Finnegan’s List 2017
The Mediterranean Issue

The European Society of Authors

Bridging cultures, crossing languages
The European Society of Authors – created in the spring of 2008 – is a network open to all authors, publishers, translators, readers and cultural actors who wish to participate in the creation of an intellectual community in a multilingual and multicultural Europe.

Placing translation at the heart of our projects and thoughts, we favor an approach that takes on differences in terms of sharing and dialogue. Since October 2011, the European Society of Authors has proposed an annual list of under-translated or forgotten works called Finnegan’s List – the personal choices of a committee of 10 eminent authors from different countries.

Each writer selects three titles that make up the committee’s “elective affinities”. With this project, the European Society of Authors strives to revive a literary canon encompassing all languages spoken and written in Europe and beyond.

Each author briefly explains the reasons for their choice of books.

Excerpts of these texts can be found in this brochure but we also invite you to visit our website, www.seua.org, to discover all of them and to find out more about Finnegan’s List and our other projects.

Our 2017 List is a special issue devoted to the Mediterranean world. The jury members are all known for their affinities with and expertise on the Mediterranean region.

For this edition, in addition to fiction, we were particularly seeking out non-fiction works and works in other genres and formats that bear witness in some way to the richness and diversity of the Mediterranean world.

If you wish to participate, to contribute or to support our projects, please write us at: contact@seua.org.
All of my childhood memories are sprinkled with droplets of water that glisten like tiny gemstones in sunlight. We children on the Adriatic were not unlike those of Tipasa, Algeria, whom Albert Camus so loved. Each summer, too, was a long, carefree *Summer in Algiers*. We played in the sea till our fingertips wrinkled, we gathered green and violet sea urchin shells, whose colors faded during the winter. If we were unhappy in love, we sang along with the radio: “Oh sea, how your waves used to caress our bodies”. Travelers from the north came to our cities, and we found their longing for the Mediterranean flattering and touching, but also somehow naive. For as we grew up, we began to realize that our beautiful blue sea also had its perils.

The first uneasiness came with literature. At first, there was just an old saying: “Give praise to the sea, but remain on dry land”. Then came poems that spoke of men who had disappeared in their boats for good while their wives waited in vain for their return. Poems about fishermen caught in storms who were thrilled to find themselves back home, even without any fish. Poems about sailors who perished because they were torn between homesickness and wanderlust. In ninth grade, we read *The Odyssey*. The man who had survived the war and was drifting about the seas trying to get home seemed to have sprung from the stories of our grandparents. In tenth grade we read stories about the crusaders, who also haunted the Adriatic Coast before moving on to the Holy Land, and in eleventh grade we learned about the sea battles between Christian alliances and Ottoman Turks. Finally, in twelfth grade, we read about slaves who were chained to the planks of Venetian galleys and brutally whipped, and about a Christian princess who Turkish pirates wanted to sell at the Dubrovnik market. We grew up and carried inside us an *invincible summer*—just like Albert Camus. We never stopped reading stories about the Mediterranean. One of them I found particularly enchanting: in this story, an old world guarded by a heraldic animal named Gattopardo was dying out. It was written by a writer...
whose name contained the claim of his Sicilian noble family to the island of Lampedusa. The same island that, in our day, has turned into an enormous burial ground, since so many only reach it when they are dead. Seeing their bodies, we feel our invincible summer freeze inside us. The Mediterranean Sea, which stretches between continents and connects them in a perpetual circulation of people, goods and stories, has increasingly become the site of broken illusions. While travelers from the north put themselves through the strangest of tourist contortions to make good on the promise of Summer in Algiers, packing themselves in like sardines with thousands of other people on cruise ships, for the new, desperate travelers from the south, the Mediterranean represents only a dangerous obstacle. These travelers long for freedom and for a life lived with dignity, but the perils of the sea await them, like the ones from our old texts. The familiar sea suddenly looks forbidding and strange to us, too. To understand the sea better, we need literature again. To regain trust in this magical sea, whose shores are acquainted with both the most unforgettable flights of fancy of the human mind, as well as unspeakable suffering, we urgently need translations of stories that have emerged around the Mediterranean, or that are even now emerging.
Zeina Abirached

Zeina Abirached (born in 1981) is a Lebanese illustrator, graphic novelist and comic artist. She studied at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts and the National School of Decorative Arts in Paris. In 2002, she published a first short comic book composed of black and white drawings. For her memoir, *A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Leave, To Return* (2007), she was awarded the FACE French Voices Grant. Abirached’s books on individual and collective memory, such as *Le Piano oriental* and *I Remember Beirut*, portray Lebanese society in her specific black and white artwork that also incorporates aspects of Arabic calligraphy. Her books have been translated into numerous languages and received great critical acclaim.

Zeina Abirached recommends

Translated into French, German and Italian.

Selected poems translated into Arabic, English, German and Italian.

Translated into Arabic, English, German, Spanish and Portuguese.
David Abulafia

David Abulafia (born in 1949) is a renowned British historian with a particular interest in Italy, Spain and Mediterranean history. He is Professor of Mediterranean History at the University of Cambridge and Papathomas Professorial Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, as well as Fellow of the British Academy, and member of the Academia Europaea. He has published various books and historical studies, including *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* and *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus*. David Abulafia has lectured in numerous countries, and has edited various collections of historical studies. For his work, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (2011), he received the Mountbatten Award for Literary Excellence. The book became a bestseller and has been translated into several languages. Abulafia has received numerous awards for his body of work, and in recognition of his writing, he has been appointed Commendatore dell’Ordine della Stella della Solidarietà Italiana.

David Abulafia recommends

Translated into Japanese, Spanish and Turkish.

Translated into Spanish, rights sold for Albania, China and Italy.

Translated into Italian and Turkish.
Yassin al-Haj Saleh

Yassin al-Haj Saleh (born in 1961) is a Syrian writer, intellectual and former political prisoner. At the age of 19, while studying medicine at Aleppo University, he was arrested by the regime and imprisoned for 16 years and 14 days. He returned to medical school upon his release but never practised medicine, instead turning to writing and gaining recognition as one of Syria's leading intellectuals. Since 2000, Yassin al-Haj Saleh has been writing on political, social and cultural subjects related to Syria and the Arab world. He regularly contributes to several newspapers and journals, including Al-Hayat and the online periodical al-Jumhuriya. Yassin al-Haj Saleh was forced to leave his home country, and now lives in Istanbul, where he co-founded Hamish, “an independent space-in-exile for critical debate, exchange and communication of ideas”. His work is translated into several languages, and he has a forthcoming book entitled The Impossible Revolution: Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy. In 2012 he received the Prince Claus Award but was unable to collect the prize, as he was living then hiding out in Damascus.

Yassin al-Haj Saleh recommends

No translations.


Fawwaz Haddad, السوريون الأعداء (The Enemy Syrians), Beirut: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 2014.
No translations.
Nir Baram

Nir Baram (born in 1976) is an Israeli writer, journalist and advocate for equal rights for Palestinians. He has worked as a journalist for the newspaper Haaretz and as an editor of nonfiction and classics for the publisher Am Oved. He started writing fiction in his twenties and has published several novels, including Good People (2010) and World Shadow (2013). In 2016, his nonfiction book, A Land Without Borders, a one-year journey along the Green Line in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, was published in several countries and became a bestseller. Baram has received great critical acclaim for his work and was awarded, among others, the Prime Minister’s Award for Hebrew Literature. He is a regular contributor to Israeli and international periodicals such as Granta, The New Yorker and Der Spiegel.

Nir Baram recommends

No translations.

Salman Natour, (The Memory had Conversed with me and Disappeared), Bethlehem: Markiz Badil, 2006/Tel Aviv: Resling Publisher, 2015.
Translated into Hebrew and Italian.

Yossi Sucary, (Benghazi-Bergen-Belsen), Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2013.
Translated into English.
Ali Benmakhlouf
Ali Benmakhlouf (born in 1959) is a professor of philosophy from Morocco. He studied at the Sorbonne University and has worked at various universities in Paris, Nice, and Brussels. Benmakhlouf has published numerous works on philosophers such as Averroes and Al-Farabi, as well as on philosophical subjects, including titles such as *L’identité, une fable philosophique* (2011) and *Pourquoi lire les philosophes arabes* (2015). He has also edited various collections and studies, and his essays and scholarly works have appeared in major journals and collective publications. Benmakhlouf regularly gives lectures in France and abroad, and organizes philosophical meetings in Morocco. He is a member of the French National Ethics Committee and the French Research Institute for Development.

Ali Benmakhlouf recommends

**Taha Abderrahmane**, فقه الفلسفة (The Science of Philosophy), Riyadh: Arabic Union Catalog.
No translations.

No translations.

**Aziz al-Azmeh**, العلمانية من منظور مختلف (Secularism from a Different Point of View), Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1998.
Translated into English.
Davide Camarrone

Davide Camarrone (born in 1966) is an Italian writer and journalist. He studied political science at the university of his hometown of Palermo, as well as directing and theatre acting. Since the 1980s, he has worked as a journalist for numerous Italian newspapers, radio and TV stations. His first novel was published in 2006, followed by several other works. His novel, *Questo è un uomo*, published in 2009, was adapted for the stage. In 2013, Camarrone received a prize named in honour of the famous Sicilian singer, Rosa Balistreri, for his literary oeuvre. In 2014, his book *Lampaduza* was published, a report on immigration to the eponymous island in recent years. Davide Camarrone is the founder and artistic director of the Festival delle Letterature migranti that takes place annually in Palermo.

Davide Camarrone recommends


Jocelyne Dakhlia

Jocelyne Dakhlia (born in 1959) is a French-Tunisian historian and anthropologist. She currently teaches at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) in Paris. Jocelyne Dakhlia has published several books on Tunisian society as well as on the history, role and perception of Islam in Europe. One of her best-known works is entitled *Lingua franca. Histoire d’une langue métisse en Méditerranée*, a study of the *lingua franca*, a hybrid language used to communicate in the Mediterranean Basin from the 11th–19th century. Jocelyne Dakhlia is a member of the French commission for UNESCO and the scientific council of the MUCEM (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations).

Jocelyne Dakhlia recommends


Adrian Grima
Adrian Grima (born in 1968) is a prizewinning author of poetry and short stories from Malta. He teaches literature in the Department of Maltese at the University of Malta. He has written and edited a number of academic works, and delivered and published papers in many countries, focusing mainly on literature in the Mediterranean. Several collections of his poetry have been translated, including *The Tragedy of the Elephant* (2005) and *Deciphered Lips* (2013). His most recent publication is a third solo collection of poems in Maltese. Grima is also one of the founders of the cultural NGO Inzijamed and its Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival, established in 2006. His work has met with acclaim and received several prizes.

Adrian Grima recommends
*Juann Mamo*, *Ulied in-Nanna Venut fl-Amerka* (Grandma Venut’s Children in America), several editions, 1930-31. Translated into English (without publisher).

*Ġużè Bonnici*, *Lejn ix-Xemx* (Towards the Sun), several editions, 1940.
No translations.

No translations.
Jurica Pavičić

Jurica Pavičić (born in 1965) is a Croatian writer, columnist and film and literary critic from Split. He studied at the University of Zagreb and worked as a journalist for the newspaper Jutarnji list, in 2014 receiving the Croatian Journalists’ Association’s award for Journalist of the Year. Pavičić has published several novels, plays, short story collections and nonfiction works. His novel, Ovce od gipsa (1997), was adapted as a movie entitled Svjedoci (Witnesses), which won the Friedenspreis at the 2004 Berlinale. His work has been translated into several languages and distinguished with many awards.

Jurica Pavičić recommends

Miljenko Smoje, Kronika o našem malom mistu (Chronicles of Our Little Town), several editions, 1971.
Translated into Italian.

Olja Savičević Ivančević, Adio kauboju (Farewell, Cowboy), Zagreb: Algoritam, 2010.
Translated into Bulgarian, Dutch, English, German, Italian, Serbian, Slovene, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish.

Tanja Mravak, Moramo razgovarati (We Need to Talk), Zagreb: Algoritam, 2010.
Translated into Slovene.
Ece Temelkuran

Ece Temelkuran (born in 1973) is a Turkish author and journalist. She studied law at the University of Ankara and has worked as a columnist for Turkish and international newspapers, and as a television presenter. She was twice named “Turkey’s most-read political columnist”. Since 1995, she has published 12 books, including *Deep Mountain. Across The Turkish-Armenian Divide, Book of the Edge*, and *Turkey. The Insane and the Melancholy*. Temelkuran’s books have been translated into several languages and she has received numerous prizes for her literary and journalistic work, such as the PEN for Peace Award. Her columns are regularly published in the international press.

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Ece Temelkuran recommends

No translations.

**Nahid Sırri Örik**, *Turnede Bir Artist Öldürüldü* (A Star is Killed on the Tour), several editions, 1958.
No translations.

No translations.
Zeina Abirached
I first discovered Etel Adnan through her paintings and drawings, and read her a bit later on, particularly when the Lebanese publisher Tamyras released a selection of her writings. I especially remember reading In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country, where Adnan follows the structure of a work by William H. Gass using the same subjects for each chapter, introduced by titles (“A Place”, “Weather”, “My House”, “A Person”, etc.), like so many layers of sensations, thoughts, daydreams, memories, that end up sketching out an implicit portrait of the author, returning to Lebanon after many years in California.

My first contact with Nadia Tuéni’s poetry was in Maroun Baghdadi’s film Houroub Saghira (Little Wars), which came out in 1982, in which the spectator is invited to follow her through the ruins of downtown Beirut. I became interested in her poetry through this discovery of her voice and her presence, so intense in the film. In her Collected Poems, published following her death in 1983, you find an echo of the images of this vanished Beirut.

I discovered Georges Schehadé’s work through his theatre. I remember as a child in Beirut seeing “L’Émigré de Brisbane” at the Théâtre Georges Naccache (which no longer exists), and later discovering his poetry and his magnificent Anthologie du vers unique, republished by Bartillat in 2011. I am still very attached to his first play, “Monsieur Bob’le”, which features all of the fantasy, humor and elegance of Schehadé’s characters, which inspired the illustrator in me to sketch them!

David Abulafia
Sir John H. Elliott is a historian of Spain, particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries, who has acquired a stellar reputation for his clear, well-focused and beautifully written books since the 1960s. In this short and highly readable book, he reflects on the tasks of a historian, interweaving his thoughts with an account of his own remarkable career: what motivated him to choose the subjects on which he has written, and the challenges of writing Spanish history in the days of Franco. Free from the jargon that often pervades books about the writing of history, and
ideologically neutral, this book provides exciting insight into the mind of a great historian.

Sir Noël Malcolm combines a mastery of Balkan history (he has written histories of Bosnia and Kosovo) with the study of 17th century political thought. This extraordinary account of the years when the fleets of Philip II of Spain and the Venetian Republic faced the Ottoman Turks in the Mediterranean is built around the careers of members of two interwoven families, the Brunis and the Brutis, both Albanian but active far from their ancestral homeland – in Provence and Moldova, as well as in the Adriatic. But it is much more than an account of people of middling importance caught up in great events, for Malcolm explains the wider setting at length and with great authority.

By concentrating heavily on the millennia before the spread of writing, the archaeologist Cyprian Broodbank has brilliantly illuminated periods of Mediterranean history that have been passed over rapidly in most accounts. His striking ability to provoke and stimulate, while drawing together vast amounts of material over many millennia, means that The Making of the Middle Sea is a book that will be relished by general and academic readers alike. This book is a tremendous achievement, enhanced by many hundreds of excellently chosen illustrations.

Yassin al-Haj Saleh

Essentially, the book considers Syrian women and the role they had, or did not have, in the first two years of the Syrian Revolution. It explores the various contradictions in how women conduct their daily lives, and their opinions and sometimes off-the-shelf convictions, be they ideas embraced by the women themselves or those that address women and the roles imposed on them. The book consists of the direct testimonies of 17 Syrian women from a variety of backgrounds, some of whom have been imprisoned and some of whom are living in exile today. Their testimonies are presented without censorship and with feminist discourse at a distance.

This is an anthology of poems by the popular Syrian poet Monzer Masri, together with 90 other poets, all but three from Syria. At once an individual and a collective work, Monzer Masri’s voice resonates throughout this unique book from start to finish, mingled with those of the other contributors. Some are established writers, of Masri’s generation (born in 1949) and older, while others are younger poets, for
whom this is their first publication. This poetry collection is quite unlike anything published before in the history of Syrian and Arab poetry.

**Fawwaz Haddad**'s monumental work of around 500 pages is the first work of fiction to deal directly with the Hama massacre of 1982, an event which remains a closely guarded taboo in Assad’s Syria. Besides detailing the massacre, the novel deals with the lives of prisoners in Tadmur (Palmyra) detention camp and with Syrian society in the 1980s and 1990s, continuing through to the Syrian Revolution. It is not the first novel to break the taboo surrounding the 1982 events in Hama, but it is the first literary work to span nearly 30 years, drawing links between two phases of grim social, political and ideological conflict in Syria.

**Nir Baram**

This novel by one of Israel’s best writers, **Lea Aini**, tells the story of a young female soldier who for some reason decides to take care of Jonathan, a young soldier from an upper-middle class family, who was injured while trying to take his life during Israel’s war in Lebanon in the 1980s. The novel moves between present and past (her childhood with a father who was a Holocaust survivor from Greece, a cruel and violent father who never believed in her) and recounts how writing was the only way for her to get out from under her father’s shadow. The writing style is compressed, both cruel and beautiful, in a story about rebellion: against her father, against the army, against the “truths” of the Israeli state, without sentimentality and with a sober and at times even funny point of view. Basically, it is a novel about Israeli society from the eyes of a young woman who never took anything for granted.

I read this book in Hebrew. It was translated from Arabic by one of Israel’s greatest intellectuals and nonfiction writers, Yehouda Shenhav-Sharabani. The author, **Salman Natour**, was born in 1949. He was a Palestinian and an Israeli citizen, and died last year. For me it is a book about the Nakba (“catastrophe”), referring to the deportation of around 600,000 Palestinians from their homes during the 1948 war, largely by the Israeli army. It is a book that was written by an author of the “second generation”, as he writes: “We were born after the Nakba and so we became unwilling witnesses. Our body became a historical draft document written in black ink. We were born after that war, and so its burden falls upon our shoulders. We learned to love the story of how we lost our childhood, sacrificed for the greater good.” Natour writes with compassion and humor, without demonizing anyone, and more than anything else, it is a smart and sensitive story about a world that
was once here, so close to us, and of which now you can find hardly any trace. *Benghazi-Bergen-Belsen* by Yossi Sucary is the first novel about the Holocaust of Libyan Jews by an Israeli writer. I think it really depicts the transformations and tribulations that this intriguing community witnessed during the Second World War. Violently uprooted from their autonomous lifestyle and thrown into a language, culture and geography completely foreign to their own, Libyan Jews, like other Jews living among Arabic-speaking Muslims, were profoundly detached, cut off even from the new ways of life formed among the camps’ prisoners. Placed at the bottom of the Nazi’s racial hierarchy for their eastern origins, they were incomprehensible to European eyes and perceived as intimidating even by their fellow European Jewish prisoners. The book is written from the perspective of a young woman, and this allows the writer to create a sort of Bildungsroman set in the absurd situation of Arab Jews being sent to Europe by the Nazis.

**Ali Benmakhlouf**

*Taha Abderrahmane* was awarded the Prize of Morocco twice (in 1988 for his work *On the Foundations of Dialogue and the Renewal of Dialectic Theory*, and in 1995 for his *Renewing the Methodology of Appraising the Tradition*, both in Arabic), and in 2006 he received the ISESCO prize in Islamic thought and philosophy. His recent work in Arabic, *fiqh al-falsafah*, or “The Science of Philosophy”, theorized in two heavy volumes, should be translated in European languages.

The Iraqi poet *Maruf al Rusafi* has written a surprising biography of the prophet Mohammed, recently published by Dar al-Jamal (Cologne). The book is based strictly on Islamic and Arabic sources and sheds light on the history of the prophet.

This book by the Syrian *Aziz al-Azmeh*, published in Arabic and English, is about the historical process of secularization in the Arab world, from the Ottoman *Tanzimat* to the contemporary period. Aziz al-Azmeh tries to understand what he calls “latent secularization” in the societies of the southern Mediterranean world.

**Davide Camarrone**

The language of Giosuè Calaciura draws on drama and poetry. The use of graphic images characterizes the narration, which is pervaded by a sense of time suspended; parataxis gives the prose its particular rhythm. Giosuè Calaciura paints a sublime fresco using the humble shades of the vocabulary of the poor: he turns
a chronicle of wretched humanity into a contemporary epic poem. In the Sicilian language, enriched by the influence of many different cultures, the word “sgobbo” means both exertion and gain. This novel is about the “sgobbo” of the Nigerian prostitutes in Palermo, a land of mafia and violence. Amidst the most profound despair, the only hope lies in the evocative and liberating force of literature.

In *Salam, maman*, Iranian author **Hamid Ziarati** uses the reinvention of memory as a means to confront and analyze the burden of violence and exile. In this everyday chronicle of an ordinary family, the innocent games of the children are interrupted by more adult ones: protests, revolution, disappointment and a new form of repression, which entails the burning of books and the despicable rage of the Pasdaran. In a measured prose, Ziarati, who lives and writes in Italy, tells the story of a son who, torn from happiness and handed over to death, represents an antidote to ideological annihilation and tyranny with his testimony.

In her Italian novel, Georgian writer **Ruska Jorjioliani** takes us to her hometown of Mestia, and shows us a home library crowded with prestigious names such as Mandelstam and Pasternak (the author of the verse in the title). Against a symbolic background, dissolved in the past, Jorjioliani revives the romantic and heroic time of the revolution, from the lies of totalitarianism to their dramatic revelation. The form of the narration ranges from traditional (letter, journal, fairy tale) to more contemporary (philosophical dialogue, avant-garde theatre). Starting with the friendship between Viktor and Dimitri, this novel explores courage and betrayal across multiple generations, and comes to an end within the pages of a book of poetry.

**Jocelyne Dakhlia**

This book, the prison memoirs of leftwing activist **Fathi Ben Haj Yahia**, deserves to be more widely read. I find the book important in that it sheds powerful light on the country that sparked off the “Arab Spring”, providing insight into the inner workings of its political system and on repression, including the relationship to torture. It is thus extremely timely. But this is also a work that, in the Arab world, belongs to a new genre that emerged at the turn of the 21st century, the prison memoir genre (Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and elsewhere). This genre is too little known and has great literary and historical as well as political importance. This book provides a strong idea of it and strikes me as a good introduction to this body of work. It is furthermore full of humor and extremely well written, with eloquence and distance, and attests to a way of being in the world through
militancy and activism that is not well known either (North African Maoism, etc.). This “book” that I wanted to recommend is actually a very long article, a two-part scholarly article on the Muslim slaves who asked to be baptized in Rome in the 17th and 18th century, authored by Rudt de Collenberg Wipertus. The study dates to 1989 and is largely forgotten today, but it is a pioneering study on the question of the “assimilation” of Muslims in Europe. The text is at once erudite and extremely lively, with a large number of biographical examples throughout depicting figures who are truly fleshed out. Of course it examines the role of patronage and the relations of sponsorship binding Muslim candidates for baptism and assimilation, on the one hand, with the Christian sponsors, on the other. It seems to me that this text deserves a second life, and is at the heart of the most timely historiography of the Mediterranean. The text also resonates with an American history that is now discovering its longstanding Muslim population, often brought against their will during the slave trade, with origins more or less masked by their baptism.

Ali Benmakhlouf is a Franco-Moroccan philosopher who splits his work between Morocco and France. He is a member of the French National Ethics Committee, and regularly organizes philosophical meetings in Morocco between “western” and Arab philosophers. I think it is important to translate this book, firstly, because it is an essay that is pleasant and easy to read, accessible to a diverse public, and with a perspective that contrasts with a number other works addressing these issues, in that it does not glorify the past grandeur of Arab philosophy. Benmakhlouf’s perspective highlights the timeliness of Arab philosophy and the modernity of its writings in light of vast contemporary questions. This work doubtlessly provides a response to a reactionary movement that today denies the contribution of medieval Arab science to western culture, but it is above all a peaceful and serene demonstration of the character, at once universal and contemporary, of this Arab philosophical output.

Adrian Grima

Juann Mamo’s Ulied in-Nanna Venut fl-Amerka is an unorthodox and irreverent satirical novel written in 1930-31 that tells the story of a group of uneducated Maltese migrants who decide to go to the United States of America to get rich quick and return to Malta to sit on their wealth. Things don’t turn out quite the way they expected and the novel ends in a very unusual way. Mamo is harshly critical of the Mediterranean and seems to find no redeeming factor in what
he perceives as its primitiveness and backwardness. Ignored by the literary establishment for over half a century, this has now become something of a cult novel. Albert Gatt has accomplished the seemingly impossible task of translating it into English, but this translation is still waiting for a publisher. *Lejn ix-Xemx* is a fast-paced romantic historical novel that was written in 1940, months before the untimely death of its author, Ġużè Bonnici, and published posthumously. It has received very little critical attention and even the Maltese original is now out of print. An adventure novel set in the Mediterranean Sea, it defies geographical and ethnic borders and comes across as a particularly topical story in a 21st century world of walls and passport controls. The protagonist’s home is on his corsair galley, the Nostra Señora, and his crew, hailing from different parts of the Mediterranean, is the community to which he belongs. *Barefoot in the Saltpans* is a carefully constructed book of strong emotions. Its rather unassuming name is accompanied by an intriguing, almost provocative subtitle: “Poetry Mediterranean”. *Daniel Massa*, a leading voice in Maltese post-Independence poetry, clearly wants us to engage with this apparently elliptic epithet. These are not poems about, from, or even of the Mediterranean. The poet wants to identify them with the Mediterranean, as if his poetry and the Mediterranean were one and the same thing. This collection, with poems written over a span of 50 years, takes the reader into Massa’s alternative “republic” of the Mediterranean Sea and coast. Unlike much of Maltese literature, which stands in awe of the sea and observes it strictly from a distance, Daniel Massa’s poetry is often written from within the sea. Jim Crace describes it in his foreword as “wind-blown, salty, sun-kissed and unambiguously Mediterranean”. Some of the poems were written originally in English while others are English versions of poems written originally in Maltese.

**Jurica Pavičić**

*Chronicles of Our Little Town* by Miljenko Smoje is a book with a strangely mixed fate. Outside of the former Yugoslavia, this book is virtually unknown. However, in Croatia and former Yugoslav countries, this book is widely known and popular, largely because it was a companion piece to the most popular television series ever aired in the former Yugoslavia. The novel follows the everyday life of a small Dalmatian island town over the four central decades of the 20th century. It is easy to describe Smoje as the Croatian Marcel Pagnol, or the Giovannino Guareschi of the Adriatic. His humor, mentality, and the worlds he describes indeed recall
these two great Mediterranean humorists. Like them, Smoje also deals with the grand ideological clashes of the mid-20th century – but he is distinctive in many ways, and particularly, in terms of the language he uses. He writes in a Central-Dalmatian Chakavian dialect, which he himself standardized, and which, due to the popularity of his work, is frequently used today in Croatian pop music, theatre and newspapers. Croatian right-wingers often accused Smoje of being a “red” author, pro-Yugoslav, pro-communist, or – simply – a traitor. Left-wingers took these arguments for granted and used them in the writer’s favor. But the truth is more complex than that: Smoje is, first and foremost, a non-believer. It is not merely that he does not believe in gods or political ideas: he deeply believes that no one else does, either. For him, all beliefs are travesty, and ideologies, and politics are well-staged plays in which everyone has an assigned role, and any trace of true dedication pales in comparison with the allure of codfish stew, a fine roast turkey or a game of balote (boccie, petanque).

Olja Savičević Ivančević’s *Farewell, Cowboy* is a book about the European Mediterranean in the 21st century. When I say that, I mean that it isn’t a book about the European Mediterranean usually sold by Mediterranean tourist boards to northern tourists. It isn’t a book about wine and summer nights, hedonistic southern ways and wise fishermen who quote the Greek classics while frying fish. This is a book about real Mediterranean society – meaning society between pre-modern and post-modern, society after the collapse of industry, the collapse of ideologies and the collapse of modernization. Savičević’s book preserves the flavour of small-town southern neighborhoods, meals, procession and feasts. But here, this “standard model” Mediterranean falls under the heavy shadow of another one: intolerant, violent, homophobic, indebted, unemployed, gossipy, devoured by trashy culture and conservative stubbornness. Her novel is – besides all of that – extremely funny. It is really and truly a western, in the best possible sense, a sense that Eastern Europe desperately needs. It is a western in a way that is crucial to all of the most important westerns, in which characters are transformed from thugs to citizens, with this personal change transforming wilderness into society. This is what *Farewell, Cowboy* accomplishes: through its poetic, magical realist style, it reminds us to become citizens.

During the 1990s and 2000s, many Croatian writers were dazzled by the sharp, laconic simplicity of Raymond Carver’s stories, and American minimalistic short stories in general. I loved this trend, which brought real life back into Croatian fiction, opened our eyes to reality, and wiped away an already mummified and overly academic postmodernist fiction, which dominated until the mid-
The 15 stories collected in Tanja Mravak’s book were written during this period. Her minimalist, hard-boiled stories open the kitchen doors of the Mediterranean, revealing half-modernized but still-patriarchal families. They focus on everyday situations of well-meaning people trapped in failed relationships, multi-generational households, kitchen-sink jealousies, longing and despair. The context of these families is the context of Mediterranean families today, already modernized, but reluctant when it comes to their own emancipation. Chekhov and the Mediterranean are rarely used together in the same sentence. In Mravak’s case, they go hand in hand.

Ece Temelkuran
Although Şule Gürbüz has written four books and has a very special devoted audience, she is not known in other languages. Her latest work was published in January 2017 and is entitled Is That So? She writes mostly poetic prose, with a special voice combining mysticism and politics, which transcends the Turkish language. She earns her living repairing watches. In a world of “showing off”, she keeps herself humbly hidden.

Nahid Sırrı Örik was born under the Ottoman Empire and died in modern Turkey, in 1960. A distinguished writer with a limited but still persistent audience, he published several books, but this little-known title of his recounting a cabaret singer’s rise and fall has always been dear to my heart. He was always looked down upon within the young Republic’s intellectual circles, for his homosexuality as well as his persistence in telling about the Ottoman era during the heyday of the Turkish Republic.

Gülten Akın is a prominent poet in the Turkish language. She has never been in the spotlight. Her work is rarely translated, but her poetry reflects the emotional and social turning points in Turkey and in the Turkish language. Her book, Then I Aged, would be my choice from her.

To read all texts at full length, please visit our website www.seua.org.
A few months ago, a German newspaper ran a headline story stating that the most dangerous area of the Mediterranean these days consists in the very waters that form it, accompanied by a photo of the choppy blue-gray sea, under the lost gaze of an officer with Operation Mare Nostrum, in charge of monitoring the European coast. The extent to which the images that we had of this sea – our own sea, whatever we may call it – have changed over time, could not be better expressed.

Not so long ago and even today, this was still a sea of tanned bodies and beach discos, fine sands and small coves, luxury cruises and marine monsters that sometimes run aground while approaching the shore under the distracted watch of an irresponsible captain. It had seen a parade of starlets in Cannes and Alexandria, the wild nights of Tangier, Capri and Beirut. Before, during World War II, it was crisscrossed by enemy marines, surveyed by pirates of all sorts, marked by the tragedy of the Exodus and its refugees fleeing persecution, turned away at the threshold of the “promised land”, as so many others elsewhere have been, at the thresholds of other promised lands. The elation of the 1950s and 60s seemed an attempt to obliterate this past suffering. But even before the terrible war in Syria, before those in Yemen, Eritrea and Libya, in Sudan, Zaire and Rwanda, in Nigeria and Ethiopia, and throughout all of these, the Mediterranean saw so many hopes for better worlds dashed – so many earthly promises, so many beliefs in a shared humanity.

It could seem that making a “Mediterranean” Finnegan’s List is a form of repetition, or a risk-free tribute. The Mediterranean holds the key, has long played host to translation, crossings and go-betweens. It is go-between, fusion, marriage of opposites and crossings. After all,
what would our “sacrosanct European civilization” be if translations of Aristotle hadn’t crossed the Strait of Gibraltar – which owes its name, let us recall, to the mountain of Tariq (Jabal Tariq) ibn Ziyad, the 8th century Muslim conqueror of Andalusia – in the books of Arab scholars? What would European literature be without the Quixote that Cervantes claimed to have copied from an Arab storyteller? And in return, how to conceive of the rise of a modern Arabic-language literature in the absence of dialogue with translated European works? How to hear the Maltese language without Italian or Arabic, the Sicilian and Corsican dialects, these hybrids that lie at the heart of the Mediterranean?

But creating a Mediterranean Finnegan’s List in 2017 is different; it springs from a place in the world, a part of Europe that has become so dangerous, so unspeakably deadly, that poetry and literature alone, alongside the patient accounts of scholars, can allow us to keep – quite literally – our head above water. This list is thus a proposal, extended in Europe and with the Mediterranean in mind, for a non-fascist existence – an existence that rekindles with a humanism that owes a great deal to Mediterranean crossings. Recalling this today, deepening the channel of knowledge of what is thought, spoken, and written in the Mediterranean, means metaphorically building bridges, passing on, letting pass, and opening the doors of Europe, even though we know that every day they shut a bit more, leaving women, men and children to die at our feet, alongside a thousand promises of better worlds.

Leyla Dakhli for the Finnegan’s List
The European Society of Authors would like to thank all former Finnegan’s List committee members, whose proposals we continue to put forth. We would like to remind readers of the authors proposed by the past five Finnegan’s List committees.

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