



Jean Leon Gerome Ferris  
*The First Thanksgiving 1621.*

# Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

## Word of the Month

DAKOTA BLACKMAN

### Indigenous

adjective | in-dig-e-nous | \ in- di-jə-nəs \  
Produced, growing, living, or occurring naturally in a particular region or environment.

According to Merriam-Webster, the first known use of the word indigenous was in 1646, nearly 150 years after a year embedded in the brains of most schoolchildren in the United States: 1492, a year that my peers and I in our New York City public elementary school learned was famed for being when Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue in search for India, but instead made the great discovery of America, the New World. We were told how crucial it was to remember the most minute details. In elementary school, it was Columbus's country of origin (Italy, though his famed voyages were from Spain) and the names of his ships (the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria). In middle and high school, we learned about the contribution of the

spice trade to Columbus's incentive to set sail and about its importance in the formation of a global economy. Though different layers of complexity were added as we got older, the two-fold takeaway was meant to be clear. First, Columbus discovered America. Second, Columbus discovered its native population. We were taught that Columbus thought himself to be in India when he landed, so I first learned to call the indigenous population Indians—by the time I reached high school, we were told to credit Columbus with the discovery of America and of Native Americans.

It was always around this time, at least in elementary school, where we would begin to jump forward a couple hundred years in our studies and learn about the Puritans in England. Again, we were given a simplified version of the story in which the Puritans were being persecuted for their religious beliefs, so they set sail and took up residence on the land Columbus had discovered. There, they were greeted with a slew of difficulties, the biggest of which was their inability to grow food on their new, inhospitable land. Of course, we were then taught about the kind Native Americans who taught the Puritans about

hunting and gathering food, ensuring their survival and helping prepare a feast for the fall harvest. The first Thanksgiving, we were taught, was a celebration of harmony between the Native and Puritan populations.

The reality, I later learned, was very different. The ramifications of colonialism—both Columbus's and the Puritan's—were grave and far-reaching. Columbus didn't discover mainland America, as we were taught, but instead landed on Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic). The Taino people were indigenous to the land, but their exploitation for slave labor, and the exploitation of their land for a trade route, ultimately led to their complete [obliteration by 1535](#). The trade route that connected this land to mainland United States also brought with it diseases to which indigenous populations were not immune including, but not limited to, measles, mumps, chicken pox, smallpox, influenza, and pneumonia. European settlers did not offer indigenous people protection against these diseases. On the contrary, in 1763, to combat the Native

CONTINUED TO P.2 \*



Statue of Christopher Columbus at Columbus Circle in New York

**\* CONTINUED FROM P. 1**

Americans' efforts to unify, British forces [distributed blankets infected with small-pox](#) to produce an epidemic.

A systematic effort to reduce native populations' rights and power has consequences that extend to the present day. The American Indian Youth Organization reports [statistics](#) on poverty, unemployment, and lack of resources in education and infrastructure in Native American communities and reservations. Native American land today—much of which is sectioned off on governmentally-determined reservations—is being disrespected by the United States government. A prime example is that of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), an oil pipeline that the United States government intends to build through the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota. It amassed news coverage this past year as protestors, many from the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, were met with [rampant police brutality](#), simply for fighting for their right to clean water. Despite the health and environmental risks, which will affect the Sioux tribe in particular, the pipeline will

continue to remain operational.

In 1870, Thanksgiving became a federal holiday. In 1937, Columbus Day followed suit. As of October 9, 2017, there are [a number of states, cities, and universities in the United States](#) that now celebrate Indigenous People's Day in lieu of Columbus Day. There have been recent protests throughout the country to remove statues of confederate generals—so too have people protested [removing statues of Columbus](#). The United States has a long and shameful history of crimes against indigenous people, and many activists believe that to celebrate Columbus Day is to celebrate these crimes.

Both Columbus Day and Indigenous People's day have passed, but Thanksgiving is approaching—it is perceived as a positive holiday where we have the opportunity spend time with people we love, and to reflect on what we are thankful for. Given the recent eruption of the conversation regarding indigenous people, it may also be wise to reflect on our history, and on why Indigenous People's day is being met with such [skepticism](#); perhaps we can look to

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the language to tell us why. According to the definition above, indigenous refers to anything naturally-occurring in a place. When we apply such terminology to Native Americans in this country and call them indigenous people, there is a clearly implied juxtaposition: European colonialists were not natural, and therefore the presence of their descendants (many proud Americans) isn't either. Though true, this fact is at odds with the inherent right that so many Americans feel they have to their land—a feeling that likely stems, at least in part, from the cultural erasure of a very real, albeit very difficult, part of United States history. The fact is that we have this land because we took it, and to keep this from children growing up in the United States (to teach them that Puritans and Native Americans were friends) does a disservice to all parties. Our cultural history must be a reflection of the full story.

# The Eleventh Hour

AILEEN MARSHALL

There is a federal holiday coming up that you may not be familiar with and probably have only heard about through advertisements. November 11 is Veterans Day, and it is almost 100 years old. The holiday is meant to honor all those who have served in any branch of the armed forces in this country. It is sometimes confused with Memorial Day, which is meant to specifically honor those who have died while serving. Many towns have a parade for the holiday. Federal employees have the day off, so there is no mail delivered and public schools are closed.

Veterans Day was first known as Armistice Day. It marked the ending of WWI, “the war to end all wars,” according to H. G. Wells. The armistice, or temporary hold on battles, went into effect on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918, although some very minor skirmishes did continue after that time. The official peace treaty to end WWI was signed in Versailles, France on June 28 of the following year. Then, in November of 1919, President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation declaring November 11 as Armistice Day, officially marking the end of WWI. In this document he noted, “We were able to bring the vast resources, material and moral, of a great and free people to the assistance of our associates in Europe who had suffered and sacrificed without limit in the cause for which we fought. Out of this victory there arose new possibilities of political freedom and economic concert. The war showed us the strength of great nations acting together for high purposes, and the victory of arms foretells the enduring conquests which can be made in peace when nations act justly and in furtherance of the common interests of men.”

It wasn't until June 4, 1926 that the United States Congress officially recognized the end of WWI, through a resolution that called for celebrating the day through... “exercises designed to perpetuate peace through goodwill and mutual understanding between nations.” A congressional Act to make Armistice Day an annual legal federal holiday... “dedicated to the cause of world peace,” was passed in May of 1938. Then in 1945, WWII veteran started a campaign to expand the holiday to honor veterans of all American



AILEEN MARSHALL | NATURAL SELECTIONS

wars. The veteran, Raymond Weeks of Birmingham, Alabama, led a delegation to General Dwight Eisenhower. Over the next eight years, various veterans' service organizations took up the cause. In 1954, President Eisenhower signed a bill changing the name to Veterans Day and designating it a day to honor all veterans.

Congress then passed the Uniform Holidays Bill in June of 1968. This Act rescheduled a number of federal holidays to a nearby Monday, so that workers would have three-day weekends to encourage citizens to celebrate them. Veterans Day was first recognized under this act on October 25, 1971. However, this caused a lot of confusion among people who remember the “eleventh day of the eleventh month” from their school days. In fact, some states still celebrated it on November 11. Starting in 1978, President Gerald Ford changed Veterans Day back to November 11, and it has been celebrated on that date ever since.

Other countries have holidays similar to Veterans Day. In the United Kingdom, they celebrate the second Sunday of November as Remembrance Sunday. In Canada, and other Commonwealth countries, the holiday is also called Remembrance Day, where it is common to observe a moment of silence at 11 a.m. on November 11. France and other allied nations celebrate Armistice Day by honor-

ing their veterans with a national holiday that coincides with Remembrance Day and Veterans Day.

It has become traditional to have a ceremony at 11 a.m. that day to honor unknown soldiers who were killed in battle. For instance, there is the annual laying of the wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington D.C. Here in New York, a wreath is laid at the Eternal Light Monument in Madison Square Park at 11 a.m. before the parade.

The parade in New York City is the largest in the country. This year's parade, on Saturday, November 11, will have over 300 contingents, including veterans from several wars, school and community groups, military units, marching bands, Medal of Honor recipients, and antique vehicles. This year's Grand Marshal will be Buzz Aldrin, astronaut and Air Force veteran. The parade runs along 5th Avenue, from 26th Street to 52nd Street, starting at 11:15 a.m. There is some limited bleacher seating near the reviewing stand at 41st Street, by the New York Public Library.

Sailors assigned to the amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima march in the 2016 Veterans Day parade in New York City. The ship had recently returned from a humanitarian assistance mission to Haiti in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew.

JIM KELLER

With the summer film festivals, namely Venice (August 30 – September 9), Telluride (September 1-4), and Toronto (September 7-17) behind us, it's time for the second of a three-part series, which examines the roles that are likely to feature in the Best Actor race. In recent years, the eventual Best Picture winner has premiered at Telluride, and so begins the Oscar race. By this time last year, Venice had given us the performances of Ryan Gosling (*La La Land*) and Andrew Garfield (*Hacksaw Ridge*), and those of Casey Affleck (*Manchester by the Sea*) and Viggo Mortensen (*Captain Fantastic*) had hailed from the Sundance Film Festival. The only performance from an eventual nominee that we hadn't seen was that of Denzel Washington (*Fences*).

Similar to last year, we have little to go on because most of the films that have been screened so far have centered on a female, not a male, lead. The last time the Academy awarded Best Picture to a film with a female lead was *Million Dollar Baby* back in 2006—not the greatest stat for *Battle of the Sexes* and *Lady Bird* to be up against following their praiseworthy Telluride premieres, but I digress. Unlike 2016, this year appears to already have a frontrunner who may prove unstoppable.

Before we delve into this year, let's put a cap on the last one. Of the seven roles that were discussed here, two went on to secure Best Actor nominations: Washington and Affleck, and the race came down to those two men. We had Washington—a veteran looking for his third win, and Affleck—the scrappy guy from Boston hoping to net his first. Even though Washington delivered hands down the best performance of the year, Affleck was able to outrun his past (more on this shortly) to take the prize.

Nate Parker (*The Birth of a Nation*) topped the snub list, which included Joel Edgerton (*Loving*), when his issues with the law were exhumed as I described last year. At that time, I portended that if he didn't get nominated, racism was to blame. It would appear that I was right because later on in the Oscar season it was revealed that Affleck too had some "past indiscretions," to put lightly. However, Affleck was legally barred from speaking about his alleged reprehensible behavior and so, walked away from the ordeal squeaky clean, and likely as dirty as sin on the inside.



Gary Oldman as Winston Churchill in *Darkest Hour*.

FOCUS FEATURES

As for the others discussed here, Ang Lee's big gamble, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, which was shot at 120 frames per second, flopped, leaving the film's star Joe Alwyn out in the cold. Dev Patel (*Lion*) was recognized in the Best Supporting Actor category, and Hugh Grant (*Florence Foster Jenkins*) was campaigned in supporting, but failed to land a nomination.

THE PEACEMAKER: Gary Oldman – *Darkest Hour* (director: Joe Wright)

FYC: This British war drama follows new Prime Minister Winston Churchill (Oldman) during the early days of WWII when Hitler closed in on Britain, forcing Churchill to decide whether to negotiate or fight back. The film bowed at Telluride, earning rapturous reviews. Oldman was nominated for Best Actor in 2012 for *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. His performance here has earned him frontrunner status, and given that it comes from a film that is in pole position for Best Picture, with director and actor accolades, he may be unstoppable.

THE DESIGNER: Daniel Day-Lewis – (Untitled) (director: Paul Thomas Anderson):

FYC: Not much is known about this American drama set in the fashion world of 1950s London, where a dressmaker (Day-Lewis) is commissioned to design for members of high society and the royal family. But what is known is that the dressmaker is Charles James, and the film is reportedly the last of Day-Lewis who will retire following a

career that has spanned four decades. Day-Lewis won three Best Actor Oscars beginning with *My Left Foot* in 1990, followed by *There Will Be Blood* in 2008, and most recently *Lincoln* in 2012. He is widely considered one of the best actors of our time, and all eyes will be on Day-Lewis to see if he can snatch the Oscar away from Oldman.

THE FIGHTER: Jake Gyllenhaal – *Stronger* (director: David Gordon Green):

FYC: This biographical drama, based on the memoir of the same name by Jeff Bauman and Bret Witter, depicts the inspiring true story of Bauman who lost his legs in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. The film, currently in theatres, screened at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) where it won over critics who praised Gyllenhaal's performance. The actor has one Best Supporting Actor nomination under his belt for *Brokeback Mountain* in 2006. But now that Leonardo DiCaprio has finally been awarded his first Best Actor Oscar, it seems that Gyllenhaal has taken up the mantle of the younger heartthrob destined to be overlooked for several years by the Academy. Recently, he delivered consistent performances that have earned him some awards heat such as last year's *Nocturnal Animals*, and 2014's *Nightcrawler*, but how many more of these will he have to deliver of equal caliber before the Academy rewards him?

THE RECORD HOLDER: Denzel

CONTINUED TO P.5 \*

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Washington – *Roman Israel, Esq.* (director: Dan Gilroy):

FYC: In this legal drama, Washington stars as the titular character: a driven, idealistic, liberal defense attorney who discovers some unsettling things about his law firm and ends up in a crisis that leads to an extreme action. Because I discussed the actor's history with the Academy in last year's column, I will refrain from expanding on it here, except to say that last year Washington, the record holder for the most nominations for an African-American actor, should've won his third Best Actor trophy. Buzz on the film following its premiere at TIFF is lukewarm, if warm at all, but Washington could get in through an I.O.U. from the Academy.

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC: Christian Bale – *Hostiles* (director: Scott Cooper):

FYC: This period war drama, based on an original story by Donald E. Stewart, follows an English army captain who escorts a dying Cheyenne war chief and his family back to his tribal lands in 1892. The film earned rave reviews at TIFF and was subsequently scooped up for distribution this year. Somehow, I have yet to discuss Bale's award history in this column, though he has been mentioned regularly. Unlike most actors, Bale won the first time he was nominated for his supporting role in *The Fighter* in 2011. He has since been nominated for Best Actor in 2014 for *American Hustle* and Best Supporting Actor last year for *The Big Short*. Because much of the acclaim of *Hostiles* pinpoints Bale's performance, he stands a good chance of being nominated.

THE PERFORMER: Hugh Jackman – *The Greatest Showman* (director: Michael Gracey):

FYC: In this biographical musical drama Jackman portrays P.T. Barnum, a man who rose from nothing and started the spectacle that became the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Jackman was nominated for Best Actor in 2013 for *Les Misérables*, but hasn't been featured in an Oscar-baity film since. Musicals can be a hard sell, but if anyone can do it, it's Jackman who won a Tony award for his performance in *The Boy from Oz* in 2004.

THE ADOLESCENT: Timothée Chalamet – *Call Me by Your Name* (director: Luca Guadagnino):

FYC: This coming-of-age drama, based on the novel of the same name by André Ac-



Hugh Jackman as P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman*.



Timothée Chalamet (right) as Elio in *Call Me by Your Name*.

man and written by James Ivory (more on this below), depicts the passionate relationship that develops between a young man named Elio and an academic (Armie Hammer) who has come to stay at his parents' Italian villa in the 1980s. Through one unforgettable summer the two bond over their sexuality, their Jewish heritage, and love for life and all it has to offer. The film premiered at Sundance where it received universal acclaim, particularly for Chalamet, Hammer, and Michael Stuhlbarg (who plays Elio's father), as well as for direction and writing. It is important to note that Ivory directed and was nominated for *A Room with a View*, *Howards End* and *The Remains of the Day*. Furthermore, each of those films earned a minimum of eight Oscar nominations, including Best Picture. For these reasons it is a formidable candidate for a Best Picture nomination and therefore should have a strong presence in the Oscar race. However, a nomination for

the 21-year-old newcomer Chalamet, perhaps best known for his eight-episode stint on TV's *Homeland* is not yet a slam-dunk (though, having seen the film, he should be)—the last time an actor was nominated for Best Actor while in their early twenties was in the 1920s.

There are several other actors with the pedigree to earn a nomination this year. We don't know if Tom Hanks' role in Steven Spielberg's greatly anticipated *The Papers* will be a supporting or a leading role, or if the Academy will decide to bestow a heap of good will onto Andrew Garfield who stars in *Breathe*. Other performances from leading men this year that could ignite include Chadwick Boseman for *Marshall*, Bryan Cranston for *Last Flag Flying*, and James Franco for *The Disaster Artist*. What we do know is that the critic groups will weigh in, and then it's all over but the shouting. Until soon, Oscar watchers!

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

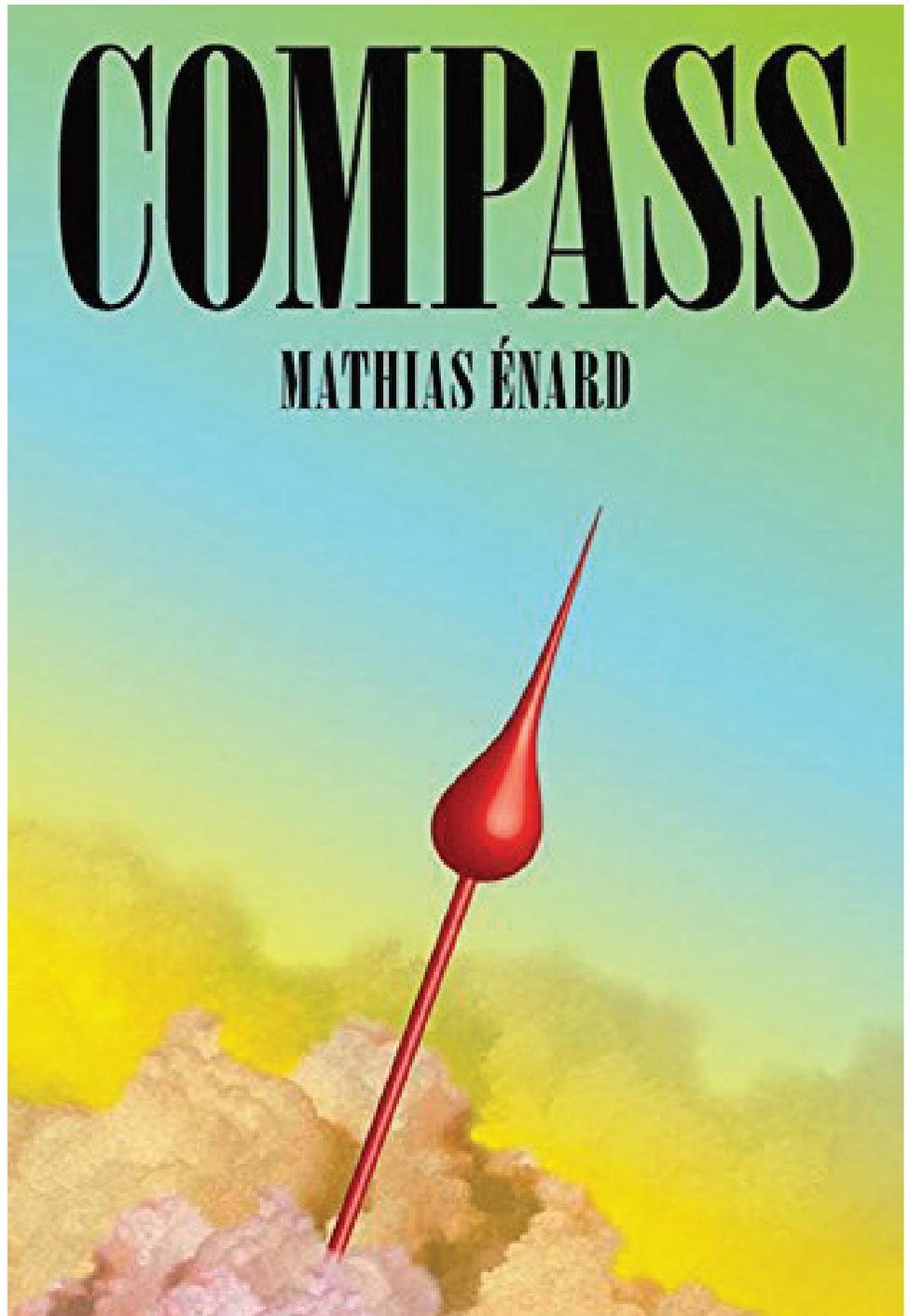
SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

BERNIE LANGS

There are novels that are categorized as literature and not merely as fiction, and then there are the geniuses of literature and the masterworks of the genre. Reading these masterpieces of literary creation, we enter a process of joyful sublimation to the voices and experiences of unique characters, and we become witnesses to the colorful imaginations of the authors. One surrenders to the writers' individualized and distinctive tones of language and states of mind as they conjure up realities that arise from a void as an expression of the acrobatic mental instincts which the best authors can relay through the art of written prose. A master of literature can construct a great sentence, a stunning paragraph, an unforeseen set of plot circumstances, and create an entire sublime world for their tales and stories.

I have recently read an amazing book, a true masterpiece, by the French author, Mathias Énard (b. 1972). *Compass* was published in 2015 and translated into English this year. It is simply the most wonderfully powerful work of fiction I've read in recent memory. It was a winner of the 2015 *Prix Goncourt* (a highly regarded prize in French literature). *Compass* clocks in at a lengthy 443 pages and is a difficult read. It is dense with nonstop ideas and an incredible number of facts on many topics, none of which are dropped easily into the text by the author. Énard's book reflects his voluminous, deep knowledge of the many subjects he addresses, often expressed as anecdotes from the arts, literature, nonfiction tomes on many subjects, from obscure moments in history and most importantly, from the flavors and ideas of distant and mysterious lands.

The story in *Compass* is narrated by a brilliant musicologist who ruminates through the complexities of his lifetime that borders on, but never gives completely into, a total disaster. The protagonist, Franz Ritter, is in the throes of horrific insomnia at home in an apartment in Vienna as he delves deep into the memories of his travels through the Middle East and his scholarly pursuit to expose and relate the interconnections throughout history between Eastern and Western (mostly) classical music. One might think this a dry subject, but the emotional passion of Franz and those who shared his quest of



making the twain of East and West meet makes for a gripping story. Franz's baseline tale always returns to his love over decades of the brilliant French academic, Sarah. The reader comes to realize that Franz is now most likely deathly ill, and as we hear the sad details of his strange, mostly unrequited love for her, Énard immerses us in Franz's consuming melancholy, all the while understanding his odd, unexpected strength. Through thick and thin, he is able to remain above water and

not drown in a flood of bitter regret.

Franz is as complete a character as one could ever meet in fiction; always consistent, always real in so many detailed ways in his actions, words and thinking. His many admitted shortcomings still never lead the reader to dislike him. In the stories of the scholars and adventurers that he has met in his life while visiting places such as Istanbul, Tehran, Damas-

CONTINUED TO P.7 \*

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cus, and Aleppo, there are numerous acts of duplicity and cruelty, and in Franz's own case, pettiness. And it is the same with the tales he tells at length about the actions of the eccentrics of the past. Yet within this odd brew, there are grand redeeming moments of love and heroism, from both Franz's lifetime and from the examples of men and women unearthed from the historical records, those from the desert sands of time.

Sarah rises above these flaws of personality, suffering only from the more intellectual quirk of the occasional fascination with the macabre. As Franz describes his own research of the history of music and delves into Sarah's complex studies, the reader learns details of their work, with dozens of references to Middle Eastern composers and writers, as well as histories of individuals from the past with like-minded obsessiveness. They were Westerners who went against the grain and saw the allure of these mysterious, disconnected lands.

Here is one random, wonderful passage: "The human heart is indeed a strange thing. Franz Liszt's artichoke heart didn't stop falling in love, even with God—in these reminiscences of opium, as I hear the virtuosities of Liszt that occupied me in Constantinople rumbling like death march drums, a *singular girl* also appears to me, over there in Sarawak, even if Sarah has nothing in common with la

Duplessis or with Harriet Smithson ("Do you see that fat Englishwoman sitting in the proscenium," Heinrich Heine has Berlioz saying in his account), the actress who inspired the *Symphonie Fantastique*. Poor Berlioz, lost in his passion for the interpreter of "poor Ophelia": "Poor great geniuses, grappling with three-quarters of the impossible!" as Liszt writes in one of his letters. You'd need a Sarah to be interested in all of these tragic fates of forgotten women..."

Although he is brilliant, Franz is fully aware and accepting of his scholarly limitations, and, wandering his apartment in sleeplessness, he admits he never reached the top as an academic. Both Franz and Sarah are studies in complete devotion to the work itself and to the process of slow and steady, exciting, absorbing discovery. *Compass* is a brilliant tale of intellectual pursuit that is always in tandem with the underpinning emotion of love as a concurrent force. It is a love which goes naturally with a researcher's ideas, and as a given that is always present during the events of their lives and in history itself.

The other melancholy, terrible theme of the book is how Franz sees his beloved Middle East devolve to its current situation of war, fundamentalist religion, and miserable violence. We read the awful tales of friends caught in Iran during the Revolution and the destruction of the people and places he's long loved, and been in awe of, by the barbaric, ruthless

armies of ISIS or as victims of Assad in the Syrian civil war. It's a heartbreaking story of what has been lost, tinged with the sadness of what could have been.

Franz is not a showy intellectual. He never brags about his incredible knowledge and though his studies take him to the heart of the Middle East, to the dangerous cities and outskirts of Iran, Turkey, and Syria where he is clearly a Western outsider, his tunnel vision of discovering artistic and scholarly connections between East and West exposes his disconnect, which leads to a defeat. This all collapses into the mire of today's horrific problems. Franz and his colleagues didn't blind themselves to the coming storm by studying in America or Europe encased in an Ivory Tower at a university, mulling over *The Arabian Nights*, simply reading, lecturing, and attending conferences. But while they put their boots on the ground and ventured abroad, they roamed within the intellectual, fortified towers of their minds and did not stop to consider that there might be something possibly irreversibly horrific being conjured up before their very eyes, even though the region's history gives them all the glaring warning signs.

As I read *Compass*, I was completely captivated by the intense musings of the inner states of Franz Ritter's unique and fascinating mind. Mathias Énard writes beautifully, like a once in a decade master of literature, and I look forward to more novels by this brilliant man.



## Quotable Quote

"It is not only by the questions we have answered that progress may be measured, but also by those we are still asking. The passionate controversies of one era are viewed as sterile preoccupations by another, for knowledge alters what we seek as well as what we find."

Freda Adler, b. 1934

## ***Life on a Roll***

### **Pretty Seasonal Colors**

ELODIE PAUWELS

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“The falling leaves drift by the window, the autumn leaves of red and gold...” Here we go again, fall has arrived, with its bright and warm colors. Who does not love walking around in this season, amazed by the beauty of the trees? Enjoy it!

