrived in my father's class – he was wearing a grey smock and his hands were, as usual, whitened by chalk. I used to call him "Sir", We had very formal relations when I was in his classroom. He gave us a rather banal topic for a composition: "Tell me about your Sunday..." I had spent my Sunday in one of my grandfather's vineyards called the Berlin Vineyard. Woody arpents ran along the Champagne vineyards, and the sloping hillside of the Berlin Vineyard was a mixture of vines and orchards fertilized by water springs and furrowed by brooks. I had spent my afternoon on that hillside, as an imaginative child can do, playing, imagining, dreaming. And when my father gave us that composition, I saw that my classmates, my neighbor, and everybody else, seemed a little bit puzzled; they were wondering what they were going to talk about. But for me, it was the opposite. I felt the words taking me by the hand, it is a banal image, but that is really what happened. I was carried away, submerged, and I shivered. I wrote that composition and since then, when I write, I always wait for that first impulse, that first emotion which, as you all know, sometimes overwhelms us.

And we must learn to master it, because Art is always about mastering. Born into this modest and sedentary Champagne background, early on I had a “nebulous” feeling, a kind of call that came from the Eastern world, as if a part of my heart belonged there. I tried to understand what was behind this feeling that I had of a divided heart. I now believe that as Europeans we all have divided hearts. Braudel says that in the Middle-Ages, Europe was saturated with Eastern influences. Why? For a very simple reason: Europe was immersed in two religions, and both are Eastern religions. Christianity first of all is not a Western religion as we often say. Those cathedral builders, those peasants who go to country churches, who are illiterate (though less so than we usually think), what toponyms are they going to hear, what names resound in their ears? They hear about Golgotha, Jerusalem, Cana, Bethlehem, Tyre and Sidon, etc. I think that all those names impregnate our imagination. And at the time, very early in the Middle Ages, the Synagogue was never far away from the Cathedral. To remain in Champagne, a region with a rigorous climate in Eastern France, quite a long way from the Mediterranean shores, I would like to remind you that Rachi lived in *Troyes* (1040-1105) he was one of France’s great Rabbis. He was a brilliant scholar of the Bible and the Talmud. He inspired both the Christian and the Islamic worlds, he earned a living as a winegrower, and to this day, he still symbolizes “a certain way of being Jewish in France.”

I have a little story about him that I would like to tell you. Something like ten years ago, during the grape harvest, I went to see my late grandfather’s pressing shed. I met two Rabbis there. In fact the winegrower who had taken over the pressing shed was making kosher wine, and they were there to control the operation. I said to them, “Are you Rabbis?” At that time I was dressed like a “marginal” writer, unshaved, dressed in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, and they thought I was a common wine worker. I said I was very happy to meet them and I asked them, “Do you know Rachi?” They turned round, stared at me with great astonishment, and we began discussing Rachi. They told me they had the notes Rachi had written about his harvests, his accounts, and this was totally incredible! Rachi had become the most important European Bible exegete, including for Catholics, he was in communication with great doctors of the Faith, and his texts were discussed universally.

I think all of Europe - winegrowers, peasants – whose feet were buried in the soil, dreamt at the same time, and quite naturally, of other skies. I believe it is very important not to forget this because it constitutes an integral part of our identity. There is an obvious link between Europe, even the remotest parts of Europe, and the Mediterranean shores.

In fact, the first time I felt the call of the Mediterranean was the day I bought a book by Camus. I was starting secondary school, I went back home, and sat on the window sill, it was spring time. And there I was, transported by the pages of *Tipaza*. I felt like I was living something so different that I went on reading, naturally, all of Camus's books. I remember perfectly, in *The Plague*, the sentences on the breathing of the Mediterranean Sea I then wrote down; it was my first serious call from the Mediterranean.

Then things accelerated when I started working for *Libération*. In 1985, I launched an international enquiry, asking hundreds of writers around the world: "Why do you write?" The results were later published and received world-wide response, literary quarrels started in Italy, Egypt, and China. In London, a publisher said to me: "You forgot Paul Bowles in your list." I said: "But Paul Bowles is dead." No one talked about Paul Bowles anymore then, and you could only find two of his books published by Gallimard, *The Sheltering Sky* and *Let It Come Down*. He answered: "No, he is not dead, I'll give you his address immediately: Paul Bowles, PO Box 11-71, Tangiers, Morocco." I sent a letter to Paul Bowles saying "Dear Mister Paul Bowles, why do you write?" Ten days later, I received a letter, a large saffron coloured envelope, typed, with a stamp representing HM Commander of the Faithful, Hassan II. I opened the letter, it read: "Dear Mister Rondeau, here is my answer: I write because I am still in the country of the living." I decided to go and meet Paul Bowles and write an article on him immediately after my survey was finished. The results of the study were published on the 22nd of March 1985, I was invited to a special program of the television show *Apostrophe*, and in May, I left for Tangiers. I had a shock when I arrived in Tangiers, partly from recollections of Camus's texts, and partly because I had just discovered the closest portion of the East. Naturally, I met Paul Bowles, and I wrote different profiles of him for the press, I even published his books because at the time I was given the opportunity of creating a publishing house, *Quai Voltaire*, (with a Mediterranean blue cover). But more precisely, I began writing about Tangiers.

Tangiers is really the entry gate to the Mediterranean, across from nearby Gibraltar. You get the feeling, as you see the boats go by, that by reaching out your hand you could touch the Spanish coast. Some people in Tangiers spend a lot of time in their gardens reading with binoculars the names of the boats that sail by. These ships, sailing in and out of Tangiers, have a poetic quality. When I am in Tangiers, I start thinking of the other gate, the gate that opens unto the Oriental world: Alexandria. I published my first *Tangiers*, and then I left for Alexandria where I spent some time; I even followed the trail

of Alexander all the way to the minor Alexandrias in Tajikistan or Uzbekistan, down to the furthest, the remotest Alexandria Eschate.

Then I dreamt of the third door, the *High Porte*, Istanbul, the gate to the Caucasian lands, to Northern Europe, Slavonic Europe, the end of the corridor of steppes that comes all the way from Asia. Because the Mediterranean Sea has the peculiarity of opening onto three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. The Ottoman Empire was born from the constant and audacious advances of the nomadic tribes that used to wage wars along the corridor of steppes, and advanced every year the Empire they finally built on the remains of the Byzantine Empire.

I left Paris twelve years ago to live in Champagne, to devote myself to my books, my work. I then began to lead an isolated life, in which I didn't see anyone. I am working on a novel and I am going to hurry and finish *Istanbul*, so that my Mediterranean project may come to completion, and the world can see it and understand it before I publish *Dans la Marche du temps*. More recently, I went to Carthage. It is radically different, a dead city, a city that disappeared but a city that still questions us, calls out to us, because once again, it is a mystery and lesson History gives us.

I would like to talk a little more about some of the cities that are very important to me. Tangiers, of course, that has remained alive in my heart. For me, it was a beginning. But I would like to talk first of Alexandria, and then of Carthage.

Alexandria was built in the fourth century BC. There was a twenty year old youth with gleaming eyes, who owned a magnificent horse, Bucephalus. He was a Macedonian king who had decided to ride in the direction of Asia, to discover Asia, to conquer Asia. He thought that if he could conquer Asia he would conquer the world. At the time, we did not yet conceive of the world as boundless. This young man had extraordinary human qualities, energy, ambition, audacity, intelligence, and culture too. His father gave him Aristotle as a tutor. He took into account Aristotle's lessons in each of his actions.

One day, he summons his small war council and declares that he intends to sacrifice everything he owns to finance an expedition to Asia. He wants to leave as if he was just born, naked, dressed only in his man's skin, under which the blood of Gods and Heroes is pulsating. He sells or gives away everything he owns. His faithful Perdicas gets carried away, "But what shall you have left?" The Macedonian answers, "Hope." He only takes with him the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, thus choosing for himself a heroic and divine and mythological

lineage. He says he is the son of Zeus because his mother, Olympias, apparently received a nightly visit from Zeus's thunderbolt. He leaves for Asia, and goes round the bottom of the Mediterranean rim, triumphing time after time over Darius.

One day, after all these victories, he is riding along the Egyptian coast with the intention of founding a city. Behind him, his army follows at a leisurely pace, like soldiers on leave. He reaches a peninsula, a spit of sand separating the Mareotis lake from the land, seven stadions away from the Isle of Pharos. The conditions seem good: clearwater springs, an easy access to the Nile, limestone deposits. Not even getting off his horse, he declares the City will be built there. He gives orders. His architect, Dinocrates, who is by his side, also gets off his horse and asks for some chalk in order to draw the outlines of the city as he sees it. No chalk. "Bring us some flour, then!" He draws out a map following Aristotle's instructions. Once the map is drawn out, a swarm of birds swoop down onto the flour, eat everything up, and nothing is left. That is how Alexandria starts off being a celestial city, because it first exists virtually, with those birds, in the sky. What is very important is Alexander's request to his architect: he wanted a lighthouse for the sailors, a museum and a library.

The lighthouse of Alexandria was to become one of the wonders of the Ancient World. The fire in the lighthouse is an extension of Alexander's fire. It has disappeared. Ibn Battuta from Tangiers, the great explorer of Islam, was the last witness to have described it still standing, in 1325. There are still some traces of it, for those who know Alexandria, because on its remains the fort Quait Bey was built. The lighthouse could be seen at an incredible distance – sixty kilometers, we believe – and it was quite famous in the Antique World; it was believed to have magic powers, comparable to the powers a laser beam or a radar would have: they believed it could see everything and destroy everything at a distance.

Once he had given his instructions to build the city, Alexander left a part of his army there to carry out his plans. He was never to see the city he had decided to create. He continued towards Asia, to the Himalayas, and then back down to India where he died at the age of thirty three. He died after his beloved horse for whom he had a tomb built, and around the tomb a city: Alexandria Bucephalous. It is interesting for those of us who think of the Mediterranean as a link between East and West. At that time it was the Oriental world that was going to be westernized by Alexander's expedition. Alexandria was famous for its lighthouse but also for another light, its library,

its *museion*. It was not a museum as we can imagine it today, but a place dedicated to the muses and to knowledge. Alexander's intentions when he left, were not only to discover Asia, wage war and conquer the world. This is what was incredible in the plans of the twenty year old youth: he wanted to make an inventory of the real world. For this reason he took with him learned men, historians, grammarians, philosophers, mathematicians, zoologists, cartographers, naturalists, entomologists, mineralogists, etc. Each of them had the mission to relate the discoveries made in the world, and the *museion*, the museum and library of Alexandria, was designed to receive and centralize all the information gathered along the way. Such was the function of the museum. It was, in the mind of its founder, an institution designed to welcome and shelter the universal knowledge of the time. He wanted this library-museum to be the living heart of a unique country. Today, we talk about globalization. Alexander's conquest, in a way, was the first globalization. Alexander was the first man who held the whole world under his gaze. He had seen everything, at least in his mind, and he thought he was creating what would be a one and only country for all. Everywhere he went, he would mix and mingle the men, the gods, the nations and the civilizations. He was not only going to westernize the East, but he was also going to orientalize himself: the *cosmocrator* got rid of his Macedonian soldier's clothes, he wore the white tunic of the Media, with a Persian belt tied around his waist, he married the daughter of Darius, and organized what is now known as the "susā weddings". An incredible metamorphosis had started that would deeply change the hearts of men. Aristotle's pupil became not only a philosopher who thought but who also acted, said Plutarch. Hence the importance of dreaming in order to change reality. Alexander put all living beings in communication with one another, (it is still Plutarch talking). What was good for the Greeks was now good for all. Alexander fulfilled and carried out the Greek genius which, a few centuries later, in the first city he founded shall meet with barbaric wisdom and the first church. The predestined had signed one of the most beautiful books of our pagan ancient testament. His adventure was a foretaste of the age of monotheisms. The sparks of holiness that sprang up from Bucephalus' hoofs opened the way for he who was to come on his donkey. The man who wanted to be a god held out his hand across the centuries to the god who became a man and ended up on the cross. But in his dismantled Empire, as Malraux rightly said, it is neither Rome nor Christianity that will come after him, but another monotheism, Islam, from Lahore to the Pillars of Hercules.

I went to the last Alexandria he left behind him, Alexandria Eschate in Khodjent, the ancient Leninabad. It is in Tajikistan, and it is a small town wrecked by seventy years of oriental communism, and by the Islam of the farthest

regions. I had managed to bring along two Russian archaeologists from Tachkent to that small forgotten town on the threshold of the world. Two knowledgeable ladies who were unemployed because everything that was left of Soviet scientific life was not employed. One of them, Margarita Filipovna, had come to Paris where she taught in the Ecole Normale Supérieure. With her former colleague, she brought me to the sites of Alexander's ancient military garrisons, and introduced me to two blue-eyed peasants who claimed to be descended from Alexander's soldiers. They were not the only ones. In the Himalayas, where he went with his elephants, Alexander stationed some of his men in a garrison to guard the mountain passes, and there, in the high valleys, you can still find tribes that mix into their dialect relics of the old Sogdiana language, and practice an Islam tinged with Zoroastrianism, and that still feel related to Alexander. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, I met bards who sang odes to Iskandar Zoukarnain, Alexander "with two horns", because he often wore on his trail through the East, a helmet made of the skin and the horns of a ram. He even became one of the characters of Islam since he appears in the Koran as a minor prophet. The Epic leaves traces, becomes part of literature, and life goes on.

To get back to Alexandria, and to other remains, the museum, the library will offer us a new way of looking at the world that is essential for all of us, a view of the world through books. After Alexander, this is going to become the obsession of the Ptolemaic dynasty, then in charge of the state and of the library of Alexandria: they want to gather all the published books in the world, they write to all the sovereigns of the time to ask them – it is the legal deposit! – to send every manuscript and papyrus they publish; all the boats that dock in the harbor of Alexandria have to make available, during their stay, all the manuscripts they have on board so that they can be copied. Actually, the librarians of Alexandria are going to make a habit of keeping the originals and never giving back the copies! Alexander had wanted to embrace the whole world in his gaze. Less than a century after his death, in the *Mouseion* he had created, men invent a new way of looking at the world, they look at it through books. The heroes of knowledge explain the world they read on papyrus or clay-tablets, they unfold its mysteries, confront truth to knowledge, and after the infinity of conquest will come infinite gloss. This way of abandoning life in favour of the sovereignty of commentaries, in Alexandria's white place of the muses, marks the birth of a new class: the clerks. On this subject, Michel Foucault wrote a sentence that sums it all up: "*Alexandria, which is the birth place of all of us, had prescribed a circle to all of western language. Writing was a coil, a return to origins, a recapture of the first moment, it meant to be new in the morning.*"

We are still living on what we inherited from the Mediterranean city of Alexandria. This knowledge, this effervescence of writing and thought is going to spawn a brilliant, shining and powerful world, which, as Braudel wrote, enlightenend the whole world, far beyond the bounds of the Mediterranean. The other town I would like to talk about, Carthage, is as much a beginning as an end. It is a beginning because it is one of the first great cities of the world. To give you an idea of the scale, at that time, since I mentionned Alexandria, we think that in the first century BC, a million people lived there. Carthage is a beginning because it was founded in the eighth century BC by Phoenicians who had left their native Phoenicia because of violent family quarrels. A woman, Elyssa (in Africa, she is known as Dido), revolted against her brother's tyranny - King Pygmalion who had murdered her husband for reasons of cupidity. She took the head of the expedition and left with a number of Tyrian aristocrats; in Cyprus, they took aboard the great priest of Astarte and several sacred prostitutes. As she approaches the African coast, she steers her ships into a gulf (the actual gulf of Tunis), and notices an attractive peninsula in the shape of an arrow. They disembark and she founds the city of Carthage. Carthage is going to become one of the capitals of the world, and it is going to be so important that Rome is going to plot for its destruction by all means because Rome cannot bear the idea that two superpowers will exist in the same Mediterranean space. It is also an end because Rome decided so, much later, in 146 BC. After three wars, the Roman legions will see the walls of Carthage fall after ten days of bloodshed. The Romans first sent in – nothing very new – their elite commandoes whos entered Byrsa, the heart of the city of Carthage. There, the houses are quite high, five or six storeys sometimes, the streets are narrow...The commandoes of the Roman legions take the city house by house, with techniques that are still being used, alas, in the Middle East. The Carthaginians are going to withdraw progressively, the shock is terrible. Once the town is conquered, Scipio decides to burn it down. We know all these details because he was accompanied by one of the three great historians of the Antique world: Polybius. He was a Greek prisoner exiled in Rome, and Scipio had become fond of him; he appreciated his intelligence and his style, and so he took him by his side and included him into his war cabinet. Polybius will follow him everywhere. The very precise description of the fall of Carthage is absolutely magnificent. The town is burning, Scipio and Polybius are on horseback, watching the scene from above. Scipio should be happy, but Polybius notices a tear on the Roman's cheek. "General, why are you weeping? – I weep because I am thinking of Rome, if Carthage can be burnt like this, then it means Rome, some day, can also burn..." And indeed, four centuries later, tribes coming from the Austro-Hungarian plains are going to pillage and burn Rome down. In this part of the text we can see the anticipation of what is to

come, but perhaps also a recollection of the city of Troy which is forever burning. Ever since men began writing their history, cities have been burning. War is part of human destiny.

Carthage is interesting for us because it was both a manifestation of power and of energy. Great things were accomplished in Carthage, which reunited the two shores of the Sea. We become conscious that a city may disappear if we do not pay attention. Civilizations are mortal, and this is a precise example, as if on the tree of mankind an important limb had been cut off and burnt, and had never grown back. This is an invitation to meditate on ourselves, on politics, because we see how decisions can be capital and cause our own loss. I am thinking of course of the clash of civilizations. From Troy to Carthage, from Sarajevo to Bagdad, "the world's great fire that forever smoulders", as Hermann Broch said, runs from one city to the next. Thrones change hands, power quivers, temples crumble, cities and villages burn, all return to ashes. History also always means war. Everything is a war actually, cannonades, offensives, defeats, treasons, assaults, usurpations, breaches, withdrawals, truces, explosions, not just war itself. Love and literature too.

Carthage was also interesting because it symbolized the presence of the East in the Western part of North Africa. I'll take an example. In the Carthage museum, on the first floor, on the right, you find a sarcophagus with the perfectly preserved skeleton of a Carthaginian, a young man who lived in the sixth century. We do not know what his history is. Next to him have been placed a beetle gem, a rosary of amulets of Egyptian inspiration, and a chiselled pill-box. Now all these little treasures come from Egyptian, Persian, Assyro-Babylonian, Sumerian worlds, which goes to show the importance of the presence of the East in that Western part of the Mediterranean. Actually, even after the arrival of Christianity, Rome continues to honour Egyptian and Oriental gods.

What always drew me to those cities were the writers, naturally. I went to Tangiers to meet Paul Bowles, and there, I discovered the extraordinary writer Mohamed Choukri, the author of *Pain Nu*, which I think is a masterpiece, and which is one of the greatest books on childhood, or at least on desperate childhood. It reminds me of another book by the Brazilian Jorge Amado, *Captains of the Sand*. Those are small concise books, in which everything is said in a few words. To Alexandria I also went because of three writers: the poet Constantin Cavafy; Forster, the English author of *A passage to India* and *A Room with a view*, who made the world discover Cavafy; and of course Lawrence Durrell. In Carthage, from Apuleius to Saint Augustus, the writers were many. And of course, I must not forget Flaubert; I would probably never have gone to Carthage if *Salammbô* did not exist. "It was at Megara, a suburb of

Carthage, in Hamilcar's gardens...” If I talk about writers, it is because I believe that once things have existed, once cities have disappeared and have been covered by silence, we must make them exist a second time, a third time, and repeat them infinitely, such is the mythic function of writing.

I now happen to be an ambassador in Malta, which was founded by the Phoenicians. There, I feel an enigmatic and mysterious presence. There, we find the oldest man-made buildings, before Easter Island. In Malta, there are temples that historians have given up trying to identify because they didn't fit into their boxes. A professor, Jean Guilaïne, talked about the civilization of Malta in a great book called *La Méditerranée avant l'écriture*. Malta, finally, was also founded by Jews who came with the Phoenicians when they settled the first trading posts. So we have a doubly Semitic origin. Then came the Arabs and the Normans, the first of whom occupied Malta for two centuries, leaving signs of their presence in the local architecture but also in the local language, because seventy per cent of the Maltese language is composed of archaic Arabic. This gives Malta its peculiarity, it is the only European country with a Semitic language. It is a treasure we have to protect. There was also the occupation by the Knights, the Christian faith which is still and well alive. There is no coincidence if during one of my first lunches in Malta I met readers of Massignon. We are there in the Abrahamic tradition which constitutes, in a certain way, our common base.

To finish, and to heed the warnings I am being given, I want to apologize for having taken so much time, and I also want to read a short text. The Mediterranean parliamentary assembly has drawn up a kind of constitution; it was adopted last year in Monaco, and I was asked to write the preamble. Allow me to conclude with its last paragraph.

“The Mediterranean taught us how to receive and how to give, how to transmit, how to question ourselves without manichaeism, and how to move through a diversity of mental realms whilst still living in a world that has remained a mosaic since Homer and Virgil. The Mediterranean, with its knowledge, its laws, its beliefs, the three religions of the Book, its respect for nature and beauty, for the sacred and for reason, has always shone far beyond its shores and embraced the whole of human experience. This is why, together, simple citizens or members of the parliaments of all the European countries, we hope to prove ourselves worthy of what was bestowed upon us. It is not our intention to magnify one civilisation to the detriment of another, nor to ignore anyone or anything; we simply want to insist, as we turn our eyes towards what lies ahead, on the existence of a form of wisdom, freedom, and thought that we believe is vital to the future of the world.”



**THE INFLUENCE
OF GEOGRAPHY ON
THE CRIME NOVEL**



G rard Meudal

We shall now continue our walk around the Mediterranean in the company of crime writers. The theme of this panel is "The effects of geography on the crime novel", or we could have said: What are the effects of place on crime novels? We shall try to answer this question with the writers gathered around this table.

Mine Kirikkanat recently published an acclaimed crime novel, it was translated into French and published by Anne-Marie M talli  under the French title *La Mal diction de Constantin*. It is a sort of political prospective novel. Without giving away the ending, which would be a crime against a crime novel, I would like to say a few things about it. Imagine an appalling earthquake in Turkey. A whole humanitarian aid system comes in to help, but this allows an undercover confrontation between the American and the European secret services which, in this fiction, manage to speak with one voice. The plot is used to unfold a geopolitical analysis. It is a fascinating book in which a number of problems are discussed. Mine Kirikkanat, you also came here with a second book; it will be translated from the Turkish in a few months, and we may talk about it later on.

Dominique Manotti, I have not counted the number of books you published so far, and though they are all memorable, I have not come across any in which the sense of geography prevails over the sense of history. But your first novel, *Sombre Sentier*, which takes place in the *Sentier* district of Paris, was born out of an intense reflection on topography.

Loriano Macchiavelli is one of Italy's most famous writers of crime novels. You have created the very popular character Sarti Antonio, perhaps the most famous detective in Italy with Montalbano. The books have been adapted for a television series, the cinema, etc. The town of Bologna is, along with Sarti Antonio, one of the main characters in your books. Here too, we find numerous reflections on topography, and questions about places.

And finally, the writer of crime novels Jason Goodwin who is first and foremost a globetrotter. You are a kind of travel writer; you have started a series of novels about the Ottoman Empire, with a very picturesque detective: a eunuch who moves around the palace's antechambers. The French publisher Plon has just brought out *The Janissary Tree* and *The Bellini Card*, which may be the beginning of a series.

Laurent Lombard, an interpreter, will translate into French Loriano Macchiavelli's interventions.

The first question I would like to ask all of you is: how can a place determine the desire to write a crime novel or more simply a novel? Does a place give one the idea of an investigation, or does it generate the novel?

Jason Goodwin

For me, location is essential, because in order to create fiction, we seek tensions, something like a conflict. And in Istanbul, I clearly found all I needed because, as we already heard today, it is really a place people just go through, in which there is a diversity of populations. The reason I chose Istanbul was not just geographical, it was also sociological: you find Turks, Greeks, especially in the nineteenth century when the city was multi-ethnic and welcomed people of various beliefs. I chose that period as a background because it was a period of conflict between the traditionalists and those who wanted to modernize the Ottoman Empire. It is a place where, like what happens when there is an earthquake, tectonic plates meet. It then becomes easy to create plots, murders, etc.

G rard Meudal

Yes, some places are quite suitable! A long while ago already, a famous Italian critic, Alberto Saviano, wrote an essay on Simenon in which he explained how much he admired him, and he also pointed out that alas, such novels were impossible in Italy because of the climate...

Loriano Macchiavelli (translated into french by Laurent Lombard)

Yes, the country is too sunny. In Italy we have too much sunshine for crimes to take place! Well to be serious, the role of the landscape in a crime novel is both central and unimportant. Central because without Bologna, Sergeant Sarti Antonio could not have existed. The place is a necessity, and you need to know it thoroughly. Most of all, the place must be explored in depth by the author. I know very well the mountains I describe, and the city. I would be incapable of locating a story in Los Angeles or in Istanbul, because I don't know

those cities. The city must be familiar, it must have been lived in, with all its tensions. One must think according to the place.

You can find tension in all kinds of places. I did not only situate my novels in the city of Bologna, a town in which a large variety of tensions, such as wealth, poverty and revolt exist; but parts of the stories take place in the Apennines mountains. I found that the mountains revealed the same accumulation of tension as the city itself.

▶ **Dominique Manotti**

In two of my novels, the location plays a central part. In the first one, *Sombre Sentier*, the conflicts of the clandestine workers in the *Sentier*, back in 1980, gave me the background. In France, it was the first strike by clandestine workers. I was a union activist at the time. I took part in that strike, and I experienced an incredible sense of bonding: those places were inhabited; they were not simple streets, you could find clandestine workshops on every floor, it was a neighbourhood but also a way of life as well as a work area. When I started writing my novel, I felt like describing this experience, the strike and the place that had shown me an extraordinary and unknown way of life, just a few streets away. For me, it determined the writing process. The *Sentier*, in itself, was already a crime novel character, an outlaw living by its own drastic rules, a place of extremes, for its violence or for its welcoming qualities. I realized after creating the story, that most of my living protagonists were incarnations of the area's lifestyles: policemen, workers, etc. Everything was an embodiment of the *Sentier*. It is obvious that this novel had geographical roots: it is more than a geographical space, it is an inhabited geographical space.

▶ **Gérard Meudal**

The title expresses it well: *Sombre Sentier*¹, a promising idea. Mine Kirikkanat, are places important to you? Because in your books, without saying that places are abstract, you do not talk of a particular neighbourhood, you tend to go into a reflection on Turkey's geopolitical position in the general international situation.

▶ **Mine Kirikkanat**

In Turkey, we have the same amount of sunshine as in Italy but we also have a lot of crime novels! Istanbul overflows with tension, I agree with Jason. Istanbul is really suitable for writing novels. Istanbul is home to fifteen million inhabitants: from the most refined culture to utter ignorance, from the

¹ T.N. the Parisian area is named *le Sentier*, a word that means « the pathway ». The title *Sombre Sentier* is a play on words which expresses the bleak aspects of the town's area, but also literally translates as: « dark pathways ».

wealthiest populations to people who would kill for a few coins... It is a mixture of all types of people, of social classes. They have to live together. You cannot avoid the common places, even the richest have to cross the centre to go to work. Since the area of the *Halles* was taken out of Paris, the city's soul has died, it was sterilized when the underprivileged populations were sent out to the outskirts. It is the right time to consider Istanbul and its contrasts, because the sewers are still seeping not far from the gilding of the Dolma-bahçe Palace.

But writing does not consist simply in making others discover what we want them to discover, it is also about discovering oneself. For twenty-five years, Istanbul was as foreign to me as it would have been to an Englishman. I had been living in Spain since 1983, where I began working as a journalist to earn a living. I started writing about Madrid, Paris and other cities I knew well, bringing together in my novels my favourite things from those different places. But when it comes to Istanbul, I've noticed that I gladly invent streets and areas, I recreate my city: I have reinvented the Istanbul of my childhood. This is why place is important, it is also a place we reinvent.

 **G rard Meudal**

Loriano was speaking of the necessity of living in a place, but I feel that you are, like the others, totally into a process of reinvention. After all, Jason, you do not live in Istanbul. You know Istanbul very well but it is a bit of a fantasized Istanbul. So what is the part of dream and exoticism in the choice of a place?

 **Jason Goodwin**

I agree with Mine, we recreate new forms. I was thinking of the absolutely classic detective Sherlock Holmes, who lived in my native city, London. Now, when I travel, I hear people from all over the world, India or China, who believe that London is full of fog and paved with cobblestones...

 **G rard Meudal**

Ideal for a crime novel!

 **Jason Goodwin**

I think the crime novel can help us establish this idea of a city. I'm thinking of the city of the greatest detective of the twentieth century, Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe. I don't know if it was the real Los Angeles, or the idea an Englishman exiled in Hollywood, Chandler himself, had of it. All his life he wanted to be an English gentleman. But despite that, he created an everlasting Los Angeles for us.

▶ **Gérard Meudal**

What a responsibility! Basically, you are saying that if there is no fog in London it is Conan Doyle's fault!

▶ **Loriano Macchiavelli**

It is always fantastic to get together with other writers and to discover that we all pass on similar things, about places for example, because they are all the same, and finally all cities, all human concentrations, are the same. The tensions I describe in Bologna are the same that Mine Kirikkanat describes. But is a city in fiction a real city or an invented one... A publishing company decided to republish my first novels, which were written in 1974, and most of the young people who came to see me asked: "But was Bologna really like that?" I was incapable of answering! I don't know if my town was the real Bologna, but in any case, it was mine, the one I lived in, the one that smelled of death and teargas during the student revolutions. I don't know if it is a city I dreamt up or invented, but it definitely is the city in which I lived as a person.

▶ **Gérard Meudal**

Dominique Manotti, your latest novel recalls an important historical moment, the total clearance of the industrial activity in the region of Lorraine after the first liquidation of the steel industry. Does it leave traces, here again, is the landscape what triggered your writing?

▶ **Dominique Manotti**

Yes, indeed, what got me started was the landscape. I had written a novel about Daewoo, the company that nearly bought up Thomson multimedia before going bankrupt, a collapse that had effects on an international scale. Because of my interest in such cases, I was following this other case, but from afar. And then I went to Lorraine, when the last Daewoo factory burnt down. As a trade unionist, I had known the valley of the Chiers quite well when it was an important steel industry valley. I was driving along the Longwy plateau and there, I stopped. It was a shock: the valley of the Chiers, around Longwy, was entirely green! Not a trace of the factories. The small town of Longwy is entirely painted anew and extremely clean. It is a tragic feeling that you can experience only if you knew the previous landscape. In itself it is a charming little valley. There is a whole project: very pretty Jesuit churches, Vauban fortifications, a reconversion program, the creation of a small golf course in what is no longer an industrial waste-land. This is when I thought I should write something. The novel was motivated by the landscape. I had already written a few stories about great financial scandals, I did not want to do another one. In fact, the novel was dependent on the absence of the factories, the absence

of the working class, the total disappearance of a memory, the change of culture, of tradition, a conscious, intended and organized erasing. There is no museum of the steel industry, the tourist centre doesn't want to hear about it... It is mind blowing. The entire story I tried to create was based on this. For me, the landscape was very important.

Just one last thing: if when we meet, we talk about the same things, and we meet so easily, it is because we write crime novels and because crime novels are the novels of our age.

Mine Kirikkanat

I agree with Dominique. I believe that in our modern age, television and the Internet leave very little space to our imagination. We are always guided in one direction or another. Things are dictated to us by the screens. Writing is the only sign that is not the image of what it projects. Writing is the only occasion in which you do not see what is described through images. On a subconscious level, we know that our imagination is much stronger than all the knowledge we can ever accumulate. You may be as knowledgeable as you want and not know how to link together the different elements you have accumulated. Or else, you may just be a normal human being, and then it is literature, or more generally the arts, that push civilizations forward. So then, how can we keep the attention of those populations that are used to being masterminded? The best solution we have found is the crime novel, the thriller. We are all trying to get a social message across. Our thrillers talk about philosophical, political, economic questions. Personally, I defend the idea that the Etruscans were Turkish...it is in this way, with blood, murders and rapes that I manage to get my message across.

Loriano Macchiavelli

While listening to Dominique, I thought of a formula that would help us establish world peace: we just need to get rid of the working class and create golf courses!

More seriously, I am convinced that crime novels play a part in the building of a cultural European union. Until now, we only had the economic European union. The crime novel, which functions as a link between the different countries, is a first step towards another European union, a cultural union, this time.

G rard Meudal

Recipes for world peace and for a European cultural union, well this is extraordinary! While talking about Lorraine and the disappearance of a landscape, Loriano described certain places as tension accumulators. Aren't ci-

ties, apart from being picturesque settings, places in which history is written? You spoke of Bologna during the years of lead, but in your last book², you also write about the way contemporary Italy is changing, you describe a district the police no longer dare enter. For you, aren't crime novels a way of analyzing the historical evolutions of society?

▶ **Loriano Macchiavelli**

Historical evolution has its own personal rhythm, but as writers, we need to highlight different questions in our novels. We must especially underline the dysfunctions, and show that we can move forward, and face this problem-ridden society. Because of this, if writers continue to curl up in the comfort of their fiction, nothing positive will happen for fiction or for the transformation of society they should foster. On the contrary, we must continue to create novels that disturb, that upset, that create an impetus, novels that are outlaws, as the writers were during the fascist period.

▶ **Dominique Manotti**

Not only during the fascist period, also during the communist period. Towards the end, probably when Stalin was weakened, he allowed a few crime novels in, but only if the murderers were foreigners. And in the United States, a new version of *Red Harvest* was recently published, the book that is largely responsible for the six months Hammet spent in jail. For McCarthy, Hammet had written an anti-American pamphlet, and because he had received money from the sales of his books to American libraries, he was accused of embezzling public money!

▶ **G rard Meudal**

And now, the minutes of Dashiell Hammett's appearance before the McCarthy Commission, the commission that sent him to jail, are being published. Mine Kirikkanat said that crime novels were a way of transmitting political ideas, as you did when you were a journalist, but in a more attractive way. Is it not dangerous to practice that kind of writing? It certainly depends on the place you are in. I would like to remind everybody that Mine is probably the Turkish journalist who totals the largest amount of court appearances and trials, and who is in danger because of her activities as a journalist, and as a novelist.

▶ **Mine Kirikkanat**

I tried to bring to the attention of the European authorities the fact that Turkey is actually living under the same terror that existed during the McCarthy

²T.N. the title of the French translation is : *Derri re le paravent*.

years, with a pro-government system of corrupt judges. It is Machiavellian. Everybody thinks their phones are being tapped, even the taxi driver thought so, because he had killed people during his years in the military service! Turkey is a blood stained country. At this point, nobody dares to talk on the phone, land-lines or cell-phones. Even when it is charging up, we imagine our phone is being tapped! The government has gotten rid of all the press in the opposition, and silenced the authors of the opposition. Professors and heads of universities are in jail nowadays; not one single television channel is in the opposition. Nothing is based on rights, this has been going on for over a year, and yet, nobody talks about it. We are all afraid of being arrested one day or another. Gérard is right, in my newspaper I am censored. Every month, at least one of my articles is sent back to me, and I cannot publish it. My news editor doesn't even dare talk to me on the phone to advise me about certain critical sentences on the government. This is the way things are.



Gérard Meudal

It is quite scary. Without going that far, you were not taking any risks, Dominique Manotti, but when you wrote *Nos fantastiques années fric*, you must have made a few enemies, am I wrong?



Dominique Manotti

Of course, I do not believe we are in the same situation here, luckily, I have had an immense admiration for Mine ever since I met her, but I think we must be conscious of certain drastic changes in our culture. I am not paranoid, I do not believe my phone is tapped and I do not feel under threat. But I am astounded every time I read a newspaper; I see the same thing everywhere. This does not mean that every journalist is writing with a gun pointed at his head by someone who tells him what to write; but something is going on. For example, newspapers are poor; we pay very few serious reporters unlike what used to be done in the past. During a large part of my life I worked in the suburbs – I write about it in my last book – and I followed quite a number of important cases concerning the relationships between young people and the police. Every time, the attitude of the press was appalling. In all those different stories, you probably remember them, that suddenly flourished about a gang of youngsters who had attacked a policeman's wife with baseball bats, the press systematically said exactly the same things, among other things because they could not afford to go on the spot and ask their own questions to the different people involved. And for this reason, we end up under an appalling uniform cloak of lead, very probably because of the economic situation. I find this is something to worry about, and on that level, crime novels have an important part to play.

We have time, we work, we do our research, we look into the details, we do what the journalists can no longer do. It is probably due to the economic situation, but it is a serious issue.

▶ **G rard Meudal**

Loriano Macchiavelli, do you find that in Italy crime novels also make up for the shortcomings of the press? Is the situation similar to what Dominique has just described?

▶ **Loriano Macchiavelli**

It is the same thing, especially because in Italy, the press is divided into two camps, the government press on one side, and the communist press on the other. Therefore, most of the communications and articles that get through are controlled. As to the phone-tapping issue, a law is being voted at the moment to give certain people the privilege, I shall let you guess who, of a notice if their phone is being tapped. This is actually what the government is talking about at the moment, to give you an idea of the situation.

▶ **Jason Goodwin**

For me, there is not a lot of risk in the small English countryside town in which I live, apart from suddenly losing my work if the electricity is suddenly cut off ! But there is probably a menace for all of us: we write as witnesses of time going by and also of past things. For me, writing a historical novel is like travelling. We travel to show the world, to show the readers, what existed, what exists still despite censorship and ignorance. As a historian, I notice that people do not understand their own past, or even do not know anything about it. In America, I wrote a book on American history, I was on the radio and I realized they know absolutely nothing about their own past. But we know that those who know nothing about the past are condemned to repeat it, or to act badly. It is our responsibility, as authors of crime novels who investigate, to show the outcome to the readers, so that they don't forget.

▶ **Hoda Barakat**

I don't know crime novels very well, I've read very few of them. You talked of space, and of the common ground with other novels. On the militant aspect, I would like to know more about this particular technique of yours, your means of investigation in those interior worlds. Finally, what method do you use to go into such a complex world in which imagination seems to play a different part than in classical novels?

▶ **Jason Goodwin**

The plot, that occasional vehicle, is for me the least important part of the story. I imagine anybody could create a plot. A murderer, and then Maigret arrives and discovers what went on. For me, with crime novels and with any other type of book, the writer plays, he hides what is most important, and then gives little clues...So that you have to turn the page...

▶ **Dominique Manotti**

I agree, the plot is not what gives value to a novel, even if it needs to be perfect.

▶ **A man in the audience**

Mine spoke of crimes and of murders as elements that could draw the reader in. But when you write a crime novel, is it not also because you have a dark and pessimistic vision of the world and of humanity? The authors of those novels, are they not locked up in such a vision?

▶ **Mine Kirikkanat**

If I was in politics, I would say this is a good question!

▶ **Loriano Macchiavelli**

It is not our fault if the world is what it is!

▶ **Mine Kirikkanat**

I don't know if my colleagues share my opinion, but as a journalist, I can only write crime novels because I see what goes wrong. As a journalist, I did a lot of reporting, and as a sociologist, I have glimpses of the future, and I think we are headed for a disaster. Yes, I am pessimistic, and I write crime novels to give a warning about an end we can still avoid.

▶ **G rard Meudal**

That sounds optimistic after all!

▶ **Laurent Lombard**

Better positive pessimism than negative optimism.

I would like to add something on the dangers that menace Italy. There are two authors over there who share the same dynamics in their writing, Massimo Carlotto and Roberto Saviano. They decided to write crime novels because investigative journalism no longer existed. After the forties, it seems that crime novels took over the responsibilities of that type of journalism, which was declining; it is a little bit like what people like Truman Capote, or

Simenon, or Dos Passos did. It is true that there is a very close link between the absence of a certain type of journalism and the presence of crime novels, as we can see at the moment with the considerable rise of the crime novel, even if today's authors are being caught up with by the newspapers because they know they sell well. Roberto Saviano, we all know his life is threatened, once told Massimo Carlotto that he should stop writing to get himself out of danger. To this, Massimo Carlotto replied that, on the contrary, he should not stop writing because that would mean his enemies had won. Another person then asked Massimo Carlotto: "How come you don't risk your life when you write investigations that dig very deep into Italian economic and political life?" He replied he did not risk being killed. But the pressure that the government imposed on Massimo Carlotto was of a different order. It consisted in ridiculing him in the media, which is a way of killing him as an author. It is more insidious, more efficient, more cynical. And in Italy, such a way of acting is very surprising.

A man in the audience

I believe crime novels should rather outgrow the *genre*, become what Freud called "disturbing" and dare to avoid the resolution, otherwise the reader witnesses a series of crises and their solution. In its classical sense, the crime novel is consoling when it remains within the limits of the *genre*. But when it is not soothing, when it maintains a disharmony, through its language or its content, it gains an eversive potentiality, it becomes political.

Dominique Manotti

I agree, and that is the whole difference between a detective story and "roman noir", crime novels with a social undertone. A certain type of books are designed to entertain, to put the mind to rest; at the end of those, everybody is gathered in the library and the solution is found. But this has nothing to do with "roman noir"! I would like to mention that in Russia a great crime novel was recently published, I forgot the name of the author, but it was just published in French by Actes Sud. Because it has become impossible to say anything in the press, we can see there the birth of a serious "roman noir" movement. It is new, and it is linked to the impossibility of making yourself heard otherwise.

Laurent Lombard

To come back to what Mine was saying about the craze for crime stories in our countries, I believe that the "roman noir" is an invention of the Mediterranean space. It is the only contemporary literary form that has returned to the founding myths of our civilization; we exported those myths to the United

States, they used them there, and now they are coming back to us. It is marvellous, this boomerang effect.

▶ **Loriano Macchiavelli**

Please allow me to read a small article: "We live in a world and an age in which the judges, the delinquents and the executioners are the same persons. There is no longer any hope for justice because, if he is both the murdered and the murderer, how can the investigator arrest, judge and punish himself? We have reached a point where courage is needed; courage to not accept the standards, the habits, and the laws of the century. The time has come for a new thought, a new culture since the old thought and old culture have betrayed us."

▶ **Mine Kirikkanat**

Can you give me this text, I would love to publish it in my column, because it is exactly what is happening at home. The committee of judges that was just put in place in Turkey, who do they judge? They are the criminals, they are assassins judging innocents. I would like to underline the fact that it is because of political correctness that today's judges are the assassins. A lovely cyanide cake was baked for us, and political correctness says we shouldn't look into it!

▶ **A man in the audience**

My question is simple: what place is left for humor in the type of literature you are talking about?

▶ **Loriano Macchiavelli**

Irony is indispensable. My readers can testify to that. What I write leans towards the detective comedy rather than the real crime novel, like those of my three fellow writers sitting here. Without irony, the novel is no longer a novel, it becomes man-bites-dog journalism.

▶ **A woman in the audience**

If we discover new ways for committing murders, can we write about them, or could this become a bad example for real people? I am afraid people may start acting out using those new recipes...

▶ **Loriano Macchiavelli**

Under Mussolini, this is exactly what the national fascist party used as an excuse to ban crime novels. It was just after a crime, the accused defended themselves by saying they had gotten the idea from a crime novel...

▼ **Mine Kirikkanat**

With the Internet and television, I doubt seriously that it is still possible to invent anything new in this field.

▼ **Dominique Manotti**

Recently, I was asking a friend in the crime squad what the different techniques were to start a fire in a squat, and he told me all the information was on the Internet. But, as for me, I always use rather basic stories in which the murders are rather simple...

▼ **Loriano Macchiavelli**

Sono morti e basta!

▼ **Dominique Manotti**

...but I really did find everything I needed on the Internet.

▼ **G rard Meudal**

For the last time around before the end, I would like to ask each of you what you are working on at the moment. Mine, I know one of your novels is being translated at the moment, it was already published in Turkey. Is it linked to "Constantine's Curse"?

▼ **Mine Kirikkanat**

Absolutely! It is a sequel, and I prefer it because it is funny; something I couldn't possibly have done when I was writing about the destruction of Istanbul. This story is very important for me. I brought you the cover, it is a picture of the Cathedral of Sienna. The Etruscan town...Three civilizations use the wolf as a symbol: the Etruscans, the Mongolians, and the Turks. What I am trying to show in this novel is that, even if it makes a few people break out in hives, or even cholera, the Turks are present in European history and geography, and we are not about to step out. There are ten millions of us in Western Europe, and seventy five millions waiting at the door, and we are really there, because we are a people of the Mediterranean. From then on I try to prove that Suleiman the Magnificent is the heir of Constantine the Great because both kill their first sons from their first marriage, and then, both end up with three children who kill each other. This is how the Oriental Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire began to decline, because Suleiman cannot atone for the sins of Constantine the Great, his soul was tainted too deeply.

▶ **G rard Meudal**

In a sense, you are dealing with the same thing as Jason with his research on the Ottoman Empire.

▶ **Dominique Manotti**

I am working at the moment on a novel which chronicles the life of a suburban police department. I try to give it an ironic touch and to put some humor into it, but I would like to add that it is much easier to have humor in a crime novel than in autofiction.

▶ **G rard Meudal**

Dominique, you also work for television and the cinema, don't you?

▶ **Dominique Manotti**

Yes, a script I wrote was accepted and casting is underway. And it comes at an appropriate time, given the fabulous story of the Pakistani incident, the bombing that is linked to that other story, when the French government and our politicians decided to stop paying cash commissions to their intermediaries. I fictionalized the whole thing, I did something quite fictive, it is inspired by the story of the sale of the frigates. Earlier on, we were talking about danger... well, this story of the frigates, I don't want get too close to it...It is really just a fiction that has to do with that particular story.

▶ **Loriano Macchiavelli**

I am actually re-writing the script of a film for television. I am re-writing because the script was ready, it was an adaptation of a short story called *The Frontier of Crime*. The whole thing should have been shot on the 4th and 5th of May at L' Aquila, in the Abruzzo. But after the recent earthquake, all the places that were in the script were destroyed, and filming was out of the question then. I am now looking for another location, hoping I won't bring them bad luck.

▶ **Jason Goodwin**

Well, as far as I am concerned, my unique eunuch has gone to Istanbul and Venice. He is now going to find his way back to the Sultan's seraglio. And there, adventures with the world's most exquisite women await him...

▶ **G rard Meudal**

Well, all this looks quite promising!

To conclude, I would like to repeat the French titles of your recent books, and

also give the names of your translators, without whom all these exchanges would not be possible. So Mine Kirikkanat, *La Malédiction de Constantin*, and its sequel, to be soon released, translated by Valérie Gay and also published by Anne Marie Métailié. Dominique Manotti, *Lorraine connection*, your latest book published by Rivages. Your latest book, Lorian Macchiavelli, *Derrière le paravent*, was translated by Laurent Lombard. And Jason Goodwin, your latest novel *L'affaire Bellini*, was translated by Fortunato Israël and published by Plon.

I would like to thank you for your complicity and for the convergence you were able to find between your books and between yourselves, and which went far beyond our hopes. In any case, thank you for this fascinating exchange.



EXILE, A NEW CITIZENSHIP?

 **Pascal Jourdana**

For political or economic reasons, to escape wars, or unbearably rigorous morals, for personal reasons related to questions of identity, or for literary reasons, a large number of writers are living in exile, by choice or by force. Between Southern Europe and the larger Mediterranean perimeter, people have gone, or are now going into what we usually call "exile". How can this term be understood in a world of never ending conflicts, especially when a number of these conflicts have remained exactly what they were decades ago? Should the word still be understood in its classical meaning of restraint? But, in the world everything has changed, and we now live under the law of globalization which gives to some a huge freedom of movement, and sometimes even affords them the possibility of a modern nomadic lifestyle. And, Exile, chosen or forced, has therefore lost two of its earlier characteristics: pain and uprooting.

To examine those questions and also to extend them to questions of identity, status, language, literature, three of our guests have joined us around this table: Fouad Laroui, Hoda Barakat and Jamal Mahjoub. Fouad, you were born in 1958 in Oujda, Morocco. You studied in Casablanca, and then in Paris, and graduated as a civil engineer. You go back to Morocco to work in your field, and in 1989, you leave everything to go to Europe (Amsterdam, York in Great Britain, Paris, London). You now live in Amsterdam. The major event of your childhood is the last time you saw your father. He went out one day in April 1969, to buy a newspaper, and no one ever saw him again. He disappeared in the jailhouses of Hassan II. Several of your books are published in French: essays, collections of short stories, novels. Among them : *Tu n'as rien compris à Hassan II* a collection of humorous and ironic short stories, and an essay *De l'islamisme : une réfutation personnelle du totalitarisme religieux*, and your latest book is a novel, *La femme la plus riche du Yorkshire*. Before introducing the other guests, just one question on the conditions

of your departure: leaving everything in 1989 to go to Europe...One has the feeling this is linked to general exasperation, but perhaps also to things that had to do with your work, with this childhood memory, something that has remained foremost in your mind, quite a heavy load to carry, perhaps.

Fouad Laroui

Not really, in 1989, I was working for the National Moroccan Phosphates Company, I was earning a good living. You must know these were the last years of the reign of Hassan II. There was a serious change afterwards, and today's Morocco is completely different. During the four years I worked as an engineer, on one side, I was earning a very comfortable living and everything was fine from a material point of view, but on the other side, I felt like I was living in a dangerous world, in which everything could change from one minute to the next, you could not say what you wanted to say, or read what you wanted to read. The atmosphere was generally suffocating, because of widespread fear. I left mainly because of that.

Pascal Jourdana

We shall come back to this widespread fear, particularly with Hoda Barakat. Born in Beirut in 1952, you started writing at the age of thirty three with a collection of short stories, *Les Visiteuses*. You left Lebanon in 1989 and came directly to Paris. It was, according to you, a leap into the unknown because, even if you were not under a direct menace, the fear was too strong for you to identify any longer with your country.


Hoda Barakat

I don't know if it was the same fear, but after two decades of civil war, I was suddenly thrown into a state of dreadful panic, I was afraid for my children. I decided we had to leave very quickly. I was thinking "What am I doing here? Why didn't I leave long ago? I must take the first plane out before death catches up with me." It was an instinctive reaction, I had not thought about it, I was not planning to go elsewhere to do something else, I just had to leave that place where nothing was right anymore.


Pascal Jourdana

Four of Hoda Barakat's books were translated into French. The first one *La Pierre du rire*, was published (like all the others) by Actes Sud. It was followed by *Les Illuminés*, and *Le Laboureur des eaux*, translated by Frédéric Lagrange, which was awarded the Naguib-Mahfouz prize in Cairo, and finally, with *Mon Maître, mon amour*, the latest, which we shall discuss here a little bit more. Jamal Mahjoub, finally, was born in London from a Sudanese father and an


English mother. You grew up in Khartoum, and studied in England. You moved to Denmark in 1988, and then to Barcelona in 1998. You were trained as a geologist, but in Sudan, in the eighties, there were not too many possibilities for work in your field, and it was probably one of the reasons that led you to write your first novel, which can also be read in French, *The Navigation Of A Rain-Maker*, a book retracing the life of a geologist. Was it a way for you to talk about a profession you could not practice?

 **Jamal Mahjoub**

In a way, yes. I consider I am in exile, in a political sense and in an economic sense, a tourist who lost his return ticket. For me, it was a bit as if the trip had continued, since I was born in London and remained torn between Sudan and England. I finally found it was easier to live in a third country, like Denmark or Spain, rather than England or Sudan.

 **Pascal Jourdana**

In fact, there were two countries to run away from, which does not make it any simpler. We must add that it was the beginning of the second civil war in Sudan at that point. You had rather strong reasons for leaving.

 **Jamal Mahjoub**

Yes, I needed to find elsewhere a way of living as a writer because, at that point, it was impossible to imagine such a life in Sudan. Ten years later, in the nineties, my parents left Sudan for political reasons. My father had come to the conclusion it was too dangerous to live there with the Bachir and Hassan Al-Tourabi regime. He was a journalist, and the paper he worked for was closed down by the regime. They left the country and never returned. For me, *that* is real exile. We left because we were afraid, but between that and exile as an official status, there is a difference.

 **Pascal Jourdana**

We will talk about that, the definition each of you gives of exile. I would like to complete my introduction and say that five novels were published after that first one: *Traveling With Djinn*s, a title we will talk about later on, then *Nubian Indigo* and *The Drift Latitudes*, translated into French by Charlotte Willez. We will discuss the idea of drifting, of floating, which I believe concerns all of you. Now that Jamal already gave one possible definition of exile, what does exile mean for you today. Is there a noticeable general evolution? Do you still feel uprooted or displaced, since this is usually what is conveyed by the concept of exile?

 **Fouad Laroui**

As far as I am concerned, there is an evolution. When I came to Europe for the second time, I wanted to stay, exile for me was very positive. I arrived rather by chance in Amsterdam, and I found I was in a place where people were totally indifferent to my insignificant self: what a relief! I felt freedom on a nearly physical level, even if I am a rather stay-at-home person. Nobody was peering into my daily life, there was a general benevolent indifference, this was the colour of my exile in Europe. With age, we realize that such a situation can be comfortable when we are young, when we still believe we do not need anybody, but it doesn't really last. For ten years I did not go to Morocco, and I ended up no longer considering this lack of interest for who I was as something positive, beside what I was writing as an author. Exile seemed less joyous, my feelings have changed, and will, no doubt, change again. There are times when you feel strong, and times when you feel weak. In moments of doubt, exile can be a curse.

 **Pascal Jourdana**

Lets dwell on what concerns the individual directly before considering the writer you are in particular.

 **Hoda Barakat**

The path of each of us, as a writer or not, is always, and whatever happens, very personal. I do not believe you can generalize on this subject, apart from politically or economically persecuted communities. I do not consider I belong to any of these two categories, but I feel a lot of tenderness towards them, and I remain as attentive as possible to the constant shifting of boundaries we can witness nowadays. To talk about my exile, I have to talk about my personal story. For me, exile began in my own country when I could no longer feel integrated in my community. From then on, I was no longer part of a human group, and the geographical space had no importance whatsoever. I have perhaps, on an unconscious level, always been writing on Beirut ever since I left it, and I have been doing so in Arabic. As a human being and as a writer, leaving Lebanon was a crucial moment of my exile. I arrived in France, not by choice but simply because I had a sister here who was capable of putting me up with my two children. I must say that most Lebanese people know France rather well, and the cultural connections are very much alive. And when I started my life here, it was no longer an exile, I was not suffering as I suffered in Lebanon. Once I had decided to continue writing in Arabic, I felt the pleasure of being a foreigner, the freedom and security that Fouad Laroui was describing. On top of that, I was going to develop a more concise point of view on my native land, through criticism. Because criticizing your country

when you live in it means running the risk of conflicts with the political and economic power system, and also exposing yourself to the possibility of inner exile, the worst of all.

Pascal Jourdana

The isolation Fouad was talking about was also felt inside the country, it is a way of escaping this when you totally extract yourself from...

Hoda Barakat

As far as I am concerned, it was hard to escape from this unhealthy and profoundly destructive relationship with my country. It is a bit like having a handicapped child; you can't have healthy relationships with what is both your child and your pain. What is supposed to be the joy of your life is instead your absolute misery, you do everything for it to live, but at the same time you can hope it dies...The inner exile, a real wound, is more acceptable when you step out. You can say: "There, I'm not French" and it is not a tragedy. In other words, being "from nowhere" can have very positive aspects.

Pascal Jourdana

Being "from nowhere" is close to what you claim for yourself, Jamal?

Jamal Mahjoub

I am not "from nowhere". I believe there is something like a fragmentation. When I wrote my first novel, which was published twenty years ago, I felt it was my responsibility to totally reinvent Sudan. Because Sudan, in a historical context, did not exist for my readers. Nowadays, I still want to talk about identity, but in a new way. I think that notions like national identity have changed, as well as the notion of country. In Sudan, like in Lebanon, the question of national identity is at the heart of the civil war. A notion that is equally problematic in Europe. In England for instance, there was a recent conflict between the soldiers who came back from Afghanistan or Iraq, and English people whose parents are from Pakistan. On a worldwide level, there is also a form of political fragmentation, to such an extent that it is more and more difficult to obtain asylum. I am thinking of the young refugee from Darfur who arrived in England and was deported, and who declared that he had returned home of his own free will. When he arrived in Sudan, he was murdered by the police. In fact, it has become nearly impossible to obtain the status of political refugee.

Pascal Jourdana

Even if you willingly claim you are foreigners in order to feel at ease in the

world that surrounds you, you do feel that without saying it out loud, you have difficulties with the fact that you are the “odd one out”. Fouad being the Moroccan in Amsterdam, Hoda the Lebanese in Paris, Jamal the Anglo-Sudaneese in Barcelona...Because of your public personalities, people tend to impose on you a status of foreigner, in which you become trapped.

Fouad Laroui

It is quite ambiguous. When I arrived in Holland, in 1989, I was really a total foreigner. I did not speak the language of all those people, who were far too tall!

Pascal Jourdana

But you adapted well; today, you even write poems in Dutch...

Fouad Laroui

It is true, but at the time I was very happy to remain in my corner with nobody coming after me. And slowly, people begin to discover you, they start talking, and today, I end up on the board of directors of the National Centre for Literature, I am a member of the jury of the Erasmus prize, a kind of Dutch Nobel prize, in short, I belong to a dozen different boards of directors...It is probably due to the surprise of seeing a Moroccan who is capable of writing his name? No, seriously, by qualifying me as the foreigner with whom you can deal, I am becoming more and more Dutch...For me, to end up in the renovation commission of the Rijksmuseum, they must have considered I had certain affinities with the history of Dutch Art. Hence the ambiguity. Am I there as a foreigner, or is it not a proof of total integration to be asked to participate in the reflection on the renovation of the great National Museum, or to join the commission of their National Centre for Literature which gives grants to writers? But becoming more and more Dutch is counterbalanced by the fact that I feel more and more foreign to Morocco. For example, the Berberist movement that has been developing there in the last ten years prints posters that I can't even read. And in ten years time, I will perhaps move to Morocco as a perfect stranger!

Hoda Barakat

For me, it is really the personal history of each of us that creates the individual and his sensitivity. I am now a French citizen, and I remember feeling very irritated during the naturalisation procedure, when they mentioned my “Lebanese origins”, or different filiations. I believe that is a very Franco-French syndrome, but I must admit I was very well received, even though I do not write in French. I was awarded medals a few times, but I have an instinc-

tive mistrust of any designation. I do not want to be part of a community, or a country. I do not want any labels. I spend my time correcting people who want to put me into a category. I write books in Arabic about the Arab world, and more precisely about Lebanon. From then on, it is obvious I am an Arab. It is useless to say I have Arab *origins*, as if it was a necessity to look for my ancestors. But am I “the Lebanese from Paris”? No, there are others, messengers of the politically correct mundane peace-mongers, that you can always find in the same circles and for whom that expression is more appropriate...

Fouad Laroui

When you are in exile, a lot of people end up defining you, and that does not happen if you remain in your village. If some introduce you as a “maronite” and irritate you, I was, for my part, very quickly catalogued as a Muslim when I arrived in the Netherlands. But I had never told anyone anything of the kind, because I am convinced the world would be a nicer place if each of us kept his inclinations to himself. There is worse, Hafid Bouazza, a writer born in Morocco who is now also living in the Netherlands, could not stand any longer to be presented as a “Muslim writer of Moroccan origin”. He rented a church in the middle of Amsterdam and gave a conference to demonstrate he was neither Moroccan nor Muslim, but simply Dutch. After the conference was published in one of the most important daily papers in Holland, most of the journalists reacted by rejoicing at the discovery of an enlightened Muslim Moroccan...

Hoda Barakat

But concerning the name Muslim, we must underline the fact that this expression was used for a very long time to designate all the populations of Northern Africa before today’s countries were constituted. When I am told I am a Maronite, basically a Christian, it is surely a favor, something like a sign of modernity for this Arab woman who writes in Arabic. But I admit my texts are not considered as exotic literature, a literature that talks to the reader of what he does not know. Since I arrived in Paris, I have been treated as a full-fledged writer, and I am very happy about it.

Pascal Jourdana

Case by case, how do things happen, Jamal Mahjoub, when one lives a nomadic life, without ever settling down in another country? The point of view you have on yourself must be different.

Jamal Mahjoub

Contrary to Hafid Bouazza, I believe it is important to be able to claim you are

a Dutch and Moroccan writer if such is the case. One does not exclude the other. The problem is rather about the people who want to label you as part of only one category. In Spain, the papers published articles on the “exotic” authors of Barcelona. In the old days, they were from Latin America, now they come from all over the world, even Africa. In those articles, the writer’s situation was extensively explained, but the book reviews were just a few sentences long. The industry of the exotic writers is a reality, and some are published only for that reason. How can we change the way foreign authors are considered so that only the quality of the books is taken into account? In England, the new trend concerns novels by young Arab women, thirty five years old at most...



Hoda Barakat

It must be said that these young ladies really play the game, because it brings them fame and money. For me, since I read Arabic, those novels have no interest whatsoever. But the European market is boasting, “come and see how Muslim women confined to the Harem talk about their salacious desires!” In fact, it is a winning game for these authors and their publishers, and we look at it from a distance...



Jamal Mahjoub

It goes further than that, I even discovered the picture of a woman with a veil who was unveiling herself on the cover of the Spanish paperback edition of my last book...But it is a well known fact, exoticism sells!



Pascal Jourdana

We saw how the public and the publishers welcomed you, but I would like us to delve into the texts themselves, and also talk about the the conditions of writing in situations like yours, on different sides of different borders, with multiple identities, a fragmented itinerary, a position that it is not easy to hold, even if, at times, things tend to stabilize. Does it help or hinder your relationship to a language which is not the one spoken in the country in which you live?



Jamal Mahjoub

With the new generations, those who arrive with no experience or memory of their country, things are changing. We must continue to publish. In my last book, most of the characters are European. The book is very well received in England. Writing, makes it possible to go beyond the imposed subjects, to enter areas that used to be taboo.

 **Hoda Barakat**

My writing is on another level, because you will not find a single allusion to France in my novels. My characters live within very small circles. I do not write novels in the language of the country that welcomed me, unlike Jamal or Fouad. I write in classical Arabic, a language which is quite hard to master, and I would probably have benefitted from writing directly in French. Some say that you cannot write in a modern way in a dead language, a sacred language, but I don't believe there is such a thing as a sacred language. In other countries than France, in the countries where I was lucky enough to be translated, it is still very difficult for them to admit that a modern woman can write in classical Arabic. During a meeting in Holland, the readers thought I was representing the author, who obviously would have been veiled! In France at least, there is a long tradition of translation from Arabic, and there is also a link with the Arab world which does not exist in other countries. And certain publishing companies, including Actes Sud, have placed Arab literature next to books from the rest of the world, and not only as an exotic literature.

 **Pascal Jourdana**

At the same time, your books are very deeply rooted in your country, in Beirut...

 **Hoda Barakat**

Well luckily! I am a foreign writer, I write in a foreign language in a foreign country, and when I am translated, it does not create any problem in any of the languages. I do not try to earn a lot of money by churning out novels made for that, selling 10000 copies is enough to make me happy. But I do not manage to it very often, so I have to have another job. But that's the game, I play according to the rules, I am not looking for fame either.

 **Pascal Jourdana**

I would like to add that the Lebanon you write about is not a Lebanon "for foreigners". But how do you remain accurate when it comes to observing a country you know less and less?

 **Hoda Barakat**

I am not looking for accuracy, nor do I pretend to offer truth to my readers. I tell personal stories about Lebanon, and not Lebanese history. My memories are sufficient to keep me writing for several lifetimes! Like with all the writers who are here today, the places in which the story is set are only metaphorical places. When I speak of somewhere in Beirut, it is to take the reader somewhere else, out of Beirut, and that is why literature is universal. The

place is always an alibi, the necessary spark that enables you to leave for elsewhere.

Pascal Jourdana

So it is a question of narrative and literary accuracy then, rather than truth.

Hoda Barakat

A lot of writers act as if they were explaining the truth, telling things exactly as they happened, sometimes even acting as if they were prophets...

Pascal Jourdana

Fouad, how did the writing of your last novel really go, *La Femme la plus riche du Yorkshire*?

Fouad Laroui

I was extraordinarily lucky; I went to live in York in 1995, a very pretty town that had escaped the industrial revolution, and therefore had never had any immigrants, it was a perfect exile. Quite quickly, in a pub, I met an elegant lady. After jabbing me in my side with her elbow a few times, and despite the fact that I was having a conversation with my bench neighbours, she blew all the smoke of her cigarette into my face. I instantly disliked her, until she said to me: “*You know I’m the richest woman in Yorkshire*”. And at that point I thought “I’ve got a novel”. So I engaged in a conversation with her and we sort of got acquainted with one another. It allowed me to do exactly what I wanted, something like ethnology in reverse. When I was younger, I was very interested in what Europeans had written about Morocco, or on my grandfather, metaphorically speaking. And I thought, what if someone were to talk about that weird tribe called the English, from a Moroccan perspective? An author did it in the eighteenth century, but at that time the oddness was all in the eye of the traveller. I’m thinking of this traveller of the nineteenth century who, when travelling through France, was seriously surprised to notice that the French treated their women better than their horses!

Pascal Jourdana

This faculty the three of you have, as exiles, to look at everything from elsewhere, to see things through the eyes of an ethnologist, is clearly quite valuable. But in the end, isn’t the writer living in permanent exile?

Jamal Mahjoub

In a metaphysical way, no doubt, but certain events in our lives nurture our creativity and the type of literature we write. But once this has been said, for

a writer, exile does not mean the same thing as for everybody else. An exile that would remain silent, during which you wouldn't be able to share your experience, will not be felt in the same way.

Fouad Laroui

That is true, I suddenly thought of my aunt and her husband; they have been living in France for over forty years, and they have no other possibility than to put up with the negative aspects of exile; they are unable to heal their wounds. The writer, at least, even if he feels depressed, can have some kind of hope that he will do something with it.

Jamal Mahjoub

In Spain, which a number of people left, with the war and later with Franco, there is now a project to revive that collective memory, so that everybody can share it, and this, at the time a whole generation is about to disappear.

Hoda Barakat

When you go to the police department to get your ID card renewed, sometimes you are glad to be a foreigner, I mean not French. Especially when you see the scorn with which certain immigrants are treated, even elderly people to whom the clerk behind her ticket window says, "No madam I have already explained it to you, this is not the right form", which means in fact: "But when are you going to understand that we don't want you here?" And this is when you realize that you are a real foreigner, when you are exiled from your language, exiled from your social and economic condition, then you are in real exile. Especially when there is no turning back. Those who try to cross the Mediterranean at all costs, even on rafts at the risk of their lives, those people do not hate their native countries. They simply want to get away from what is unbearable. This is why hoping to send them back is bound to fail. As writers, we are "luxury foreigners" compared to these people, we are "literary foreigners" who liberally criticize everything. And our children are worse, because freedom allows their natural cruelty to develop...

A man in the audience

There is a word I heard a lot, even if it was not pronounced, the word "body". An exile is a body being moved, it is also the first boundary, because for each of us, our body is a border.

Hoda Barakat

In *Le Laboureur des eaux*, a very beautiful and rather plump Kurd woman explains that away from her country, she feels the necessity of having a heavier

body to feel she is still on the earth. Personally, when I left Lebanon, I put on ten kilos... Perhaps I wanted a mother's body, since I had come with my two children.



Fouad Laroui

My body changed also, because when I was in Morocco my body was constantly sending signals. I was looked at, people knew who I was, I was followed... One day, the cop who was supposed to follow me asked me if I could write the report on my week-end myself because he had to go to his sister's wedding! In Amsterdam, I am totally anonymous because nobody knows me, my body disappears because it isn't looked at. I am only a pair of eyes; only what surrounds me and is in me is left, and I have a feeling of great freedom. Then, of course, the body reappears.



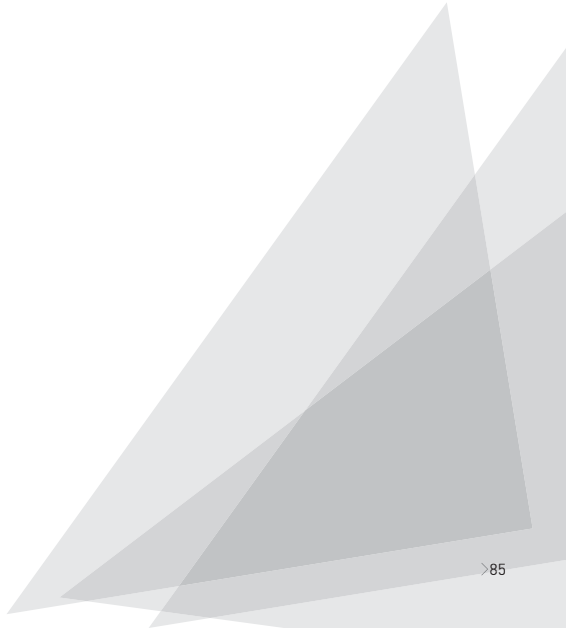
Jamal Mahjoub


In Denmark, being terribly visible, I sometimes wish I were invisible...In Spain, where the population is more mixed, I feel more comfortable, less visible than in Sudan where I am noticed because I am of mixed race. It seems to me, that in order to observe, the writer must not be too visible.



Pascal Jourdana

Thank you to the three of you for answering all these questions, thank you also for letting your thoughts drift so freely, and for sharing them with us.





**HOW TO BE AT
THE SAME TIME A
JAPANESE, AN ALGERIAN
AND A FRANCO-CONGOLESE
WRITER ?**

Alain Mabanckou

Coming to Europe for a day or two is also a way of demonstrating that the notion of borders is slowly disappearing. We now live in a world in which man is no longer defined by his citizenship, but by the intensity of his encounters. It is because we meet others that we know who we are. The idea of Nation has lost of its significance even though what it means changes whether you are in Europe or in Africa. The title I chose for my talk – a title that may seem provocative – is justified; as a writer, you may belong to any nation. A writer is of the same citizenship as his or her reader. If I am read by a Japanese, then I become a Japanese writer for the duration of the reading.

In my native land, Congo, when I was reading Marcel Proust or Gabriel Garcia Marquez, I sincerely believed that they were Congolese writers, because there we were, myself and the writer, chatting in my bedroom. It is a mistake to believe that when we take a book on a trip, we are travelling with it; in fact, it is the book that makes us travel, because it contains the world we are looking for. Therefore, when we read, we go “elsewhere”. Dany Laferrière once told me he liked to watch the nape of the neck of people who are reading, because this is where you can see if everything is going well. The neck never stops moving according to what happens during the journey!

How can one be at the same time a Japanese, an Algerian and a Franco-Congolese writer? It is possible and it is not incompatible! Earlier on, in this same room, I saw Fouad Laroui, and I remembered a story that happened to me, and that he wrote about in a weekly magazine - *Jeune Afrique*. I'll just draw a broad outline of the story which will lead to a reflection on the position of writers in today's world.

Something like two years ago, I was at the Toulouse Book Fair with Fouad Laroui (a Moroccan writer) and Boualem Sansal (an Algerian writer). The three of us had in common that we were African, they are from North Africa and I am from Black Africa. It was the year Algeria was being honored at the Book Fair, and the visitors felt the need to go home with a book by an Algerian writer. A rather elderly lady came up to me and asked if I was an Algerian writer. I

found the question very interesting because this reader had no biased idea as to the archetype of the Algerian writer. I then answered rather naturally: *"Yes I'm an Algerian writer, but from Black Algeria."* Delighted to enlarge her geographical conceptions she set her heart on two of my books. I got dragged further into this game a bit later because a whole group of high school students and their teacher wanted to take notes on Black Algeria. So I spoke of Black Algeria at great length...

Quite ironically, sitting next to me was a real Algerian woman who was noticeably North African. But she spent her whole day denying her origins, explaining in a very Parisian accent: "I'm not an Algerian writer, I'm a French writer" she would say in front of her fellow-countrymen; she was quite irritated by this black neighbor constantly repeating that he was Algerian...

That night, I went to an Irish pub in which a party was going on, and I continued enthusiastically to introduce myself as an Algerian from Black Algeria. As the pub was closing down, around four o'clock in the morning, I heard the owner of the bar say to one of the waiters as he was putting the chairs away: *"Ah, if all Algerians were black like him, life would be more simple! But the only ones I ever came across were white Algerians"*

If this woman, the Algerian writer – whom Fouad Laroui, in his article in *Jeune Afrique*, called a scribbler – seemed to have identity issues, I must say that as far as I am concerned, since that day, I have become an Algerian writer...And I am finally going to discover Algeria, because a month ago, I got an invitation for a Pan-African literary conference that is taking place over there. I thought: *"I am finally going to inhabit my citizenship!"* But then, I learnt that I was being denied entrance in Algeria because my novel *Verre cassé* was translated into Hebrew and won a prize in Israel. In front of the absurdity of the situation, I wrote to the Minister of culture to tell him about all this. I had been in fact "fingered" by a North African poet living in Paris, and he had decided I should be banished from his geographical space. I received a new letter from the Algerian Minister of culture, and I was finally authorized to attend the conference! I was told it would be useless to say anything about it to the press; as an Algerian writer I would have my place among my colleagues. My conclusion? Things are very simple; every writer should just take the citizenship of the country that refuses him access. And because they did not want me to go to Algeria, I became even more Algerian...

Here is another example to confirm what I just said. A Swedish friend of mine who knows the Congo very well told me one day that nobody was more Congolese than him! I thought he was just saying that to please me. I had a few doubts about a Swede being more Congolese than me. So we met in the

Congo, in *Pointe-Noire*. I asked him to prove his “congo-ity”. He drove me to a cemetery. I experienced a brief moment of anxiety – after all, he was perhaps a serial-killer – then we arrived at the entrance of the cemetery. The guard saluted him like a long lost friend. After half an hour of plodding through this spooky place, he stopped in front of a grave; his father who had died in the Congo was buried there. He said: “*My father is buried here. We have the citizenship of the place where our father is buried. So I am Congolese.*”

My Swedish friend’s conception of citizenship is interesting. Let’s imagine what this new definition of nationality would mean for all the soldiers from Senegal buried in France...According to this conception, all the exiled, all the writers who die in a foreign country, die in fact on their own land...

We often believe exile is a geographical question. But the most difficult issue is exile from time. The Latin-Americans have understood this, just read *One Hundred Years Of Solitude*. To write a great novel of a given place, you need to make yours the issues that are at stake in that particular place. In *L’énigme du retour*, the novel by Laferrière, the Haitian author explains that the great European novel is a war novel, the great Latin-American novel is a novel about time, and in Haiti, the great novel is still to be written and should be about hunger. No third-world writer has yet written a novel on that fundamental issue. Dany Laferrière mentions, as an example, a Haitian painter whose paintings show beautiful fruit trees although in his environment all the trees are dried out and shriveled up. When asked why he does not paint the “dry” reality onto his canvas, the painter replies that nobody would want to hang on their living-room wall an image of a reality they could see if they opened their window. This means we must invent territories, represent dreams and fill in the holes. I spend my time inventing faraway lands, but those lands are also mine, because a writer inhabits the geography of his imagination.

My imagination is composed of multiple territories, and I live in the *middle*, in the etymological definition of the word *Mediterranean*. I am a Mediterranean by ricochet. Since the Mediterranean sea is a melting pot out of which Western civilization was born – a civilization that later came to my homeland by way of slavery and colonization – I need to make it mine in order to open myself to the world and thus confound intolerance and its lies. So I needed to study, to swallow this civilization that is now layered over my own. This is how the African becomes more Mediterranean. Actually, we know that many of the African populations came from the Nile valley, and that the presence of Black people is attested in ancient Egypt. Historians can testify to the presence of a Black civilization within the ancient Mediterranean perimeter, but

the course of history is such that a certain number of formerly domineering peoples later became dominated in their turn.

As a Congolese, I belong to the "Bantou people", who migrated all the way to Central Africa in ancient times. These peoples created kingdoms, and these kingdoms were later destroyed by colonization. The borders invented by the Western world separated the populations. The colonialists created states according to their Western conceptions and did not consider the African vision which was based on chiefdoms and on the custom of palavers to establish justice. However, every Bantou is necessarily Mediterranean since he comes from the Nile valley. My ancestors knew the pharaohs!

Jacques Roumain, a Haitian writer, reminds us that man is a baker who bakes his own life. Which means we must believe in the free-will of each man, and in the possibility of becoming what we want to be. The definitions of citizenship and of the Mediterranean will no longer depend on geography books. I can feel closer to Jamal Mahjoub in Sudan or Fouad Laroui in Morocco than to another Congolese writer who might have chosen a Russian or Peruvian influence to identify with. The Mediterranean offers us an open and sprawling vision, it is a space of interchange between influences. The sea invites us to embark on a trip which is not necessarily without a return ticket. Laferrière once said he was a Japanese writer, and he even wrote a book in which he talked about this and treated the question of identity with humor; for him identity is not defined by the rules of citizenship but by personal choice. Fundamentalism and intolerance come from people who ground the idea of identity on blood. There are far too many examples of this. According to them, *Jus sanguinis* and *jus solis* are the principal elements defining citizenship, with marriage and adoption. Must our blood, which is red on all continents, be shed for more centuries still in order to settle the question of our origins? Are we afraid of the preeminence of the land and of the mobility of the people – which I personally defend – because those two notions stand for open-mindedness. The land is what allows us to walk and become mobile. Blood – a dangerous notion – is not a human specificity, animals can also bleed. And blood leads to the notion of "strain". Thus, defining man through blood means our origins are predetermined, an idea which annihilates what makes us Men: Free-will. We are not Men because we have blood, we are Men because we choose to be. To this free-will, dissected by Sartre in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, must be added the idea of subjectivity: Man chooses himself. Through our actions we create the man we want to be. And what we want to be obviously creates the image we will have of Man. If I do not agree with the idea of predetermined origins (through blood), it is

because, to me, belonging to a nation is a dynamic act, a positive act that involves an awakening of the person. You must deserve to be a Mediterranean, you cannot just say so! What is a French person? That is a rather vast question! There are two categories of French people; those who did nothing to become French – no problem, no sweat, no queuing at the police headquarters – and those who had to battle to become French. The ones who battled will have to repeat they are French till the end of their lives, because their legitimacy is constantly questioned. Sometimes, even the law changes someone in this category into a stateless person. French on paper, but foreigners in their daily life, confronted to the scrutiny of eyes that constantly question your *real origin*. If everybody was French by blood, I am sure discrimination would still exist and people would be classed by blood-types...

We clearly need to defend a different vision of our humanism. Our identity comes from our encounters. If some people choose exile, it is because the encounters went wrong in a territory that imposed on them a unilateral definition of Man. Nobody wants to allow a dictator to take charge of your humanism in your own country. Hence the land of exile that is supposed to welcome us with our bags full of dreams. And if a dictator chases me from home through the door, I can always climb back through the window of fiction. The exiled Italians used to say "Rome is no longer in Rome." The Black Americans of the "Negro Renaissance" in a context of social segregation, with no voting rights, brought to Paris the cultural intensity of Harlem. From then on, France was the country that gave their nobility titles and their grandeur to those freedom-loving writers and musicians.


As a witness of his age, the writer is a sower of new spaces. Exile has become an unavoidable condition. You feel closer to the land that opens its doors to you and gives you opportunities for new encounters than to your place of origin.

France and Algeria first encountered in 1830; it was a conquest. Great Britain did the same thing in Egypt. Those encounters were tumultuous. The clash of civilizations, one claiming it was more advanced than the other. A French president once declared, "The African man has not yet come into History." But who is writing the history I am expected, as an African, to come into. History will always be different whether it is told by the lion or by the hunter. Am I supposed to come into the history of the benefits of colonialism? Is that it? It is almost funny. How can one invite into history a people who is at the very heart of the History of Mankind?

If history has for so long defined us as opposed, the present gives us an occasion to reconcile and to stop thinking that there is a hierarchy among men. Writers are not the only witnesses of their age. All men are. This implies

that each of us could justly claim he comes from the Mediterranean. This is the best thing Man could invent since he got past crawling in the dirt on all fours: choose the place that could best shelter his dreams. This is why, when I am asked what kind of writer I am, I always choose the first citizenship that comes to my mind. And because we were expected to talk here about the Mediterranean, I remembered I was an Algerian from Black Algeria, and I want this to be heard throughout the whole wide world.

However, I do not deny the fact that I am a Franco-Congolese writer. When it encountered the Congo, France opened the Mediterranean to me. And the Congo now has relationships with North Africa, and these relationships allow me to go beyond the narrow concept of citizenship.

 **The moderator**

If anyone in the audience would like to ask a question, this is the time.

 **A woman in the audience**

Do you know what a “Congolese” is?

 **Alain Mabanckou**

I suppose you are referring to what we can find in a bakery?

 **The same woman**

Exactly! Those delicious little coconut cakes, they look like a rock bun, brown on top and white underneath...

 **Alain Mabanckou**

Ideally, you wash them down with black coffee.

 **A man in the audience**

It is important that you should say you are an Algerian from Black Algeria here, in Marseilles. The colonization of Northern Africa was done as if Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco should be read on the same horizontal line, but in fact, all of those countries have vertical relations with the south. By saying you are an Algerian from Black Algeria, you remind people, beyond the joke, that history connects Morocco to Senegal and Mali, Algeria and Nigeria, Tunisia and Chad. That history, the history of the caravanserai, is still unwritten. It exists in the memory of a few mixed families, and I believe it is important to reconsider North Africa with respect to those relations.

 **Alain Mabanckou**

Yes, it is true that we tend to present Africa as if it was cut into two even

though there are countless historical links. Let us simply ponder on the fact that Islam does not stop in North Africa and goes all the way to the Congo. In my family, when someone was a bit crazy, we used to say, "His head has remained in Morocco." Because the sardine cans we used to eat came from Morocco, and inside, the sardines had no heads. It was actually quite an enigma: what could the Moroccans do with all those sardine heads? The connections with North Africa, apart from travel and commerce, can also appear in humor. In fact, I find it nearly shocking that the same relationships do not exist in literature. As I was saying earlier, when I was talking about Laferrière, the Haitian people do not yet have their great novel because no novel was written about hunger. African writers should perhaps have a closer look at the relationships between North Africa and Black Africa, these relationships could perhaps give birth to the great novel of that area. But bringing up that history is probably too scary. We still haven't come to terms with the enslavement of Black people by the Arab world. This is why we try to find some kind of consensus, and the question is not dealt with. The Malian writer Yambo Ouologuem, who had dared broach the subject in *Le Devoir de violence* was severely criticized, and not by North Africans but by Black Africans, Senghor one of the first among them. For him, as for most of the "Négritude" writers, the unity of Africa is an essential theme. But I do not believe that the North Africans should only write about North Africa, and the Black Africans about Black Africa. Many of us are talking about France in our novels, but the novel of the vertical relationship between North Africa and Black Africa remains to be written!



A woman in the audience

I wanted to thank you for bringing up the question of the *jus sanguinis* and the dangers that are implied when we ground identity on blood. I am Italian, and I understand very well why the Mafia, at its beginning, functioned on the basis of family clans: all those that are not of the same blood are enemies, and no rights are granted them. Slavery was born out of the same system. And the Catholic Church, to the contrary of the true values of the Christian faith, accepted the brutality that went with slavery and said that those beings were not of the same blood, which meant they were hardly *human* beings.



Alain Mabanckou

The question of the *jus sanguinis* is indeed a question I take very much at heart. When the Western world came to Africa, it tried to import there this idea, but it did not work. In certain African villages, it is common to entrust another family with your child, and they bring it up as if it were theirs. In tho-

se villages, they can all say they are brothers because the question of blood was dealt with and settled a long time ago. This is why the Ethnic groups were put forth in Africa – and that caused the great misery of Rwanda. The colonizers said: “You are aware that you have a finer nose, and that your skin is lighter than the skin of these people from this other ethnic group; those are barbarians.” A whole ideology was created in Rwanda, into which entered also the myth of Cham and his curse, a religious explanation that has, since Biblical times, been used to justify the depreciating of the various peoples of Black Africa. But we must remember that the question of blood was at the core of the legislation in France and in Europe for a very long time. Today, luckily, many French people consider that “roots” do not mean anything; this concept is only a call to intolerance, racism and fundamentalism.

EPILOGUE

John Erik Forslund
and Alain Absire

Our forum has now run its course, and at the time of closing, I would like, first of all, to thank all the participants for making this gathering what it is. Thanks to the quality and the intelligence of the interventions and discussions that have taken place during these past two days, this Mare Nostrum V has been a most inspiring and most fruitful seminar. Finally, and in order to bring this forum to its end, it is my pleasure to ask Alain Absire to conclude.

John Erik Forslund

I would like to retrace some of our steps during these past two days which were both fruitful and enriching. I shall begin with a quote, something Alain Mabanckou said: "We are of the same citizenship as the person who is reading us", meaning also that the one who is reading us takes, in his turn, our citizenship. The two dimensions coexist, and this coexistence leads us to understand the universality of these two activities, reading and writing. There was much talk on the subjects of identity and citizenship, we all belong to one same country, the land that shelters our dreams best, and our task now, is to learn how to live in this land. Thus, a European or a Mediterranean citizenship is something one must work for; it is a choice that we make. We are all gathered together here, in the European Writer's Council, to express and confirm our individual engagement, which then, in turn, becomes a collective and voluntary engagement. And this engagement, grown out of our meetings, has created between us something like a literary companionship.

We said that most of the things we read, nearly everywhere, look alike. We spoke this morning of the dangers of conformism, but I think we all reject such a monotonous world, we reject the idea of a Mediterranean or a European literature with one and same face, from which all historical reality would be erased. But what is a European writer, knowing that the real language of

Europe is translation? When languages speak between themselves all the way to the far reaches of the East, we know we can resist harmonization by force. We are what we are, and we must remain true to ourselves. And this is made all the more easy because of translation, the thread that binds us to one another, and constitutes the indispensable web enabling us to share knowledge, imagination and emotions.

We spoke yesterday of a pleasant image, of a world seen through books, but the problem now is that everybody cannot do that. There is an unbelievable injustice which is linked to the problem of education, to the insufficient space in which to share live literature. By live I mean contemporary, I mean a literature which becomes meaningful at the levels of imagination, language and the sharing of values, and which speaks to all those who live on our planet today. We should reflect together upon the consciousness we have of the fact that we have lost language. We can continue to talk and laugh together on the basis of the common values that we share, but the territories in which these values can be shared are constantly diminishing. We should all give together, to the generations that will come after us, the desire to take their time; time to read, time to write, time to inhabit the stories that we tell. I have seen how difficult it is to ask pupils in their third year of secondary school to concentrate for a few minutes on a text that should logically interest them, I have seen how hard it is for them to give imagination the space it deserves, to take the time to settle into a book, into the universe and the language of the author, which in their turn become the reader's. It is a mission we must all accept, it is urgent, and it is our duty.

We must go forward, and face the situations many of us are confronted with. This morning, we spoke of writers as people who disturb our stability. It is a pleasing image, because many of the things that are stable nowadays are deeply inhuman or dehumanized. We must dare. In a Europe which is no longer only economic, we must accept this mission which is not only cultural but also political. Writers must have the courage to refuse the standards of this century, in the same way the previous generations refused the standards of their centuries. When we talk about freedom of speech, in particular, we can easily see how pressing the issue is, it is almost a menace. It is the duty of each of us, in such a place as the EWC, to pass on the torch, to make ours this great mission.

I also heard this sentence: "To write you need to be alive." I would add you need the means to live. The writer, who works alone, by himself, is confronted to the notion of "content" which takes the place of the idea of a work of art. I

am convinced that the work of art is in danger today because it is becoming porous, it is attacked on all sides by those who are incapable of really creating, but who know how to use their networks to make something look great when it is not. We are entering a time of confusion. Our writings travel, are shared, dismantled, and lose their substance, but we are not able to do much about it; we need to awake at the European level so that the authorities concerned can be made to understand the danger that surrounds the idea of a freely recorded culture made available at no cost. Because to write, you need to live. If we have chosen, with some courage, to take on this European and Mediterranean citizenship as writers, we also need to defend our rights, and our copyrights. Otherwise, we shall lower ourselves to the level of the lowest common denominator, which is the uniformity I was mentioning earlier. We are facing such a menace, and also facing a menace against freedom of expression: those are hard but beautiful battles to be fought! I really appreciated the fact that during this symposium, despite the seriousness of the debate, I felt a sort of light-heartedness, a certain suppleness of the spirit though we are not all born-intellectuals. Hope is also in our sense of humor, which we really saw at work here. We need to look with a new eye, a new mind and a new energy at the value of literature, at the value of books and at reading: it is up to us to transmit all this to the future generations.

Thank you to all of you.

Alain Absire



BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PARTICIPATING WRITERS

Gabriela Adamesteanu

Born in 1942 in Târgu Ocna, Gabriela Adamesteanu now lives in Bucharest. Because of her persistent disrespect for the type of literature subjected to social realism, she comes late to fiction. A born novelist, the publication in 1975 of her first novel *Drumul egal al fiecarei zile* (*The Equal Way of Every Day*) is acclaimed by her peers. From 1991 to 2005 Gabriela Adamesteanu is mainly concerned by her activity as political analyst and editor of the weekly magazine *Revista 22*. The President of the Romanian Centre of the Pen-Club (2003-2006), she is also since 2004 the editor of the bi-monthly magazine *Bucurestiul Cultural*.

Gabriela Adamesteanu is very attached to the French language and has translated Guy de Maupassant and Hector Bianciotti into Romanian.

Hoda Barakat

Hoda Barakat has been living in Paris since 1989. In 1985 she published a collection of short stories, *Les Visiteuses*. Since then, she has published four novels with the publisher Actes Sud. In *La pierre du rire* (translated into French by Nadine Acoury), for which she received the prize Al-Nâqid, she describes the mechanisms of madness when living and killing become synonymous. *Les Illuminés* is published in 1999. With *Le Laboureur des eaux* (2000) she received the esteemed Naguib-Mafhouz prize from the American University in Cairo. The main topics treated by Hoda Barakat are irreparable loneliness, madness, inner chaos, and memory. She chose to write in classical Arabic and acknowledges the influence of Musil and of the Arabic classics.

Ali Benmakhlouf

Ali Benmakhlouf has received an Agrégation degree in Philosophy and is now a professor of philosophy at the Sophia-Antipolis university in Nice where he teaches the philosophy of logic and medieval Arabic philosophy. He is a member of the CCNE (national ethics committee) and the IIP (International Institute of Philosophy). He has, among others, published books on G.Frege (Vrin 2000), B.Russell (Ellipses, 20002) and Averroes (Belles Lettres, 2000). His latest book is on Montaigne (Belles Lettres, 2008). Ali Benmakhlouf supervises the translation into Arabic of *European Vocabulary of the Philosophies: a Dictionary of the Untranslatable* by Barbara Cassin (Seuil, Le Robert 2004).

Jason Goodwin

Jason Goodwin studied Byzantine history at Cambridge University. Following the success of *A Time for Tea: Travels in China and India in Search of Tea*, he walked from Poland to Istanbul, Turkey. His account of the journey, *On Foot to the Golden Horn*, won the John Llewellyn Rhys/Mail on Sunday Prize in 1993. *The Janissary Tree* won the coveted Edgar Award for Best Novel in 2007 and is available in 38 languages. The third Yashim novel, *The Bellini Card*, was released in the summer of 2008.

Martin de Haan

A Dutch translator and literary critic, Martin de Haan (1966) has been living in France since 2003. He translated about twenty books from French into Dutch. His authors are not only Marcel Proust, Denis Diderot, Benjamin Constant, but also include Michel Houellebecq, Milan Kundera and Jean Echenoz. Martin de Haan is the president of the European Council of Literary Translators' Associations (CEATL).

Hanneke van der Heijden

Hanneke van der Heijden was born in 1964 in the Netherlands. After a master's degree in applied linguistics at the University of Tilburg and a master's degree in Turkish studies at the University of Utrecht, Hanneke van der Heijden taught in the Dutch language and literature department at the University of Ankara. Since 2000, she has been an interpreter and literary translator from Turkish into Dutch. She has, among others, translated Orhan Pamuk, Elif Shafak, Halid Ziya Usaklıgil, Ahmet Altař, Oguz Atay, and is preparing, in collaboration with Margreet Dorleijn, an anthology of short

stories translated from Turkish into Dutch. She is currently translating a novel by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü*. Hanneke van der Heijden was the editor in chief of *Umut*, a Turkish literary review, and has published numerous articles on translation.

Mine Kirikkanat

Born in Ankara, she graduated from the University of Istanbul where she was trained as a sociologist. Mine Kirikkanat began in journalism by writing for the humoristic newspaper *Çarsaf* in 1977. She then wrote the humoristic page for *Ciddiy* and the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* for two years. After a long interruption, she went back to journalism as a correspondent for *Cumhuriyet* in Bilbao and then Madrid. In 1991 she was posted in Paris. From 1993 to 2005 she was a correspondent for *Milliyet* and an editorial writer for *Radikal*. Since 2005 she has been an editorial writer for *Vatan*, and regularly contributes to TV5's programme *Kiosque*. Her latest novel, a best seller, *Bir Gün Gece* (Constantine's Malediction) is a political murder mystery.

Fouad Laouri

Born in Oujda in 1958, Fouad Laouri is a Moroccan writer. After studying at the Lycée Lyautey in Casablanca, he is admitted in the French Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, and graduates as an engineer in 1982. After working for a few years for the Moroccan phosphate company in Khouribga and Casablanca, he leaves for Great Britain, and lives for a few years in Cambridge and York. He obtains a Doctorate in economy in 1994 in Paris (Ecole des Mines) and leaves for Amsterdam where he first teaches econometrics and environmental science (1999-2005) at the Free University. He is now teaching French literature at the Amsterdam University. He has all the while been writing in French and has published three books of poems written in Dutch, and dozens of scientific articles written in English.

Le Maboul, Julliard, 2000; *La Fin tragique de Philomène Tralala*, Julliard, 2003; *Tu n'as rien compris à Hassan II*, Julliard, 2004 (Grand Prix SGDL de la Nouvelle); *De l'islamisme. Une réfutation personnelle du totalitarisme religieux*, Robert Laffont, 2006; *La Femme la plus riche du Yorkshire*, Julliard, 2008.

Martin Lexell

Martin Lexell has been living in Madrid since 1988 after studying Nordic and Hispanic philology at the University of Uppsala (Sweden). He is now a professor of Swedish language and literature in Madrid (Escuela Oficial

de Idiomas de Madrid) and translates from Swedish into Spanish. He has translated among others, such writers as Per Olov Enquist, Mikael Niemi, Eke Edwardsson, Stieg Larsson. He participated in the elaboration of five anthologies of Nordic literature, and was in charge of the part that concerns the Swedish authors representing the XXth century.

Per Olov Enquist *El libro de Blanche y Marie* (Boken om Blanche och Marie), Destino 2007 (in collaboration with Cristina Cerezo); Stieg Larsson *Los hombres que no amaban a las mujeres* -Trilogía Millennium (Män som hatar kvinnor), Destino 2008 (in collaboration with Juan José Ortega); Maj Sjöwall - Per Wahlöö *El hombre del balcón* (Mannen på balkongen), RBA 2008 (in collaboration with Manuel Abella).

Alain Mabanckou

Born in 1966 in Congo Brazzaville, he begins to study law there, and later comes to France where he obtains a DEA in Business law from the University Paris-Dauphine (Paris IX). An advisor for the Lyonnaise des Eaux -now SUEZ – for ten years, he also publishes books of poems for which he receives various prizes. In 1998 he publishes his first novel *Bleu-blanc-rouge*. In 2001 he obtains a grant for a writing residence in the United States, resigns from the Lyonnaise des Eaux in 2002, and accepts the position of Francophone literature professor at the university of Michigan. Since 2006 he has been teaching in the department of Francophone studies and comparative literature at the University of California in Los Angeles.

Loriano Macchiavelli

Born in Vergato in 1934, Loriano Macchiavelli is a stage director, an actor and a writer. In 1974 he writes the first adventure of Sarti Antonio who will become one of the most popular police characters in the peninsula. His novels have been adapted for television since 1978. He also wrote the scripts of 13 TV-films shown on RAI between 1991 and 1993. He is at the origin of SIGMA (Scrittori del Giallo e del Mistero Associati) in the early 1980's, and of the Group 8 in 1984, a group that gathered such writers as Renato Olivieri, Enzo Russo ou Attilio Veraldi; he is also at the origin, in 1990, of the famous Group 13, an initiative that was at the origin of the success of modern Italian detective stories. He founded and is the editor of *Delitti di carta*.

His books include: *Les Souterrains de Bologne* (2004), *Bologne, ville à vendre* (2006), *Derrière le paravent* (2008). All are published by Anne Marie Métaillé and all were translated by Laurent Lombard.

Jamal Mahjoub

Born of a Sudanese father and an English mother, Jamal Majhoub was raised in Khartoum and goes to study geology in Sheffield with the idea he will prospect for oil and work in the oil industry in Sudan. He later lives in London, Copenhagen, and Barcelona. All his novels are translated into French and kept in print. Jamal Mahjoub has the particularity of writing in English and defying the usual frontiers of the literary establishment; he is seen as an English writer in Sudan, and mainly as an Arabic-speaking writer in the London literary scene (as well as in the Danish or Spanish scenes).

The Drift Latitudes, Chatto & Windus (2006). *Navigation of a Rainmaker*, Heinemann International Literature & Textbooks (1989)

Dominique Manotti

Dominique Manotti was born in Paris, a city she never left. She studied history in the Sorbonne and taught contemporary economic history in a Parisian university, with a ten year interruption at the end of the seventies during which she was a permanent union organizer for the CFDT. She is engaged in a career as modern age chronicler, denouncing, novel after novel, the fundamental injustice in the relationships between simple people and the powerful. The talent with which she injects fiction into real facts is close to the work of James Ellroy, a lineage she claims openly.

Diego Marani

Born in 1959 in Ferrare, in Emilia-Romagna, Diego Marani is an Italian writer, a journalist and a translator. In 1996, while translating for the Council of the European Union, he invents Europanto, an ironic international language. He uses it in a comic novel, *Las adventures de l'inspector Cabillot*, published in France in 1999 by Mazarine. His most famous novel, "Nuova grammatica finlandese" (New Finnish Grammar) is translated into different languages and has received in Italy the Grinzane-Cavour literary prize. Some of his other novels are: *L'ultimo dei Vostiachi* (Bompiani 2002); *L'interprete* (Bompiani, 2004); *Il Compagno di scuola* (Bompiani 2005).

As an essayist, Diego Marani has published *A Trieste con Svevo* and *Come ho imparato le lingue*. Diego Marani regularly writes for the cultural page of the Italian daily *Il Sole 24 Ore*.

Khaled Osman

Khaled Osman was born in Egypt but grew up in France; he has always taken interest in Arabic literature, first as a reader, and then as a translator into French. After translating Naguib Mahfouz, he took an interest in Gamal Ghitany, and translated ten of his books, including *The book Of Illuminations* (Seuil, 2005, Amédée-Pichot prize). He also co-translated into Arabic (Palestinian) *A Very Hot Springtime* by Sahar Khalifa (Seuil, 2008). Khaled Osman has collaborated to different publications on cinema and literature. He was the literary advisor from Cairo for the *Le Caire/Vancouver* issue of the review *Meet*, 2008.

Daniel Rondeau

Successively chief editor of the cultural pages of *Libération*, special correspondent for the *Nouvel Observateur*, and editorial writer for the *Express*, Daniel Rondeau is recognized both in the world of journalism and the world of literature. In 1987 he founds the publishing house *Quai Voltaire*, and reawakens the interest of the French public for the American author Paul Bowles. Daniel Rondeau is the author of several travel stories, novels, political and literary essays, as well as autobiographical writings.

He received in 1997 the *Deux Magots* prize for his book *Alexandrie*, and the “Grand prix de l’Académie Paul Morand” for the whole of his work.

Daniel Rondeau is currently the French ambassador to the island of Malta.

