

Migration and the Quest for a Metalanguage in Hédi Bouraoui's Mediterranean Trilogy and *La Réfugiée*

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Abstract: Hédi Bouraoui, our leading poetic advocate of Transculturalism, continues his lifelong quest for the right word, the Flaubertian « *mot juste*. » Following his Mediterranean trilogy, the most moving example of Bouraoui's musings on language are found in the two protagonists of *La Réfugiée*, Lotus, a female Laotian refugee, and her new friend Jasmin, a male North African immigrant by choice. They grope their way towards a common language. Their names signify their natural common ground, the language of flowers, hers denoting the lotus, the sacred flower of Buddhism, and his the jasmine, hinting at the Jasmin Revolution of 2011 in Tunisia. A charming parable, *La Réfugiée* reproduces the language of the human heart, promoting connectedness, or what Bouraoui calls *AMIAMOUR*, in a fragmented world.

Keywords: language; migration; refugee; Laos; Paris; North Africa; metaphor; genre; Buddha; *AMIAMOUR*

Résumé : Hédi Bouraoui, défenseur de la poétique du Transculturalisme, poursuit quête perpétuelle du mot précis, de ce que Flaubert a appelé « le mot juste ». Quand cette quête ne suffit pas, Bouraoui invente ses propres « mots-concepts ». À la suite de la trilogie méditerranéenne, on trouve l'exemple le plus touchant des réflexions de Bouraoui sur la langue chez les deux protagonistes de *La Réfugiée*, Lotus, une réfugiée laotienne, et son nouvel ami Jasmin, un Nord-Africain qui a choisi librement l'immigration. Ils cherchent à tâtons une langue commune. Leurs noms signifient leur fondement mutuel : le langage des fleurs, pour elle le lotus, fleur sacrée du Bouddhisme, et pour lui le jasmin, symbole de la Révolution du Jasmin de 2011 en Tunisie. Une parabole charmante, *La Réfugiée* reproduit le langage du cœur humain, afin de promouvoir les relations humaines, ou ce que Bouraoui appelle l'AMIAMOUR dans un monde fragmenté.

Mots-clefs : langue ; migration ; réfugiée ; Laos ; Paris ; Afrique du Nord ; métaphore ; genre ; Bouddha ; AMIAMOUR

The bombastic President of the United States, elected in 2016, arrogantly proclaimed as a candidate, “I have all the best words.” (A journalist commented that it is a matter of 350 words maximum, repeated endlessly!). In contrast, Hédi Bouraoui, the leading poetic advocate of Transculturalism, trained in both linguistics and literature, more modestly continues his lifelong quest for the right word, in fact going beyond the Flaubertian « *mot juste* » to what Flaubert might have considered some « *mots injustes* » (new coinages or inventions outside the realm of the Académie française). When the quest fails to produce results, Bouraoui invents his own words, or « *mots-concepts* ». The quest for language is a key theme of all his works. In the Mediterranean trilogy¹, for example, his archetypal questor, the modern Hannibal, explores all the islands of the Mediterranean, from his native Djerba and Kerkenna (Tunisia) to Sardinia, Sicily, Corsica, Crete, Mallorca, Malta, along the way learning Italian, Corsican, Greek, Spanish, and in the very center of the Mediterranean, Maltese, where he finds analogues to his native Tunisian dialect.

Hédi Bouraoui is an enormously prolific and experimental francophone poet, novelist, short story writer, and essayist who has devoted a long career to a quest for a metalanguage, for humanistic communication that transcends the boundaries of nations, cultures, religions, races, gender and genre. The language he is seeking to create goes beyond the theme of this collection, “Language and Territory,” to language and multiple territories, in other words, the languages of migration. His terse little book, *Transpoétique : éloge du nomadisme* (2005) insists on the link between « *nomadisme*, » the passage across boundaries, and a heightened poetic language that creates dialogues, or builds bridges. The title, *Transpoétique*, is only one example of Bouraoui’s creation of words, sometimes called “neologisms,” but he prefers his own term, « *mots-concepts* ». A glance at some of his titles suggests the fertility of his linguistic imagination: *Vésuviade*, *Haïtuois*, *Échosmos*, *Nomadaïme*, *Sfaxitude*, *Livr’Errance*, *NomadiVivance*, and even his first collection, *Musocktail*.

Bouraoui seeks to create a « *poésie fonctionnelle*, » much needed in a world where « *ni le nombrilisme du romantisme, ni l’écriture automatique des dadaïstes et des surréalistes n’y suffit plus*² ». Bouraoui constantly seeks to escape what he calls « *la binarité infernale*. » To that end, his key words, « *allusion*, »

¹ Hédi Bouraoui, *Cap Nord (CN)*, Ottawa, Les Éditions du Vermillon, 2008 ; *Les Aléas d’une odysée*, Ottawa, Les Éditions du Vermillon, 2009 ; *Méditerranée à voile toute*, Ottawa, Les Éditions du Vermillon, 2010.

² Elizabeth Sabiston, « Postface », in Hédi Bouraoui, *Mutante la Poésie*, Toronto, CMC Éditions, collection « Essai mosaïques, 2015, p. 145.

« espace, » « vide, » « néant, » « silence, » recur time and again. All these lead to an « *écriture interstitielle*, » where the truth lies in the gaps, or the « *béances*. » Bouraoui has written that the poet's function is to « *créer avec la matérialité verbale une poésie qui traduirait l'inexprimable* » (*Mutante* 21). His *mots-concepts* go beyond words, for poetry is « *la quintessence de toute langue*¹ ».

It is the purpose of this paper to trace the trajectory of Bouraoui's quest, and its impact as a counterpoise to our modern world of Twitter, Instagram, bombast, and all the ways humankind has found to avoid looking in the eyes of the Other. In so doing, we discover not just "the otherness of the Other" (whether defined by culture, gender, nationality, religion), but the identity of the self. This poetic, inventive language is closely linked to « *Nomaditude* », to a world in which we are all immigrants, trying to decipher or decrypt the symbolism of a global village now at war with itself. Bouraoui's metalanguage is transformative: it deconstructs the classical French of Flaubert or Balzac, and borrows from multiple languages in order to "make it new." Mario Selvaggio refers to Bouraoui as « *Le Poète de la Résistance* » (*Transpoétique Vôte* 13-19), and sees his work as « *un texte d'engagement résistant* » (19).

Hédi Bouraoui: A Transcultural Journey

Hédi Bouraoui was born in Sfax, Tunisia, and educated in France and the United States, where he completed a Ph.D. in Romance Studies at Cornell University under the distinguished literary critic Paul de Man. He has made his professional career in Canada, at York University, Toronto, where he is currently University Professor Emeritus, Senior Scholar, and Writer in Residence, Stong College. He considers himself a writer from three continents, Africa, Europe, and North America, but he has also travelled widely all around the world. He is, in fact, the living embodiment of Édouard Glissant's term, « *littérature-monde* » only his work is more truly global than Glissant's, which grows mainly from his Caribbean roots, as contrasted to mainstream French. Bouraoui has produced twenty novels and countless books of poetry. But he is an academic critic as well as a creative writer, and insists that the two interpenetrate. His 1983 book, *The Critical Strategy*, offers a form of creative criticism, in which his own work reflects the styles of other writers, such as John Cage and William Burroughs, in place of conventional academic critique and analysis. *Struga, suivi de Margelle d'un Festival* (2003) similarly presents reflections, in their own style, on the works of poets at an International Poetry Conference in Struga, Macedonia.

¹ *Préface*, Hédi Bouraoui, *Liv'Errance*, Mareuil-s/Ourq, France, Éditions D'ici et d'Ailleurs, 2005, p. 50.

Bourauoui's "Transculturalism," not to be confused with the term primarily used by social scientists, was devised in the 1970s in response to Pierre Elliot Trudeau's policy of multiculturalism, which was designed primarily to highlight the backgrounds of the many cultural groups comprising the "Canadian Mosaic"¹. Bourauoui applauded Trudeau's efforts to create an alternative to the U.S. metaphor of the "melting pot", in which the new immigrants were all expected to assimilate, and integrate seamlessly with U.S. society. But he also recognized the problem of the different tessera of the Canadian Mosaic remaining imbedded in their own cultures, and failing to take cognizance of the other pieces, or tessera. Bourauoui adopted the term "Transculturalism" to promote dialogue, or the building of bridges between cultures. As Master of Stong College, York University, in the late '70s and '80s, he designated the academic identity of the College as "Cultural Studies in a Multicultural Context", and presided over college courses embracing this identity, as well as conferences such as "The Canadian Alternative" and "Creativity-Criticism in Francophone Literatures". Hédi Bourauoui is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and an *Officier des Palmes académiques* (France). On July 29, 2018, he was appointed Member of the Order of Canada, the highest civilian honor in the country, "for his literary contributions and theories on cultural identities as a poet, novelist and essayist."

Among his other honors is a Doctorate Honoris Causa from Laurentian University, Sudbury, for "his creative and critical work of national and international renown". He holds honorary citizenships in Acquaviva, Bari, Italy, and Orbetello, Tuscany, Italy. There have been four international

¹ Fernando Ortiz, in 1940, applied the term "transculturation" to anthropology. Maximilien Laroche has noted that, in 1970, « *Le concept de transculturation, forgé pour résoudre des problèmes de sociologie et d'anthropologie, a été déplacé vers le champ de la littérature par le sociologue et anthropologue Roger Bastide [...]* » (« La transculturalité poétique dans *Haïtuvois* », dans Elizabeth Sabiston et Suzanne Crosta (dir.), *Perspectives critiques : l'œuvre d'Hédi Bourauoui*, Sudbury, Ontario, Série monographique en sciences humaines, Université Laurentienne, 2007, p. 83). Bourauoui, however, had read neither Ortiz nor Bastide when he devised the term "transculturalism" in the late 1960s in order to add the notion of cross-cultural dialogue to Pierre Trudeau's Canadian multiculturalism. It is encouraging to note the growing interest in literary transculturalism manifested in such recent works as Arianna Dagnino's *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility* (West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue UP, 2015). While Dagnino's work reflects the contemporary focus on world literature (Édouard Glissant's « *littérature/monde* »), Bourauoui's theory of transculturalism predates that of her authors, and of his friend Glissant, but Bourauoui continues today his radical experimentation and innovation in both theory and practice. The very recent *Vingt-quatre heures en tesselles mosaïcales* (Toronto, CMC Éditions, 2017) subverts the genre of the short story, and his essays pursue the creative-critical dialectic begun in the late 1960s.

conferences specifically in his honor: « *Créativité-Critique: l'œuvre d'Hédi Bouraoui* », York University, 2005; « *Hédi Bouraoui et les valeurs humanistes* », Lectoure, France, 2013; « *Réflexions sur l'œuvre d'Hédi Bouraoui* », Tours, France, 2016; "In Honor of Hédi Bouraoui", Sfax, Tunisia, 2017. Other conferences have had sessions devoted to his work.

He has been awarded a number of book prizes: the *Prix du meilleur ouvrage d'érudition*, APFUCC, Canada, for *Transpoétique : éloge du nomadisme* (2006) ; Grand Prix du Salon du Livre de Toronto, for *Rose des sables* (1998); Prix Christine Dumitriu van Saanan du Salon du Livre, Toronto, for *Ainsi parle la Tour CN* (2000), among others; and he was also finalist for the Trillium Prize, Ontario, for *Cap Nord* (2009), among others.

A number of scholarly books have appeared on his work: Elizabeth Sabiston, *The Muse Strikes Back: Female Narratology in the Novels of Hédi Bouraoui* (2005); Abderrahman Beggar, *L'Épreuve de la béance* (2009); Abderrahman Beggar, *Éthique et rupture nouraouiennes* (2012); Abderrahman Beggar, *Histoire et mémoire bouraouiennes I* (2016); Rafik Darragi, *Hédi Bouraoui, La parole autre: l'homme et l'œuvre* (2015), in addition to a special issue of *CELAAN* (2013). Conference proceedings include : *Perspectives critiques : l'œuvre d'Hédi Bouraoui*, ed. Elizabeth Sabiston and Suzanne Crosta (2007); *Hédi Bouraoui et les Valeurs Humanistes* (2014).

Bouraoui's own background is multilingual: French, dialectal Tunisian, English, and he is fluent in Italian. This multilingual background predisposes him to the « *Rupture* » of words cited by Beggar. The acquisition of new languages does not preclude his remembrance of older tongues, which he works into his texts. In *Retour à Thyna*, for instance, the editor thought fit to attach a glossary of dialectal Tunisian words translated into French. In his *Avant-Propos to Nomadi'Vivance*, he looks back fondly on his Mediterranean roots: « [...] *la Mare-Nostrum a surgi du fin fond de mon être pour me rappeler aux bons souvenirs de mes origines africaine et méditerranéenne* » (8). He defines succinctly his attitude towards language and literature:

Comme l'ont montré Deleuze et Guattari la littérature minoritaire ne consiste pas en une minorité de langue, mais de celle qu'une minorité fait d'une langue majoritaire. Autrement dit, c'est une littérature « anticonformiste » bouleversant, pour ne pas dire, révolutionnant le corpus sociétal et littéraire dit classique ou normatif. Et son caractère intrinsèque est « affecté d'un fort coefficient de déterritorialisation ». J'adhère complètement à ce point de vue car je ne cesse de « trafiquer » les genres, les styles, les langues...

This appetite for experimentation with language and literature has been reflected in his academic career as well. He helped create the Division of Languages and Literatures at York in the late 1960s, and later introduced

courses on North African, Caribbean, and Franco-Ontarian literature in the Department of French Studies. He created the Canada-Mediterranean Centre (CMC) at York, which has a library or collection devoted to the field, and publishes an online open access journal, the *Revue CMC Review*, which is bilingual (French / English) and pluridisciplinary.

Throughout his creative work, Bouraoui resists the Tower of Babel (his metaphor) of the postmodern social media. He aims, rather, at what the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson advocated in the 19th century: “Cut these words and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive” (“Montaigne” 293). Among French writers, Bouraoui has been inspired by Baudelaire and the Symbolists, and philosophically by Sartre and existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, etc. But critics and readers often forget the equally significant influence of the American literary tradition, particularly of the poets Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson for their rejection of traditional meter and conventional subject matter. Dickinson, in particular, is known for her lack of punctuation, slant rhyme, idiosyncratic capitalization, for telling the truth “slant.” For Bouraoui, the corollary to poetic experimentation is the rejection of traditional genres in favor of forms he names the « *roman poème* », the « *narratoème* », « *prosème* », « *mémorème* », etc.

His fictional characters typically exist in a world of Francophonie, rather than classical French. His hero Hannibal in the trilogy, a Tunisian native, carries his French and Tunisian linguistic baggage with him through the islands of the Mediterranean where he finds surprising analogues to his own language. And in *La Réfugiée*, a woman from Laos and her friend from Tunisia do not speak so-called Parisian French, but find themselves in Paris, among strangers. They must find a common language not only to understand each other, but also the alien European world surrounding them.

The three novels of the trilogy (referenced above) were followed very closely by *La Réfugiée* in 2012. The trilogy is expansive, panoramic, even dynastic, following the adventures of the Tunisian Hannibal ben Omer, his Sicilian wife Laura, and finally, in the last of the trilogy, their son Télémaque, Tél for short, a product of a north and south Mediterranean union. *La Réfugiée*, on the other hand, is a « *narratoème* » – terse, poetic, allusive, concise. While both the novels and the « *narratoème* » are highly experimental, they are strikingly different in form and content. Nonetheless, there is a consistent Ariadne’s thread through the Bouraouian labyrinth: the quest for a language capable of reaching, and communicating with, the Other.

The Mediterranean Trilogy: A Postmodern Quest

The trilogy assumes the form of a quest. It is a kind of modern-day epic, in which the hero (or anti-hero) Hannibal ben Omer incorporates elements of both the fictional epic hero of the Trojan War, Ulysses, and of the real, if mythologized hero of the Punic Wars, Hannibal Barca. But Hannibal ben Omer is an average man, a common man, a hero for the modern age. He lives by his wits, as athlete, car rental agent, caretaker, olive oil entrepreneur, and « *écrivain public* ». He embarks from his native Tunisian island of Kerkenna on a quest for his father, who has followed the magnetic attraction of « *Cap Nord* », the north shore of the Mediterranean, or an Eldorado, that is, Europe. That quest also soon becomes a search for the mother, a native of the Tunisian island of Djerba, for she in turn had migrated north in her husband's errant footsteps. The quest for the parents is, in fact, a quest for origins. The theme of language resonates in the very orthography of the islands, and the father's name evokes not only Homer, but also « *ô mer* » and « *ô mère* ».

Ulysses is one role model for Hannibal, for he returned home from the Trojan Wars by way of a number of the islands of the Mediterranean, of which perhaps the most famous is the Isle of the Lotus-Eaters, when, enchanted by Circe and the drug effect of the lotus, he nearly forgot to return to his faithful wife Penelope, waiting patiently in Ithaca. The Isle of the Lotus-Eaters has been identified by some historians as the island of Djerba, Tunisia, which becomes one of Ulysses' temporary places of exile. Bouraoui makes it the spiritual home of the latter-day Ulysses, his hero Hannibal, who, like Ulysses, effects a circular journey around the Mediterranean islands, but unlike Ulysses, the "home" he returns to is not his point of origin, Tunisia, but another Mediterranean island, Sicily, home of his strongminded wife Laura.

The second role model is Hannibal Barca, the archetypal warrior who set out across the Alps to conquer Rome, and whose strategies inspired such later empire-builders as Napoleon Bonaparte.

Cap Nord: The Lure of Europe

The quest for origins takes place through both time and space, and for Hannibal the instrument is not the sword of conquest, but the Word of communication across cultures. Hannibal notes from the beginning that his French is better than his Arabic, but Classical French is losing out to English as the universal language, and Classical Arabic is controlled by Cairo or Beirut, whereas North Africans speak a local dialect, although their

official language is Classical Arabic. But his second language also confines him: « *Je suis corseté par une grammaire étrangère* » (CN 94). Hannibal's very name underlines the theme of language, for it begins with an aspirate "H" which corresponds to the breath of life (CN 18). Hannibal is an inveterate keeper of a « *journal intime* » (think Alain-Fournier, or André Gide), for he seeks to meld the oral tradition he first finds in Tunisian dialect, with a written tradition, or « *écriture*. » To that end, he is initiated by a series of female mentors, most notably his Tante Souad, who is a storyteller in the folklore tradition¹. As he describes her talent, « *Éblouissante façon de dire avec des mots simples et justes, les choses les plus profondes [...] épousant des événements jusqu'à les rendre palpables, [...] croustillants de vie* » (CN 94). From her he learns « *les mots de la tribu* » as she tells a tale known as a traditional « *hikayèt* » in Tunisia.

Hannibal is an *Autodidacte*, polyvalent. He puns frequently on "A" for « *Autodidacte*, » but also for « *Artiste* ». He sets out to master languages, as he masters sports, when he becomes a competitive weightlifter. His athleticism enables his travels, in *Cap Nord* first to Sardinia, then to Sicily. The purpose of travel, « *c'est se découvrir, et découvrir l'autre* » (108). If for Hannibal « *toute langue est étrangère* », that enigmatic quality is the source of its fascination for him. As Samira Etouil remarks, « *Pour Hannibal, [...] la maîtrise de la langue de l'Autre est nécessaire pour assimiler cet Autre et décoder son monde* » (7).

Before he embarks on his individual voyage to the Mediterranean islands, Tante Souad's husband Kamel takes him on a business trip to that north Atlantic island of Manhattan, where the two confront (or affront?) the dominant English. Uncle Kamel struggles with an English stuffed with Arabic and French – « *Une langue incompréhensible pour les Américains* » (104) – while his nephew learns more by observation on the street and on television.

When Hannibal sets out on his own, armed with skills of both body and mind – weightlifting and computer programming – he seeks to learn how to capture people « *en verbes et conjonctions, en sujets et disjonctions* » (124). His fellow competitors in Sardinia resent the fact that he, the non-European, shows a greater facility in European languages than they do. He is gifted in what Rafik Darragi calls his « *parole autre* » in his book on Hannibal's creator, Hédi Bouraoui. In Sardinia Hannibal also recognizes words that are close to his own Tunisian dialect, and it is that linguistic connectedness that is to facilitate *human* connectedness throughout his career.

¹ See Elizabeth Sabiston, *The Muse Strikes Back: Female Narratology in the Novels of Hédi Bouraoui*, for a discussion of the role of female narrators and the female point of view in Bouraoui's works (Sudbury, Ontario, Human Sciences Monograph Series 9, 2008).

Hannibal has yet to learn the reasons behind his father's death, but he is already, wittingly or unwittingly, repeating some of the same struggles. Omer ben Omer, the father, sought a clear, transparent language: « [...] j'ai agité le kaléidoscope de mots de tous les continents » (CN 215). But as his (bigamous) second wife, the Corsican Marie-Noëlle Angeli, reveals, he had to « fonctionner en étranger dans une langue et une culture acquises au second degré » (CN 58).

Les Aléas d'une odyssée :

Greece, or the East and the Mythic Past

The second novel of the trilogy, *Les Aléas d'une odyssée*, is actually a diptych, divided into two parts. In Part One, Hannibal rediscovers the lost mother in Corsica, and her story which led to her death. In Part Two, « *Le Dit de Pénélope* », Laura takes over the action, and the narration. Like Hannibal's mother, Mounira, Laura is a writer, a lyric poet, whereas Hannibal sees himself as mainly an « *Autodidacte*, » and the keeper of a notebook. Laura follows Hannibal from their home in Sicily to Crete when she is nine months pregnant. She transitions from poetry to narrative, makes a « *détour vers la fiction* » when she falls in love. Her Hannibal is "Annibale" in Italian – and Annibale he remains throughout the course of Laura's « *Dit*, » or story. If her name, Laura (*née* Principato) evokes Petrarch's Laura, or muse, she immediately rejects the role of muse for that of creator. Annibale, in turn, sees her as « *un mirage dont je me plais à décoder le langage* » (21). Both partners, moreover, participate in what has become the major narrative of the late 20th / 21st century, migration, « *l'aventure primordiale de notre temps* » (198).

In Part One, Hannibal learns that his mother discovered both a poisoned old love, and a natural new poetic love. Omer has betrayed her with the vicious Marie-Noëlle, but she finds true love with a shepherd who knows Tasso and Dante by heart. In Corsica, Hannibal discovers his *mother's* notebook, not his father's. From it he learns that Mounira had decided to "turn the page" on her old life, and choose a new one: « *Je veux vivre* » (115). His mother's notebook becomes his bedtime reading, his mother's legacy.

The very name of the island reflects the theme of language. Cor-sica is both « *cor*, » the heart, and « *sica*, » or a dagger – both love and hate. In Greek, the name is "Kallisté," the Isle of Beauty, first named by the Phoenicians. In *The Aeneid*, it appears as a stop on the road from Europe to Africa. The Corsicans are well known for their troubled relation with France, of which they are a reluctant part. Their signs are bilingual, but the French is usually

blotted out. The Corsican language, Hannibal finds, is analogous to Sardinian and Sicilian: « *corsitude* » has also been compared to « *carthagitude* » (138). Largely through language, he feels very much « *chez moi* » here, as in the entire Mediterranean basin. Angela Buono relates Bouraoui's voyage motif to the quest for a « *langage nouveau, aux formes originales, ayant la nature d'un voyage dans 'ce pays de mots en migration'* » (Hédi Bouraoui, *La Femme d'entre les lignes* 36)¹ *qu'est la patrie de tout poète, de tout écrivain, de tout lecteur* » (*Pluri-Culture* 38)². Hannibal admires that most famous of Corsicans, Napoleon Bonaparte, not for his military genius, but as an author, a man of letters.

Part Two, « *Le Dit de Pénélope*, » begins with a marriage and ends with childbirth. Hannibal and Laura have two wedding ceremonies, Catholic in Sicily, Muslim in Tunisia. Though neither is religious, Hédi Bouraoui underlines the cross-cultural nature of this Mediterranean union. And he notes that priests were the first to translate the Koran into Latin. Shortly after the wedding, Annibale departs for the eastern limit of the Mediterranean islands, Crete.

If Annibale leans towards the oral tradition of the Amazigh (Berbers), Laura's expertise is written. She is also a female detective. When she reads the elusive « *espace littéraire* » (a phrase of critic Maurice Blanchot) in Annibale's communications from Crete, she knows something is wrong, and follows him, only to learn he is in prison as the prime murder suspect in the death of the millionaire Nikos Kitsikis. Annibale learns Greek in prison, but Laura knows not a word on her arrival. She is taken in hand by Christos, who becomes her language guide, as well as a male mentor. Learning the language is compared to learning the language of flowers, at the heart of the perfumery Nikos and his ruthless wife Athéna operate. The clue to the murder of Nikos is linguistic, for his killer has left the message, « *jé tué nik* » (286), certainly not the French of the highly literate Annibale. Laura finally creates "Her/story," though she started to write "His / story": « *En l'occurrence la mienne. Femme méditative et contemplative [...]* » (353). Or, as Rafik Darragi writes of Hédi Bouraoui himself, « *Écrire [...] est un acte d'amour [...]* »³.

¹ Hédi Bouraoui, *La Femme d'entre les lignes*, Éditions du GREF, Toronto, Canada, 2002.

² Elizabeth Sabiston and Robert Drummond (eds.), *Pluri-Culture and Migrant Writings/ pluri-Culture et écrits migratoires*, Sudbury, Canada, Human Sciences Monograph Series 17/ Série monographique en sciences humaines 17, 2014.

³ Rafik Darragi, « Traversées de Hédi Bouraoui : autoportrait d'un Global immigré », Centre d'études des littératures et des arts d'Afrique du Nord (CELAAN), *Hédi Bouraoui et L'écriture Pluriculturelle*, Vol. 1 et 2, 2013, p. 86.

Méditerranée à voile toute :**Malta, Center of the Mediterranean**

The third, and last, novel of the trilogy, *Méditerranée à voile toute*, is, like its predecessor, a diptych. Only this time the two narratives belong to Hannibal and to Télémaque, his son. As Pierre Léon remarks, « *Il y a deux grands romans dans ce roman, celui d'une double quête identitaire, celle d'Hannibal et celle de Télé. En effet il pourrait y en avoir bien d'autres*¹ ». With the character of Télé, Bouraoui introduces another use of language, the virtual reality of the mass media and the social media. Bouraoui evidently has in mind Fénélon's classic novel of an education, *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699), which is one reason he uses the French spelling, rather than the Latin Telemachus, the son of Ulysses. Télé is known as Télé Mac Omer for short, and Bouraoui has reinvented Fénélon's protagonist for modern times. Télé's early education is not derived from books, but from the Internet, especially Google – hence "Télé". "Mac" references both Apple computers, and global McDonaldization. When he commences his voyage, following the footsteps of his father, his education consists of an initiation into life, reality, as opposed to the virtual reality on his computer browser. Through him, Bouraoui critiques the postmodern world with its surplus of undigested, unstructured information, and reaffirms the power of the Word, written or oral.

The first part of the novel situates Hannibal in Mallorca, the western limit of the Mediterranean islands, whereas in the previous novel the climax was located in Crete, the eastern limit of Hannibal's wanderings. It also introduces Hannibal to Spanish, the next language, in which he finds distinct traces of the Moorish hegemony, the *Alamudaina*, the Golden Age of Islam in Spain. Fatima, the receptionist at his hotel, assumes she was named for a Christian saint, but Hannibal tells her the name is of Arabic origin. Actually, both are true. In Mallorca, he witnesses a layering of cultures and religions, including « *les chuetas* », the reluctant Jewish converts to Christianity in the Middle Ages. The descendant of one of those « *chuetas* », Joan Mirò the policeman, becomes his friend and guide. There is a layering of cultures, as there is of languages. Hannibal comes to the realization that he has not yet participated significantly in his own son's education, which prepares us for the second part, Télé's story. Laura is not physically present in any great extent in this novel, but her influence remains powerful. We sense that all is not well at home in Sicily, when she rejects the role of the woman who

¹ Pierre Léon, Un romancier et son double », *L'Express*, 28 juin-4 juillet 2011.

waits patiently her warrior's return: « *Je veux vivre, et non jouer à la Pénélope !* » (49). She is not satisfied to voyage, or navigate, in books. It is evident that she has had sole charge of Télé, until his own departure in search of his father's past.

The first section of the novel is particularly literary. Hannibal echoes Abou el Kacem Echabbi, Balzac, Manzoni, Henry James, and there are substantial allusions to Ramon Tlull, a Mallorcan writer, to Robert Graves, and Albert Camus, whose mother was born in Minorca. At the same time, Hannibal asserts he is none of the above. He indulges instead in constant note-taking. He aspires to begin « *une révolution tranquille avec des mots pour seule œuvre* » (48). This is also a book about blocked communication: he cannot communicate with two Moroccan women he encounters, because they do not know classical Arabic.

Dolorès is the principal female he encounters on Mallorca, and he proceeds to give her linguistic and historical lessons about her own native island. At one point, Bouraoui flips the narration over to her female voice: « [...] *l'auteur m'a cédé la parole dans ce récit où j'arrive avec mes gros sabots* » (87). Bouraoui creates a metafiction in which his novel denounces its own fictivity. By the same token, his metalanguage denounces conventional rhetoric. One needs to go *beyond* language, or cross over languages, to reach the audience. St. Vincent Ferrier, patron saint of Valdemossa, wrote his sermons in Latin but delivered them in Limousin. Bouraoui stresses that the Romance languages, like the three religions of the Book, were born in the Mediterranean basin.

In the second part of the novel, « *Le Marcheur de Malte* », Télé takes the reins and the reader follows his quest for the father's adventures in Malta. If Crete and Mallorca form the eastern and western poles of Hannibal's journeys, Malta is the center of the Mediterranean islands. Télé is unknowingly following in the wake of his father's quest for *his* father, Télé's grandfather, Omer ben Omer. There is a similar transfer of narrative agency and focus to that from Hannibal to Laura in the previous novel, to Télé in the last novel. The quest thus becomes generational, almost dynastic. It represents an initiation in which Télé will « *partir en quête, non plus sur l'écran, mais sur les chemins rocailleux du temps* » (189).

It is Télé who references the title of the previous novel, as he traces the trajectory of « *les aléas de l'histoire amoureuse de mon père* ». At first he is harshly judgmental about Hannibal's suspected liaison with Antonella Pace, a Maltese woman, but comes to realize that his own treatment of young women is not so innocent. Télé has learned languages from his

mother, a poet / teacher, « *juste pour l'amour de se métamorphoser en diverses personnalités* » (174). Armed only with his computer skills, and his linguistic abilities cultivated by his mother, he discovers one sole support from his father: Hannibal's notebook tucked surreptitiously into his luggage. Télé realizes his father used the pen as his weapon of choice, « *qui livre le combat sur les pages béantes* » (256). The notebook teaches the son, and erases boundaries.

Antonella Pace is briefly a female storyteller at the beginning of this section, hinting to Télé about her past relationship with Hannibal. She shortened his name to "Han," over his objections that it erased any historical sense or context.

It is appropriate that the trilogy should end, to all intents and purposes, in Malta, for its language and history are closely intertwined. The island is « *un microcosme incarnant l'histoire de la Méditerranée* » (192). Malti, the Maltese language, consists of « *dialectal arabe en grande partie, truffée d'italien, d'anglais et de quelques miettes de français* » (204). Malti, like Tunisian dialect, is typically underestimated because it is mainly oral, and both have been subordinated to the language of the colonizer, English in Malta, French in Tunisia. Bouraoui, one suspects, is speaking through Hannibal, who affirms « *La liberté, c'est ma mère langue. Et la paternelle, la révolte* » (205). Frank Olivieri, Bouraoui notes, is a Maltese writer who chose to write in Malti, not English, though his choice might limit his audience.

Arab dialect is omnipresent in Malta, in place names such as Mdina, the city on a hill. It is very evident in the *Christian* carnival: Ash Wednesday (*Ramdan, Ras-In Randam*), Good Friday (*Gimгла [-Kibr]*), the Assumption (*l-Ghidl-Kbir, l'Aid el-Kébir*) (215). Télé also hears the legend of Ghar Hasan, about a kidnapped girl, whose meaning is drastically altered according to different linguistic renderings. "Hasan" is the Cave of Shadows, but the word becomes "horse" if the "h" is aspirated. If spelled Hassan, it becomes a good man, not a villain. Malta is also a rich source for archaeologists. Fr. Manwel Magri decoded the Phoenician inscriptions in the Hypogeum, and then went to Sfax, Tunisia, ancient home of the Phoenicians, before finishing the task, where he died in 1907.

Finally, Télé learns from his absent father the riches of language in both past and present. His father became to the Maltese the iconic, almost legendary figure, « *le Marcheur de Malte* », but Télé learns that Hannibal both walked and read (266). Like his father, Télé is enamored of language, « *Pour me faire de plus en plus pluriel* » (272). From his father's notes, Télé is to move to his own tale. To voyage is to voyage through language, to remain constantly

in motion. As Hannibal says, he walked « *pour ne se figer ni dans l'espace, ni dans le temps* » (318). If to wander is to « *errer* » in French, it may also mean “to err”, so Hannibal and Télé both discover risk-taking is tied to their explorations of life. And the new generation, represented by Télé, is to “read” the cutting-edge technology as well as the written word: « *Régale de passer de l'un à l'autre* » (335).

Méditerranée à voile toute ends with a hallucinatory Carnival, and we recall the storytelling feast in Sardinia (*CN*), and the performance of the Chinese National Ballet in Corsica (*Les Aléas*). In all instances, there is a wedding of the verbal with the visual, of sound, even smell (perfume), and we are reminded of Baudelaire's « *Correspondances* » made postmodern. Throughout the Carnival scene, the reader is spectator or observer, along with Télé. And what we witness is a breaking of linguistic and fictional boundaries through a heightening of the five senses.

***La Réfugiée* : The Language of Flowers**

This experimentation with language and genre is to continue even more radically in Bouraoui's next work, a « *narratoème* ». Perhaps the most moving example of Bouraoui's musings on language are found in the two protagonists of *La Réfugiée* (2012), the titular character Lotus (or DorBoa), a female Laotian refugee, and her new friend and neighbor Jasmin, a male North African immigrant by choice, who eventually moves farther afield to Canada. They grope their way towards a common language, the former in a halting, unpronounceable learned French, the latter speaking, and reinventing, the language of the colonizer. Their names signify their natural common ground, the language of flowers, hers denoting the lotus, the sacred flower of Buddhism, his the jasmine, gesturing towards the Jasmin Revolution, or the Arab Spring. Moreover, the parenthetical subtitle, « *Lotus au pays du Lys* », carries a double meaning: Lotus finds herself in the country of the lily or, as the auditory pun suggests, the « *pays d'Ulysse* », or the country of Bouraoui's eternal wanderer, referencing Djerba, Tunisia, supposedly Ulysses' Isle of the Lotus-Eaters. Bouraoui's invention of language has its corollary in his invention of literary forms: *La Réfugiée* is characterized as a « *Narratoème* », bridging the gap between narrative and poetry. The « *Narratoème* » has no plot, no central intelligence. Bouraoui seeks to « *écrire en narratoèmes où le poète se fait de plus en plus chroniqueur* » (*NomadiVivance* 11). As he defines the form in the *Avant-Propos* of *La Réfugiée* :

Mais qu'est-ce qu'un Narratoème ?

Un texte battant vie nouvelle en accomplissant :

Un transvasement de genres (prose/poésie.)

Une interpénétration de formes (narration romanesque / dimension poétique / récit / conte / drame...)

[...] Ce qui permet au narratoème d'incarner une sorte de synthèse dont la cohérence se situe au niveau du brassage des ingrédients constitutifs. Ainsi pour les niveaux de langue : du classique au parler, de l'écrit à l'oral, du soutenu au relâché, du français aux langues étrangères [...] Ou des continents, de l'Asie à l'Afrique, de l'Europe à l'Amérique [...] (9).

This new form « *marque la mort de la narration conventionnelle pendant ce troisième millénaire [...]. Pour Bouraoui, la vérité se trouve dans l'interstice, ou mieux dans l'écriture interstitielle*¹ ». For Bouraoui, truth is found in the narrative gaps, in the literary space left to the reader.

This literary experiment offers a site for the study of the invention of language, especially the language of flowers, by these two protagonists, and behind them the shadow of their creator Hédi Bouraoui. A charming, witty parable, *La Réfugiée* nonetheless radiates a serious purpose: that of reproducing the language of the human heart², the only way to promote connectedness in a world increasingly fragmented.

For Bouraoui's earlier hero in the trilogy, Hannibal (or Annibale in Italian), like Jasmin in *La Réfugiée*, migration is a deliberate, conscious choice. Both are native speakers of French, their second language along with Tunisian dialect, which is already distinct from classical Arabic. Hannibal's migrations, in particular, are spurred on by a need to acquire, absorb, and reinvent language. Both men utilize a French uttered « *dans la gueule du loup* », making new the language of the colonizer. Jasmin migrates twice, to France and ultimately to Canada, notably to Anglophone Ontario, where he masters a third language. Hannibal's migrations are multiple, and even his name is translated into Italian by his Sicilian wife Laura, thus hinting at what is at least a dual identity. Both men are fascinated by folk tales, by the oral tradition represented by Hannibal's Tante Souad, who teaches him « *les mots de la tribu* », or visceral language. Jasmin taps the source of folk tales from even farther afield than Hannibal's Mediterranean, from the Far East of the Laotian DorBoa / Lotus.

¹ Elizabeth Sabiston, 4^e de couverture, Hédi Bouraoui, *NomadiVivance I*, Toronto, CMC Éditions, collection «Nomadanse», 2016.

² One thinks of Nathaniel Hawthorne's reference, in *The Scarlet Letter*, to « a tongue native to the human heart », in which the words may be "indistinguishable", but if heard, "might have been only a grosser medium" (1895, New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1957, p. 232). He had in mind the Pentecostal tongues of flame, supposed to descend upon the disciples after Christ's crucifixion, when they begin speaking in unknown tongues, which are nonetheless understood by each and all.

Both men are in control of their quest for words. Hannibal begins his wanderings in Sardinia, as a weightlifting competitor, learning both kinesics and the language of sport. He speaks with many tongues, the words of all the continents. Through Lotus, Jasmin moves beyond the Indo-European languages, as well as Arabic, produced in the Mediterranean basin. Jasmin juggles the Laotian words and myths of Lotus from the Far East. If both men use words to bridge the gaps between cultures, Jasmin concentrates exclusively on one person, representative of an ancient Eastern tradition. Thus, *La Réfugiée* is a tight, compressed parable, while the trilogy expands outwards to encompass many cultures. But both Hannibal and Jasmin would argue that writing contains the seeds of immortality: « *Ce qui est écrit continue à fleurir* » (CN 128; emphasis mine), thinks Hannibal, the flower imagery foreshadowing the instinctive creativity of Lotus / DorBoa, the refugee. If Hannibal keeps a notebook, Lotus plants flowers, « cultivates her garden », unknowingly following the advice of Voltaire's *Candide*. And Bouraoui uses the same floral metaphor to describe Mario Selvaggio's selection of his poems in *Transpoétiquement vôtre*: « *Impression qu'il a cueilli les plus belles fleurs de mon jardin poétique* » (Avant-Propos 8).

The female narrative of Laura, Hannibal's partner and wife, in Part II of *Les Aléas d'une odyssée*, « *Le Dit de Pénélope*, » anticipates Lotus's story in *La Réfugiée*. Laura, however, is herself a poet. She is able to recount « her/story, » her history, and reminds us that poetry has mothers as well as fathers. This Penelope, not content to remain loyally at home with her needlework while Ulysses adventures on life, follows her Ulysses, or Hannibal, to Greece to rescue him from a false accusation of homicide. Moreover, as we have seen, she is nine months pregnant at the time, and arrives on Crete not knowing a single word of Greek (which her husband learns in prison). She begins, moreover, to read the language of flowers in order to solve the mystery: « *Pénélope déplie les pétales interdits* » (297), anticipating the language in which DorBoa is adept. If Laura / Penelope creates her own written narrative, as a major part of Bouraoui's hymn to the Mediterranean, Lotus speaks metaphorically the language of flowers and myths. In a sense, she too narrates her own tale, though it is the narratee, Jasmin, who pieces it together. If Part I of the trilogy, *Cap Nord*, is largely Hannibal's, Penelope/Laura dominates Part II, *Les Aléas d'une odyssée*, and their son Télémaque, or Télé, Part III, *La Méditerranée à voile toute*. In *La Réfugiée*, the characters are reduced to two storytellers, male and female, friends but not lovers, North African and Laotian, educated and naïve, who nonetheless forge a bond that Bouraoui encapsulates in another of his « *mots concepts* », « *AMIAMOUR* ».

What has been said of Bouraoui's essays on poetry in *Mutante, la Poésie* is equally true of his work in general: « [...] le fil conducteur, c'est la métaphore de l'amour. Hédi Bouraoui se présente sous la figure d'un Amant – des mots, des contacts humains pour la vie » (Sabiston, *Postface* 141). What animates him is the love of poetry, the love of language: « [...] pour lui [...] tout est poésie, dans n'importe quel genre choisi – parce que la langue elle-même est la poésie » (*Postface* 142).

Although Laura's name is evocative of Petrarch's Laura, his muse or inspiration, she rejects the role of passive muse and is herself a creator, both in the biological and artistic sense. Laura's name, as well, is also a plant image, suggesting the laurel gifted to poets. She controls her own destiny, and that of her family. Like her husband's, or like Jasmin's, her migrations are consciously motivated. DorBoa, on the other hand, is not a migrant, but a refugee escaping from a Communist dictatorship that has cruelly overridden her homeland. Her relation to her adopted land, France, and to its language, is accordingly strained and ambivalent, at times polyglot.

If Lotus's apprehension of reality is rendered metaphorically, it is doubtful that she would even understand the term (somewhat like Molière's "*Bourgeois gentilhomme*" who learns that « *Il fait de la philosophie sans le savoir* »). But Jasmin, her sympathetic audience, does know and understand. If she speaks the non-verbal language of flowers, the paradox is that even the wordless must be conveyed through words, but words which are symbols, layered, indefinite, suggestive, containing a multiplicity of meanings. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the language of flowers was that of courtship, a ritual of romantic love. But for DorBoa, or Lotus, and Jasmin it becomes a metaphorical cultural bridge, universally understood. Lotus's father, we learn, was a horticulturalist, so the symbolism comes naturally to her. As Bouraoui comments ironically, however, the father evidently sowed his own seed rather widely. Following the death of DorBoa's mother, by whom he had five daughters, he remarried and produced ten more daughters, but exchanged one for a son, who DorBoa naïvely believes appears by magic. She never questions the son preference of her culture, although she suffers from it.

Through her father's services, he becomes a Prefect close to the royal family (or *famille royenne*, as she calls them). When the family's fortunes collapse with the advent of the Communist regime, DorBoa becomes a refugee, first in a series of United Nations camps in Thailand, which go from bad to worse: « *Chaque fois que Boa change de camp / Elle regrette le précédent* » (34).

If Hannibal is the epic hero reinvented as a common man, DorBoa is the refugee reconfigured as a reluctant, ill-equipped female Ulysses. This concise parable or fable, witty and entertaining, nonetheless conveys a serious perspective on the major issue of the 21st century, migration, and the plight of refugees. Unlike the trilogy, the central figure, DorBoa, is not the point of view character, the central intelligence, to use Henry James's terminology. Instead, she is viewed largely from the outside, by Jasmin within the fiction, and by Bouraoui from without, as its creator. She is granted, nonetheless, a certain narrative voice, for we hear her idiosyncratic French in conversation, as she recounts tales of Buddha, and of the founding of her native town, Luang Prabang, which is the Oriental equivalent of the Occidental tale of the founding of Rome in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

If Jasmin, the migrant / nomad delights in transforming the language of the colonizer, Lotus the refugee exercises her own creativity, but out of necessity. The clash of languages, paralleling the clash of civilizations, results in her adaptation of French to Laotian pronunciation. In school, « *La fluidité de ses voyelles bute [...] / [...] sur ces affreuses consonnes / Étrangères [...] / Vite elle les adapte à la sauce laotienne / Le e se nasalise, devient enn sans formalité* » (20). She leaves school at fourteen « *avec un BEPC [...] et n'en connaît que l'acronyme !* » (21). As she creates with flowers, cultivates her garden, she creates with the French language, shaping it according to her own needs. Jasmin is affectionately amused by her version of the French « *Oo-la-la !* » which becomes « *Oh Nanna* » (46). He and his friends begin to think of her as « *Madame Oh Nanna* ».

While some of her extended family chose to take refuge in North America, she chose France. A certain feminine ambition led her to travel to Montpellier, where she fell in love, not with a Frenchman, but with the « *pays entier et de sa Navarre* » (21). She chooses France, and finally Paris, as her earthly paradise largely because of its language and its perfumes, the latter distilling the essence of flowers. She works for a time in a perfume factory, such as the one owned by the Kitsikises in *Les Aléas d'une odyssée*. She then takes a series of menial jobs, until ill health forces her early retirement. While she idolizes French language and culture, her human ties, apart from Jasmin, who is also an immigrant, are mainly with the Laotian community, with whom she converses mainly in Laotian.

Her worship of the now-deposed Laotian royal family (or of Buddha) is transferred unquestioningly to the rulers of France. Although French authorities treat her as a welfare case, having become a French citizen she votes for the

right, for the most conservative party. She is impressed with the rhetoric of then French head of state Nicolas Sarkozy, thinly disguised in the text as VerboZéro, or style without substance. She equates all levels of Socialism with Russian or Chinese Communism, her *bête noire*. The color red, symbol of Communism, becomes an abomination for her, and she prefers the « *Bleu capital occidental* ». Red is, in addition, the color of the poppies, from which opium is derived to sustain the Communist regime in her native Laos. In fact, in her view, « [...] *le Paradis est pure absence de rouge* [...] » (57). Here too there is a paradox, for Jasmin notes that when it comes to her worship of Buddha, red is a sacred color.

As Bouraoui justly remarks in his Preface, the characters in Lotus's world become flowers, and the flowers in turn become characters. Lotus's friends, relatives, and acquaintances are usually designated by flowery names: Orchidée the beautiful one who never has to struggle in life, Cactus the prickly older sister who tyrannizes over Lotus. The few exceptions to the flowery names are usually male: VerboZéro / Sarkozy and Volubilis (Voluble), both defined as verbose, all talk and no action. Perhaps Jasmin / Bouraoui sees the men as more reliant on empty speeches and male sequential logic. Of the women, principally a « *femme pays de l'Est* », from Eastern Europe, is not assigned a flowery name: she represents the Communist enemy for DorBoa. Women she perceives as hostile are named the « *Femme Généranne* » or « *Femme Cononéenne* » (General or Colonel) because she considers them aggressive, rebellious against patriarchal systems, which she tacitly accepts, and even venerates.

There is a certain dark side to DorBoa's personality: she adores her flowers, and her friends with flowery names, but she is also capable of jealousy and hatred directed towards those who threaten her child-like world. She is the Lotus, but also, suggestively, the Boa constrictor, the serpent: « *L'envie la calcifie parfois en Boa serpent* » (123). The boa constrictor crushes its victim before devouring it.

But even her faults are those of innocence and naïveté, perhaps a heritage of the childhood she was denied. As Jasmin says : « *J'adore sa façon de voir le monde/ Naturelle, naïve, innocente [...] enfantine* » (99). Despite the limits of her language, she is anything but silent, and spends hours gossiping on the telephone, which Bouraoui compares to the Arab telephone: « *DorBoa plus modeste navigue [...] / [...] dans une curiosité maladive/ Veut tout savoir [...] tout contrôler [...] / Rien ne doit lui échapper / ce qui fait d'elle la meilleure rapporteuse / Au monde [...] mieux que le téléphone arabe !* » (43). Once she

thinks she has found her Paradise on Earth, she cannot comprehend why Jasmin, privileged as a voluntary immigrant and native speaker, could choose Canada over France:

- *Tu as de la chance [...] tu mènes la benne vie !*
- *Toi aussi, tu avais un diamant dans la main !*
- *Quoi ? D'avoir été à l'éconne du Lys ?*
- *Oui, mais tu n'as pas voulu le garder.*
- *Non, même si j'avais dans la main le diamant*
Je n'aurais jamais pu avoir de poste [...] et travailler dignement !
- *C'est pas normanne, ça ! Pas normanne ! (66)*

Jasmin is aware, as she is not, that even for those who are educated and have native speaker fluency, France remains a closed society – chauvinistic or even xenophobic. Fortunately for her, DorBoa never realizes that for the French she is invisible, simply an « *Asiatique* » – and all Asiatics are alike. According to a popular French joke, “Asiatics never die”: « *Quand un des leurs décède [...] Sa carte d'identité / Servira à un autre clandestin* » (85).

Flowers are an important part of her religion, for she prepares flowers and fruit to place before the Vénérable, representative of Buddha on earth. We often witness her in the lotus position of worship. She is at peace with Buddha, and in her garden, while the whole world explodes around her: « *Son labeur essentiel consiste à cultiver / Les fleurs de toutes les couleurs* » (131). Both her religion and nature (her garden) inculcate in her a certain passivity, or fatalism: « *Ainsi va la vie / certains fleurissent [...] / d'autres flétrissent [...] / Les Fleurs comme les Hommes [...]* » (104). She is best described as « *Résignée* »: « *[...] elle doit tout accepter* » (121).

Her little world of daily routine – « *Je passe aspirateur [...] fait les courses [...] làa cuisine [...] La vaissègne [...] vide làa poubenne [...] / et passe le reste / Du temps à téléphoner [...] / aux amies proches et lointaines [...]* » (51) – is circumscribed and poetized not only by the intermingled languages of East and West, linked by a common language of flowers, but also by Bouraoui's invention of a new genre, the « *Narratoème* », to fit the language experiment. The whole appears on the printed page as a domestic epic in free verse, breaking boundaries of genre as it has those of language and nationhood. Georges Friedenkraft has described it as « *l'aboutissement en mosaïque de la combinaison et de l'intégration de diverses formes littéraires* (1)¹ ». Placed

¹ Georges Friedenkraft, Review, *Hédi Bouraoui, La Réfugiée (Lotus au pays du lys), Narratoème, CMC Éditions, Toronto, collection «Nomadanse», dirigée par Elizabeth Sabiston*, vol. 1, n° 1, 2014, electronic resource, <https://bit.ly/2HcShf3>.

alongside the expansive trilogy, *La Réfugiée* offers instead a lyric, poetic distillation of the same themes of tolerance and cross-cultural understanding, of *AMIAMOUR*, or, as Bouraoui puts it, « *Une goutte de paix dans un monde perturbé et éclaté !* » (12). If not the Word Made Flesh, we witness at least the Word Made Flower. The ideal transcultural society of brotherhood/sisterhood envisaged by Hannibal and Laura in the trilogy comes to poetic fruition in the microcosm of *La Réfugiée* through the bonding of a Laotian refugee and a North African migrant.

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