

AMIN MAALOUF

(1978- )



Jean-François Dauven is a Belgian francophone writer from Brussels, of the new generation of fictionists that feels little to no link to *Belgitude*, the Belgian movement of identitarian claims in the 1970's. Graduated in philosophy, Dauven was a high school colleague of another Belgian francophone contemporary fictionist, Grégoire Polet, at the Martin V high school in New Leuven (Walloon). Dauven got to work as a plumber and currently works as an editor in Paris, where he

lives

Actually, the narrative fiction of both writers points to generic stylistic and thematic resemblances. In fact, like Polet's fiction, the three novels so far published by Dauven are characterised by the "coral novel", a narrative structure in which, a set of voices mixes, integrates, hides, or overlaps in a complex articulation of complementary characters.

It is precisely the case of *Madrid ne dort pas* (2005) [Madrid Does Not Sleep] by Grégoire Polet and of *Ceux qui marchent dans les villes* (2009) [Those Who March in the Cities] by Jean-François Dauven, novels in which the generalised resort to the present and the profusion of countless recurrent characters prevail. The predominantly urban and "trans-European" scenario of the diegesis is also emphasised, which allows for a geo-critical reading of the dauvenian fiction.

It is to be noted that *Ceux qui marchent dans les villes*, as a subtle fictionalisation of Europe, was officially selected in 2009 for the European Book Prize, a literary award instituted in 2007 by the association *Esprit d'Europe* to reward, yearly a novel or an essay that expresses a positive vision of Europe and to promote the common European values to the citizens of the European Union.

It should also be noted that Jean-François Dauven was chosen to represent Belgium in the collective work published under the aegis of the European Union, titled *O diálogo intercultural*

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*e o papel dos escritores na promoção da diversidade* [The Intercultural Dialogue and the Writers' Role in Promoting Diversity] (Portuguese representation under the responsibility of Rui Cardoso Martins, titled "J'écris depuis la frontière") [I Write From the Border].

Moreover, *Ceux qui marchent dans les villes* sets on stage several simultaneous destinations that articulate themselves from multiple urban focal points in Europe the author visited and describes with minutiae, so much so that this novel can be read as a hymn to a concurrently unique and plural Europe fictionalised through the evocation of ten European cities, among which there is a fictitious one, Portosera, with Mediterranean characteristics; the author attributes epithets full of authenticity and personal experience. Lisbon is described as "unforgettable", Brussels as "unknown", Prague as "enigmatic", Seville as "obfuscating", Paris as "unspeakable", London as "inexhaustible", Marseilles as "exuberant", Oviedo as "unexpected", whereas Portosera is forcefully described as the "favourite".

Furthermore, other walkways make the reader wander in a Europe diverse but intimate and united by destiny. One should highlight the thematic recurrence of an industrial *coffee machine*, whose trading makes several choral characters circulate and interact between different European cities. Another reference is the almost obsessive insistence in a torrid and scorching Summer sweeping all across Europe, giving rise to the irrepressible desire to lounge through the city streets, which justifies the novel's title: "C'est l'été aujourd'hui et la radio annonce une vague de chaleur sur toute l'Europe" [It is Summer Today and the Radio Announces a Heat Wave Across Europe].

Throughout these cities is, in fact, all of the old Continent that, thus, appears extensively portrayed as a diegetic element in several interlinked chapters. Brussels appears cosmopolitan and eurocrat, for the action takes place in the context of the European Commission, while in the Czech capital, Myriam "[...] loves the rain, like one can love Europe [...]" and in London, Georges evokes some European stereotypes, since this character "[...] does not feel as a foreigner in the city. Quite the opposite. It is people like him that make London what it is. In Brussels, the Europeans chat. In Rome, the tourists contemplate. In

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Paris, people chat and contemplate. In London, one decides”. Meanwhile, in Oviedo, maestro Samuel aspires to a European federation through music: “His head is full of Vivaldi. He waits for the day when, in a Spanish city, it will be possible for a Viennese to play Italian music instead of being confined to an Austrian repertoire. He waits for Europe”, but a Europe that registers and respects the cultural diversity: “For Samuel, Europe is divided into two parts: that, where one drinks sitting and that, where one drinks standing”. Actually, the European multilingualism is doubly emphasised in Seville through the title of the doctoral thesis that Virgílio is about to submit, since it deals with *“The influence of multilingualism over the French grammar structure in the early novels of d’Arthur-Stanislas Jjèce”* European writer of “Portoseranese” origin.

## **Brief Anthology**

Um relâmpago ilumina o horizonte, mudo no estrondo da cidade. Instintivamente Myriam para, escuta o trovão soar alguns segundos mais tarde. “Não está longe”. As primeiras gotas começam a cair quando ela chega à outra margem, enormes, estivais, constelando o passeio com estrelas enormes de raios curtos. Myriam abranda. Ela gosta da chuva, como só na Europa se pode gostar dela, sem a alegria que gera a ideia dos seus benefícios, mas com a comprazimento triste que faz toda a sua sensibilidade artística. Outro relâmpago reflete-se no Moldau, seguido de um estrondo bem próximo. Myriam está encharcada.

O apartamento é bastante espacioso, bem dividido e funcional. Talvez date do comunismo. Certo é que não tem qualquer charme (157).

Afinal, Georges gosta de caminhar, de noite como de dia, na cidade tentacular. Shirley nada disse em relação à ganga. Será bom sinal? Talvez o visual perfeito não se destine a suscitar comentários, só por ser perfeito. Ele atravessa Brompton, Belgravia, chega a Victoria Street, perto de casa. Não se sente estranho na cidade. Bem pelo contrário. São pessoas como ele que fazem de Londres o que é. Em Bruxelas, os eurocratas tagarelam. Em Roma, os turistas

contemplam. Em Paris tagarela-se e contempla-se. Em Londres decide-se (192).

O apartamento é gigantesco. Na sala de estar já estão instalados quatro convivas: o responsável pelo pelouro da cultura, o homólogo para a região das Astúrias, de que Oviedo é a gloriosa capital, e as respetivas esposas. Todos têm pelo maestro vindo de Viena um respeito admirativo. Exceto Alfonso, que nunca imaginou que se pudesse admirar quem quer que fosse. Samuel não dá por nada. Está feliz sem querer saber porquê. Ele ama esta cidade, está contente por descobrir um desses apartamentos espaçosos que sempre o deixam a sonhar quando passeia à noite e contempla as janelas iluminadas. Em contrapartida, detesta Mahler, mas esta noite já nem pensa nisso. Tem a cabeça cheia de Vivaldi. Ele aguarda o dia em que, numa cidade de Espanha, se admitir que um vienense toque música italiana, em vez de o confinar por princípio ao repertório austríaco. Ele aguarda a Europa (214).

### **Selected active bibliography**

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