



Compass

Mathias Énard , Charlotte Mandell (Translation)

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Compass

Mathias Énard , Charlotte Mandell (Translation)

Compass Mathias Énard , Charlotte Mandell (Translation)

As night falls over Vienna, Franz Ritter, an insomniac musicologist, takes to his sickbed with an unspecified illness and spends a restless night drifting between dreams and memories, revisiting the important chapters of his life: his ongoing fascination with the Middle East and his numerous travels to Istanbul, Aleppo, Damascus, and Tehran, as well as the various writers, artists, musicians, academics, orientalists, and explorers who populate this vast dreamscape. At the center of these memories is his elusive love, Sarah, a fiercely intelligent French scholar caught in the intricate tension between Europe and the Middle East.

With exhilarating prose and sweeping erudition, Mathias Énard pulls astonishing elements from disparate sources—nineteenth-century composers and esoteric orientalists, Balzac and Agatha Christie—and binds them together in a most magical way.

Compass Details

Date : Published March 28th 2017 by New Directions (first published August 19th 2015)

ISBN : 9780811226622

Author : Mathias Énard , Charlotte Mandell (Translation)

Format : Hardcover 448 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, France, European Literature, French Literature, Novels

 [Download Compass ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Compass ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Compass Mathias Énard , Charlotte Mandell (Translation)

From Reader Review Compass for online ebook

????? ??????? says

?????? ??????? ?????? ?????? "?????? ??????" ?????? ??????? ??????? "?????". ?? ????? (???????)
?????? "?????" (1) ?????? ????????. ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????
????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????
????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????
????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????
????? ?????? ??????.

????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????
????? ?????? – ????? – ????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????
????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????

????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? "????? ??????" ?????? ??????
????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????
????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? "?????" ?????? ?????? ??????

?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????

Jim Coughenour says

A superb book, perfect for insomniacs – being one long night's reverie by an ailing Austrian musicologist Orientalist who cannot sleep. It is a *slow read*, it will doubtless appeal only to a few, but what a fortunate few we are. On one level the novel is a spirited, comical refutation of Said's Orientalism (much of which I would have missed without the work of Robert Irwin); on another, it is a fantasia on Orientalist themes, infusing the spleen of Thomas Bernhard and the musing melancholy of W G Sebald with the magic of Proust, Pessoa, *The Arabian Nights*, Annemarie Schwarzenbach, Omar Khayyam, Sadeqh Hedayat, Hafez... but this is only a beginning, the list multiplies, the echoes reverberate throughout the night. There are bibliographic and musicological pleasures at every turn.

On a more topical level it is the anti-Submission. In the deepest roots of our cultures, the Middle East and the West interpenetrate, we are each other's dreams and fantasies. The narrator is acutely aware of the horrors currently unfolding in Syria; his distress is mingled with memories of time spent in Aleppo, Damascus, Tehran. Nothing is glossed over, but one is most aware of his love for Arabic, Turkish, Persian art, music, poetry. His meditations are riddled with the scholars and artists who crossed back and forth among the cultures.

Nietzsche the Persian, Nietzsche the reader of the Avesta, last or first Zoroastrian of Europe, blinded by the light of the fire of Ahura Mazda the Great Brightness. Always these paths keep crossing and re crossing: Nietzsche in love with Lou-Andreas Salomé, that same Lou who would marry an Orientalist, Friedrich Carl Andreas, specialist in Iranian languages, who almost

stabbed himself to death, since she refused him her body and made him mad with desire; Nietzsche met Annemarie Schwanenbach in Sils-Maria, where the Schwanenbachs owned a sumptuous chalet; Annemarie Schwanenbach met the ghost of Nietzsche in Tehran, where she stayed several times; Annemarie Schwanenbach met Thomas Mann and Bruno Walter through Erika and Klaus Mann, to whom she sent those distraught letters from Syria and Iran. Annemarie Schwanenbach met Arthur de Gobineau without realizing it in the Lahr Valley, a few dozen kilometers north of Tehran. The compass is still pointing east.

Or, to pluck one of my favorite sentences from the middle of the book: "Without the Orient (that dream in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, stateless, which we call the Orient) no Proust, no *In Search of Lost Time*." Dyspeptic, melancholy, defeated: this is a marvelous book.

Melissa says

Compass takes place over the course of one, long night during which Franz Ritter, a Viennese musicologist, suffers from a terrible bout of insomnia. The symptoms from his recently diagnosed illness, the memories of an unrequited love, and the dissatisfaction at his mediocre academic career all contribute to his sleepless night. Instead of chapters, Énard uses time stamps to denote the hours that are slowly ticking away as Franz runs through years of memories. Sarah, a French Academic with whom Franz has spent many years in love, sends him an article she has written from Sarawak, in Malaysia, which is her current place of residence. It is unclear at the beginning what Franz and Sarah mean or have meant to each other, but Franz slowly unravels their complicated history throughout the course of his sleepless night.

As an academic musicologist, Franz has had a deep interest in the music of the Middle East, which studies have brought him into close contact with many orientalists, including Sarah. Compass is a travelogue, an historical essay, a literary catalog and a music lesson on the Orient. Franz takes us on his travels from Istanbul, to Palmyra, to Damascus, to Aleppo and to Tehran as he explores eastern music and his growing, emotional attachment to Sarah. The Orient becomes just as beautiful, enchanting and elusive as his love for Sarah. When Franz and Sarah are suddenly forced to end their travels together in Tehran, Franz nurses his wounds by going back home and retreating into himself and his academic career. Sarah consoles herself by wandering father east where she ends up spending quite a bit of time in a Buddhist monastery. But the objects in his apartment are a constant reminder of his travels with her in the east:

My glasses were under a pile of books and journals, obviously, I'm so absentminded. At the same time, to contemplate the ruins of my bedroom (ruins of Istanbul, ruins of Damascus, ruins of Tehran, ruins of myself) I don't need to see them, I know all these objects by hear. The faded photographs and yellowing Orientalist engravings. The poetic works of Pessoa on a sculpted wooden book stand meant to house the Koran. My tarboosh from Istanbul, my heavy wood indoor coat from the souk in Damascus, my lute from Aleppo bought with Nadim.

The disjointed and rambling narrative structure is fitting for a man whose mind cannot rest over the course of a sleepless night. He jumps from one topic to the next: his illness, musicology, literature, archaeology and, of course, Sarah. Some might find this stream-of-consciousness style frustrating but a more straightforward narrative would not have been as fitting or appropriate for Franz's state-of-mind and circumstances. One common thread that runs through his thoughts are the connections between East and West. He has a joke compass that points east which is fitting for Franz since his thoughts are always pulled in that direction. He discusses travelers, writers, musicians, academics and archaeologists who were fascinated by Orientalist travels and study. One of my favorite examples Franz brings up is the Swiss author, journalist, traveler, and

הוא מנסה להבין את המציאות, את הדינאמיקה של החיים, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. (הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה.)

הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה.

הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה.

הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה.

הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה. הוא מנסה להבין את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה, את המורשת, את ההיסטוריה.

Neil says

I made a start on this book several months ago when it was long listed for the Man Booker International prize. I gave up after a third of the book because I felt like I was being tortured by being force-fed Wikipedia articles.

This time, I stuck with it and made it to 100%.

I'm not at all sure what it is I want to say about this book, so I took the unusual (for me) step of looking at some other reviews before writing my own. There are two quotes from The Guardian that, I think, sum up my sentiments:

Fascinating though the facts often are, the scores of pages of this kind of thing are mainly rendered in detailed precis: there is very little direct speech in the novel, which helps to evoke the febrile meanderings of insomniac memory but it also threatens to send the reader, if not Franz, off to merciful sleep.

...and the book concludes with a surprisingly upbeat, if not sentimental, flourish. As the dawn does for our sleepless hero, this comes as a relief to the reader, who emerges from this strangely powerful work as from a feverish dream.

I think one thing that helped me get to the end this time was the fact that I recently read *Home Fire* and *Exit West* from the main Man Booker long list. *Compass* is a sort of meditation on the interaction between East and West and it often gave me cause to think back over those two books.

...she could show how these objects are the result of successive shared efforts, and how what we regard as purely 'Oriental' is in fact, very often, the repetition of a 'western' element that itself modifies another previous 'Oriental' element, and so on; she could conclude that Orient and Occident never appear separately, that they are always intermingled, present in each other, and that these words – Orient, Occident – have no more heuristic value than the unreachable directions they designate.

This quote also highlights one of the problems I had with this book: the sentences are simply too long (this is a relatively short example) and I found it (even though I have read all of Pynchon!) rather mind-numbing.

That said, I think the mind-numbing is partly deliberate. The book is the rambling thoughts of Franz Ritter through a sleepless night. He is wrestling with his thwarted love for Sarah and remembering the times they have spent together. Both of them, in different fields, are fascinated by the interaction of East and West, so his thinking about Sarah feeds his thinking about Orientalism (and vice versa).

Unfortunately, I ended up in the place the narrator finds himself when considering a colleague

*...he would pace up and down the corridors thinking out loud in a low voice, for hours, kilometres of corridors travelled, and **this monody, as knowledgeable as it was unintelligible, got on my nerves terribly.***

Last time I read this I abandoned it and gave it 1 star. This time, I have completed it and I am upping my rating because I can recognise the literary merit of the book. But I cannot claim to have enjoyed it, despite the odd flash of humour. So, 2 stars is as far as I can go. It's won prizes already and may well go on to win more, but it's not one I could support.

Philippe Malzieu says

I remembered the beginning of *Salammbô*. "C'était à Megara, faubourg de Carthage, dans le jardin d'Hamilcar." In only one sentence, I live in the Mysterious Orient, there is the color, the scent, the wet suffocating heat (in french we name it *touffeur*) of the luxuriant vegetation. I was already in love with *Salammbô*.

I did not want to read this book. It belongs to the short list for the Goncourt Prize then which the best french book (Laurent Binet) has been eliminated.

And I read the beginning of this novel in the bookseller. There is a brilliant text on Sadegh Hedayat. Enard compares him to Kafka and it is well seen. So I decided to read it.

Pitch? An austrian musicolog have a love affair with Sarah, brilliant young university researcher. The book became a kind of treasure hunt between them with different stop from Vienna to Viet Nam. But too much erudition, too much references. It is a *debeauche* of exotics word and tones. It is too much. there is even photos. Photos in literature book have only a goal, prevent the author to write description like Breton in *Nadja*. Here, they have no utility.

I have the impression that the author had collected all the cultural references on orient and had built his book around them. We are far from the conciseness of Flaubert. The novel becomes boring even if sarah does not miss charm. Dommage.

Laura ????? says

I mille e un Oriente

Vincitore nel 2015 del prestigioso premio letterario francese Goncourt, “Bussola” non è un romanzo di facile recensione. Che cosa racconta?

Una storia d’amore, anzi due storie d’amore: prima di tutto, quella tra una donna e un uomo, due orientalisti che per anni s’incontrano, fuggono e s’inseguono tra Europa, Turchia, Siria e Iran; sullo sfondo, superba e affascinante cornice, la seconda storia d’amore che per gran parte del libro sembra offuscare la prima: quella tra Occidente e Oriente (in particolare, quello più prossimo), inquieta e ancestrale passione, raccontata attraverso le tantissime piccole grandi storie di coloro che di essa, in passato così come in tempi più recenti, fecero una ragione di vita. Scrittori e studiosi a vario titolo, viaggiatori, avventurieri e sognatori... È lunga la lista degli occidentali irrimediabilmente stregati dall’Oriente: tra queste oltre quattrocento densissime pagine si susseguono nomi europei ben noti legati, in un modo o nell’altro, al mondo orientale. E si scoprono cose curiose e interessanti. Non sapevo, per esempio, che Flaubert avesse tenuto un diario egiziano né che Goethe si fosse dilettrato a scrivere esercizi di lingua araba. Nel nostro vecchio continente c’è molto più Oriente di quanto si creda; e in Oriente, paradossalmente, esiste molto dell’Oriente stesso rielaborato dall’Occidente.

“[...] lampade fornite di genio, tappeti volanti e pantofole miracolose; dimostrerebbe come questi oggetti sono il risultato di sforzi successivi comuni, e come ciò che consideriamo puramente “orientale” è in realtà molto spesso la ripresa di un elemento “occidentale” che a sua volta modifica un elemento “orientale” precedente, e così di seguito; ne trarrebbe la conclusione che Oriente e Occidente non appaiono mai separatamente, e sono sempre fusi, presenti uno nell’altro [...]”

Un’opera straordinaria e monumentale che racchiude storia, letteratura, musica, nonché esotismo ed erotismo davvero raffinati: un’erudizione sconfinata in materia di Oriente e orientalismo, che sono viaggio, esplorazione continua, forse pure perdizione. Considerati gli specifici riferimenti geografici, letterari e linguistici ad arabo e persiano, purtroppo non si tratta di una lettura per tutti, semmai per appassionati del settore, altrimenti essa rischia di annoiare o, peggio, di non essere capita.

E a me, indegna appassionata di questioni orientali, che cosa ha lasciato questo libro?

Moltissimo, più di quanto potessi immaginare. Anzitutto, una bella lista di nomi dei quali approfondire la conoscenza (in testa, quelli dell’avventuriera francese Marga d’Andurain, della scrittrice e fotografa svizzera Annemarie Schwarzenbach e dello scrittore iraniano Sadeq Hedayat); poi, il promemoria relativo a una lettura di Edward Sa’id che avevo interrotto quand’ero più giovane; infine, oltre a quello per i miei ormai lontani giorni d’Oriente, anche il rimpianto di non essermi recata in Siria quando, per diverso tempo, mi trovavo a un tiro di schioppo dalla frontiera e gli schioppi, quelli veri, ancora tacevano.

Énard dipinge splendide descrizioni di Aleppo, di Palmira e del deserto siriano sospeso tra la notte stellata e lo sbocciar dell’aurora. Uno strazio profondo al pensiero di ciò che il Paese è diventato dopo ormai sei anni di guerra: un cumulo insanguinato di macerie e morte, perenne monumento alla stupidità e crudeltà umane.

Winnielou says

Une thèse vaguement déguisée en roman. Alors que ça commençait plutôt bien, soudain le texte devient un

prétexte à une longue thèse sur l'orientalisme et les rapports entre Orient et Occident. Comme toute thèse qui se respecte, le narrateur cite ses sources et de temps en temps entre deux citations érudites, une intrigue narrative essaye de se développer. Elle n'est pas vraiment développée et personnellement au bout de 100 pages je me fichais complètement de la vie de ce narrateur insomniaque. Quelques passages de temps en temps sont intéressants (au niveau de l'intrigue et/ou du style) mais c'est vraiment trop peu.

Michael Kotsarinis says

Απ? τα βιβλ?α που δεν μπορ? να αποφασ?σω τι βαθμ? (αν ?χουν καμ? αξ?α αυτ?) να δ?σω. Ε?κόλα, ?μως, μπορ? να καταλ?βω ?ποιον του δ?σει 1 αστερ?κι και ?ποιον του δ?σει 5 και πιο ε?κόλα μπορ? να καταλ?βω ?ποιον το παρατ?σει.

Ε?ναι ?να βιβλ?ο δ?σκολο στην αν?γνωση αλλ? ?χι δυσν?ητο. Για να διαβάστε? θ?λει ρυθμ? και χρ?νο καθ?ς ε?ναι ελ?χιστα τα σημει?α που προσφ?ρονται για διακοπ?. Ο αναγν?στης κινδυνει να χαθε? μ?σα στο δα?δαλο των ονομ?των, περιστατικ?ν και τ?πων. Αυτ? γιατ? ο συγγραφε?ς γρ?φει συνειρμικ? θα ?λεγα πι?νεται απ? ?να ?νομα, μια λ?ξη και η αφ?γηση πα?ρνει ?λλες οδο?ς. Φυσικ?, αυτ? δικαιολογημ?να συμβα?νει καθ?ς υποτ?θεται ?τι ακολουθο?με τις σκ?ψεις εν?ς ανθρ?που σε απν?α. ?μως, ?σο επιμ?νεις, τ?σο φανερ?νεται η κεντρικ? ιστορ?α που χωρ?ς να ε?ναι ιδια?τερη δεν ε?ναι και ?σημη. Παρ?λληλα ?χεις αποκτ?σει ?να σωρ? γν?σεις για τον οριενταλισμ?.

Αυτ? ε?ναι και η ουσ?α θα ?λεγα του βιβλ?ου, η ενασχ?ληση και η αναζ?τηση των Ευρωπαϊων (πιο σωστ? των δυτικοευρωπαϊων) για την περ?φημη Ανατολ?. Εμε?ς λ?γω των ιστορικ?ν συγκυρι?ν ?χουμε μια διαφορετικ? ?ποψη για την Ανατολ? και αυτ? ε?ναι ?να απ? τα πρ?γματα που αποκ?μισα απ? το βιβλ?ο. ?τσι λοιπ?ν απ? τις σελ?δες παρελα?νει ?λη η ιστορ?α και ?λα τα πρ?σωπα που ασχολ?θηκαν με την Ανατολ? ?λλος πιο προσγειωμ?να ?λλος πιο εξιδανικευμ?να. Μεγ?λο β?ρος π?φτει στη μουσικ? καθ?ς ο κεντρικ?ς ?ρωας ε?ναι μουσικολ?γος και αρκετ? απ? τα μουσικ? κε?μενα που αναφ?ρει ?χουν ενδιαφ?ρον (αν?γνωση μετ? μουσικ?ς, γιατ? ?χι;).

Δεν μπορ? να πω συμβατικ? αν μου ?ρεσε ? ?χι. Σ?γουρα με κο?ρασε, υπ?ρχαν σημει?α αχρε?αστα φλ?αρα αλλ? και σημει?α πολ? μεστ?, σημει?α που η ιστορ?α ?κανε κοιλι? και ?λλα που σε κρατο?σε σε αγων?α. Εκε?νο που μπορ? να πω με βεβαι?τητα ε?ναι ?τι πι?νει σε πολ? καλ? βαθμ? τον τρ?πο σκ?ψης και την ατμ?σφαιρα των εποχ?ν που περιγρ?φει και ?τι σ?γουρα αποκ?μισα κ?ποια πρ?γματα απ? αυτ?.

Anya says

“Boussole” had been one of my top reads last year, and (in my opinion), a very deserving Prix Goncourt winner. I was thus happy to plunge into this dense and atmospheric novel a second time, as part of the 2017 Man Booker International challenge.

I can happily say that “Boussole” certainly holds up to a second reading. The book is about Franz, a middle-aged Austrian musicologist, who is having a sleepless night. He spends what should be his sleeping hours revisiting memories of his past travels and reflections on the Orient; memories that centre around the

unrequited love of his life, a brilliant academic by the name of Sarah.

And so, over the course of the night, we follow Franz from country to country (e.g., Austria, Iran, Syria), from memory to memory, from love story to love story... The book is ultimately part travelogue, love story and essay on Oriental historical, political, literary and musical trends. It respectfully renders homage to the East and strives to underline, throughout the entire narrative, the interconnectedness of East and West, and how both worlds have always nourished and exchanged with one another.

“Boussole” is a dense, atmospheric novel that utterly impresses the reader, given the breadth of knowledge and erudition contained within. I was particularly captivated by the ‘love story’ told by Sarah’s thesis supervisor in Iran, and by the ‘night under the stars’ in Palmyra.

This is not a fast read, but a novel that you will want to savour slowly, while listening and viewing -in the background-some of the referenced music, historical sites and paintings. It is a wonderful success of a novel that I would wholeheartedly recommend to any one interested in learning more about the Orient.

Gumble's Yard says

RE-VISITED (NOT FULLY RE-READ - SEE COMMENTS BELOW) DUE TO ITS LONGLISTING FOR THE REPUBLIC OF CONSCIOUSNESS PRIZE

Fitzcarraldo Editions is an independent publisher (their words) *specialising in contemporary fiction and long-form essays it focuses on ambitious, imaginative and innovative writing, both in translation and in the English language* . Their novels are (my words) distinctively and beautifully styled, with plain, deep blue covers and a "French-flap" style

And that serves as something of an introduction to this novel distinctive, at times beautiful styled, but also very French - a winner of the Prix Goncourt, the most prestigious French literary prize - but perhaps a novel less designed obviously appealing to non-French speaking literary tastes (it was shortlisted for but did not win the 2017 Man Booker International Prize).

Ostensibly the set-up of this novel is that it is set over a single night of insomnia, as Franz Ritter (an Austrian Musicologist, suffering from an unnamed, but he believes, serious illness) thinks back on his various travels and researches in the Middle East and in particular his (at least on his side) obsessive relationship with a French academic, Sarah.

In practice this book is more of a Sebald-esque meditation on the Middle East (particularly Syria, Iran and Turkey), on Orientalism, and the relationships and interactions of Westerners (archaeologists, writers, musicians, academics) with that area over the last few centuries.

Sarah’s central thesis (one which explicitly rejects Edward Said’s “Orientalism”) about this relationship is that:

What we regard as Oriental is in fact very often the repetition of a ‘western’ element that itself modifies another previous ‘Oriental’ element, and so on ... the Orient and the Occidental never appear separately, they are always intermingled, present in each other and ..these words – Orient, Occidental - have no more heuristic value than the unreachable directions they

designate.

The actual conceit of the novel is very weak – Ritter’s feverish thoughts seem to allow him to reproduce details both of his own adventures and (even more unlikely) various historical episodes in encyclopaedic (and often also tedious) delay including with reproductions of articles and documents, which are sometimes excused by Ritter apparently getting up to look at them, but which at other times are unexplained.

At times also the book turns effectively into a non-fictional book or perhaps more of some form of cultural essay or doctoral thesis – and, it has to be said, a poorly organised and at times tedious one. I found at times myself sympathising with Ritter’s own thoughts

What an atrocity to think that some people find dreaming pleasant It's so tiresome

And only wishing he would have followed through on an early resolution

I'll try to reduce my thoughts to silence, instead of abandoning myself to memory

However overall, I found that on a first read I was just about able to skim read the more tedious passages and instead join Ritter in abandoning myself to his memory: to the overall impressions he creates both of the cities in which he stays (Damascus, Aleppo, Palmyra, Tehran, Istanbul, Vienna); to the complexities and depths of his relationship with Sarah (an aspect which grows in strength as the book progresses and particularly as we understand the ambiguities of Sarah’s reciprocal feelings).

On a second read - I realised that this is a book to be dipped into, to lose oneself in one of Franz's digressions for 15 minutes just before sleeping makes a wonderful digression but trying to read it conventionally and serially is challenging (despite its conceit of it taking place over a single night). Perhaps in this way the novel mirrors a night of insomnia and fever, drifting between chains of association.

The book increases in power due to its topicality – much of Ritter and Sarah’s early travels are in areas of Syria which Ritter is now aware are at the heart of the Syrian civil war and ISIS’s atrocities and this adds added urgency to the attempts to really understand the Orient.

Sarah talked to me about her thesis , Hedayat, Schwarzenbach, her beloved characters; about those mirrors between East and East that she wanted to break, she said by making the promenade continue. Bring to light the rhizomes of that common construction of modernity. Show that “Orientals” were not excluded from it, but that, quite the contrary, they were often the inspiration behind it, the initiators, the active participants, to show that in the end Said’s theories had become, despite themselves, one of the most subtle instruments of domination there are: the question was not whether Said was right or wrong in his vision of Orientalism; the problem was the breach, the ontological fissure his readers had allowed between a dominating West and a dominated East, a breach that by opening up a well beyond colonial

studies, contributed to the realisation of the model it created, that completed a posteriori the scenario of domination which Said's thinking meant to oppose. Whereas history could be read in an entirely different way, she said, written in an entirely different way, in sharing and continuity. She spoke at length on the postcolonial holy trinity – Said, Bhabha, Spivak; on the question of imperialism, of difference, of the 21st-century, when, facing violence, we needed more than ever to rid ourselves of the absolute otherness of Islam and to admit not only the terrifying violence of colonialism but also all that Europe owed to the Orient – the impossibility of separating from each other, the necessity of changing our perspective. We had to find, she said, beyond the stupid repentance of some or the colonial nostalgia of others, a new vision that includes the other or the self. On both sides.

Overall a flawed novel but an important and, if approached in the correct way, ultimately enjoyable one.

Caroline says

Énard has written a masterwork, a long meditation on the Other, as embodied in his two main characters and their lifelong study of the idea and reality of the 'Orient' and the West. The entire work consists of the reminiscences of insomniac, fiftyish (?) Franz over one night as he wrestles with the knowledge that he has a fatal disease and has failed in a lifelong attempt to win Sarah, the object of his obsession. The irony, we come to see, is that despite his long academic meditations on the necessity of recognizing the self in the other, Orient in Occident and vice-versa, he is so self-absorbed that he misses every chance to hear Sarah and to respond to her alterity, to absorb her being into himself and become vulnerable to her. Sarah, a very successful academic, has her own weaknesses, a steely ambition and shell that prevent her from being honest with him.

Their story is interwoven integrally over the period of about twenty-five years, as these two Occident academics criss-cross the "Orient" researching a wide range of concepts about how the two spatial and mindset constructs of Orient and Occident affect each other. A dark current running throughout is the collapse of the old Islamic/Persian world, and destruction of the cultural treasures and culture of that world.

There is so much pleasure in this book. The astoundingly wide-ranging erudition flows naturally through Franz's reflections and his renditions of episodes in his and travels and researches over the course of decades in Europe and the 'Orient.' Where the Orient starts and 'ends' is one of the ongoing questions, as it might start in Vienna, flow through the Balkans, Istanbul, Syria, Iran, ...all of which places they have been, and now even to Sarawak, where Sarah is living in the wild studying death wine. Sarah's academic fascination with the macabre may have roots in her own otherness, a French Jew with an Algerian French mother. Franz is another sort of other, an awkward, hapless mama's boy.

I came to *Compass* without the burden of Said's *Orientalism* to color my reading. But I was so happy that over the past few years I had read so many of the authors referenced in Énard's endless flow of reflections on the flow of literature from and about these countries. For some of them I have my Goodreads friends to thank (e.g. Faris al-Shidyaq's *Leg over Leg*) and for many others my chipping away at Philip Ward's *A Lifetime's Reading*. I expected the literary references; I wasn't prepared for all of the musical commentary (Franz is a musicologist). Lists of sample references:

Literary/historical: *Blind Owl* by Sedegh Hedayat (on ongoing talisman work), Hofmannsthal, *Danube* by Magris, Hafez, Ta-abbata Sharran, Le Fanu, Rückert, Lousie Labé. Dumas, Grillparzer, Balzac, Chateaubriand, Gomez de la Serna, Nerval, Richard Burton, Burckhard, Isabelle Eberhardt, Said, Trakl, Benn, Leopold Weiss, Hölderlin, Bloch, René Guenon, Lou Andreas-Salomé, Pierre Louÿs, Joseph Roth, Gautier, Lemaître, Luci Delarue-Mardrus, Proust, Schopenhauer, Pessoa, Rimbaud, Segelen, Hesse, Durrell, Govineau, Eliot, Avicenna, Ali Shariati, Khadjou, Nezami, Nima, Sepehri, Char, Heine (often), Suhrawardi, Mann (Doctor Faustus), Farugh Farrokhzad, Naim Frasheri Ebard, Ignac Goldziher, Flaubert, Sarga Moussa, Goethe (*East West Divan*), Hebraic love poetry of Andalusia, Masudi, Milarepa, Cervantes as the ultimate Orient-Occident melding author in *Don Quixote*.

Music: *Tristan and Isuelt*, Felicien David, Ismayl Urbain, Badr Shakir, Sayyab-Iraq, Szymanowski, Wagner, etc etc. I'm not a musician and didn't make as many notes on them. I listened to several over the internet as I read to try to see what Enard was getting at, which was a delightful side benefit of *Compass*.

This should not be daunting but inspiring. Énard provides context for all of these references so that you know why he's mentioning them. They give credence to Franz's academic persona and substance to his arguments. Another irony, though, is that while Franz's closely argued theories are persuasive and impressive, it is the quotes from Sarah's papers and letters that show the agility and genius of a remarkable mind as it leaps to truly insightful and profound ideas about east and west, the other, death, the macabre, and so much else.

I've only read three of the nominees for the Man Booker, but this has got to get into the very short list. It is valuable book for our times as we try to find out way toward a way to overcome our seemingly innate self-other reactions that now threaten to destroy not the other, but ourselves.

Some quotes:

There is no such thing as chance. (p 10, again p 30 and throughout)

In the meantime, there had been Félicien David, Delacroix, Nerval, all those who visited the façade of the Orient, from Algeciras to Istanbul, or its backyard, from India to Cochin China; in the meantime, this Orient had revolutionized literature, and music, especially music: after Félicien David nothing would be the same...I've shown that the revolution in music in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries owed everything to the Orient, that it was not a matter of "exotic procedures," as was thought before, this exoticism had a meaning, that it made external elements, alterity, enter, it was a large movement, and gathered together, among others, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Liszt, Berlioz, Bizet, Rimsky-Korsakov, Debussy, Bartók, Hindemith, Schönberg, Szymanowski, hundreds of composers throughout all of Europe, over all of Europe the wind of alterity blows, all these great men use what comes to them from the Other to modify the Self, to bastardize it, for genius wants bastardy, to use of external procedures to undermine the dictatorship of church chant and harmony...(p 140-141)

It would include a discussion of genie lamps, flying carpets, and fabulous slippers; she could show who these objects are the result of successive shared efforts, and how what we regard as purely "oriental" is in fact, very often, the repetition of a "Western" element that itself modifies another previous "Oriental" element, and so on; she could conclude that Orient and Occident never appear separately, that they are always intermingled, present in each other, and that these words—Orient, Occident—have no more heuristic value than the unreachable directions they designate. (p 210)

Sometimes I feel as if night has fallen, that Western darkness has invaded the Orient of enlightenment. That spirit and learning, the pleasures of the spirit and of learning, of Khayyam's and Pessoa's wine, have not been able to stand up to the twentieth century; I feel that the global construction of the world is no longer carried out by the exchange of love and ideas, but by violence and manufactured objects. Islamists fighting against Islam. The United States, Europe, at war against the other in the self. (p 398-399)

Life is a long meditation on death.

Remember the *Death of Isolde*, which you spoke to me about at such length? You heard in that a total love, of which Wagner himself wasn't aware. A moment of love, of union, of unity with the All, unity between the Eastern enlightened ones and Western darkness, between text and music, between voice and orchestra. As for me, I hear in it the expression of compassion, *karuna*. Not just Eros seeking eternity. Music as the "universal expression of the suffering of the world," said Nietzsche. This Isolde loves, at the instant of her death, so much, that she loves the entire world. Flesh allied with spirit. It's a fragile instant. It contains the seed for its own destruction. Every work contains the seeds of its own destructions. Like us. We are equal neither to love nor to death. For that we need enlightenment, awareness...(p 442)

Lee says

Finished this finally, unintentionally in the perfect way, reading from three to five in the morning when I couldn't sleep. It's the perfect way to finish because this is an insomniac's diary, or more so, its conceit involves an Austrian insomniac's cognitive perambulations in bed in Vienna as he makes his way, only ordered by the increasingly late hour, through the occidental experience of alterity (the novel's keyword) in the orient. It's about the interpenetration of east and west, self in the other. Like *Zone*, it's a vehicle for erudition, an assemblage of a whole lot of stuff previously unbeknownst to me. In "*Zone*," each phrase of a discontinuous, single, 500-page sentence is like the ties along the tracks the narrator rolls over seated in a train, providing basic forward movement and structure, whereas in this one, the narrator is in bed mostly, or puttering around his apartment, as nocturnal hours pass. In both novels, the masks the author wears (his narrators) have insider information -- although he's not a former spy as in "*Zone*," the academic orientalist narrator of "*Compass*" feels more naturally aligned with the author who I believe at one time taught Arabic at the University of Barcelona. The narrative mask seems more transparent. At one point, research is associated with espionage and this is sort of like the secret history of the western infatuation with the east, but Enard being a great writer blurs the duality and complexifies it. He also refers to Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata solely as his 14th sonata, which I then had to look up on Spotify, which really comes in handy when reading this since you can find Mendelssohn's Octet and choose from dozens of versions, or pieces by Schubert, Chopin, Wagner, or any other piece by western classical composers you don't know at all or well that are discussed at one point. Someone with more time should put together a "*Compass*" playlist. The title itself refers in part to Beethoven's compass, which is set to point east instead of north. It's not all about "orientalist" interests, however -- there's also a love story with another academic, Sarah, who the narrator loved and loves still, and idealizes, especially times together in Tehran and Damascus, and the love story, the history of their interactions since then, the cooling off, the letters, the time together in Vienna when Sarah only wants to visit museums related to horror, establish the novel's spine, the trunk from which the limbs of episodes and anecdotes and the foliage of essay and ideas can grow. Although nowhere near as conventional

as Enard's last translated novel, *Street of Thieves*, the love story is satisfying enough, as is all the esoteric information and all the reference particularly to writers and artists and composers. Ultimately, like "Zone," this is a major Reference Work, what I've decided to call these contemporary novels that rely so heavily on biographical reference, particularly to artists, philosophers, musicians, et al, that they're almost something like disordered encyclopedias, like fragments from the fourteen-thousand volume compendium of all knowledge at the time that went up in flames thanks to the incursion/aggression of Westerners in China. It's five-stars in terms of the author's ambition, execution, and erudition but I nevertheless docked a star for my reading experience: I could only read this in bits and pieces, a few pages on the subway to and from work, a few pages before sleep overwhelmed me or I decided to put it down in favor of a tight NBA playoff fourth quarter streaming to my tablet. At times I thought it could have been edited more stringently, could have been pruned throughout and lost a hundred or more pages without missing much overall, but its ranginess and excessive stream-o'-consciousness sleepless progression also seem essential to what makes it feel unique. Anyway, definitely recommended reading for anyone willing to immerse themselves in the long history of western addiction to oriental alterity, beyond belly dancers, magic carpets, genies, all the way up to those recent black-hooded Islamic State decapitators from London. Lots of interesting opium-related stuff in here, too. And a nod to hope in the end. All of the authors' novels I've read in English have been translated by Charlotte Mandel, a tandem I count with confidence among my favorite contemporary writers thanks to this one's addition to their achievements, all different yet united in their focus on Euro-Eastern interaction and the often but not always resultant atrocities.

Jonfaith says

We Europeans see them with the horror of otherness; but this otherness is just as terrifying for an Iraqi or a Yemenite. Even what we reject, what we hate, emerges in this common imaginal world. What we identify in these atrocious decapitations as 'other', 'different', 'Oriental', is just as 'other', 'different', and 'Oriental' for an Arab, a Turk, or an Iranian,

My initial bliss digging into this rich novel soon gave way to more serious labor. Whereas Jim Gauer's masterful *Novel Explosives* was a fanfare of images and poetry, this is a sustained exercise, an unflinching exploration of the relations between East and West and perhaps, ultimately, what Pessoa quipped is the "East east of the East." Pessoa looms large here, but alas, so do ranks of figures from Cervantes and Beethoven to Balzac.

The novel is a nightlong insomniac agony of a (perhaps dying) Austrian musicologist Franz Ritter who ponders the efficacy of scholarship in our world-- while his misspent attentions and affections have crisscrossed the globe - especially towards and in the form of Sarah, a French ethnologist whom the protagonist has loved for decades and cravenly been unable to articulate.

There are lateral paths and stories revealed on nearly every page, how the vampire novel has roots in the cross-pollination of Turkish and central European music. Thomas Mann and his children wave a significant shadow over these proceedings. Leverkühn as Nietzsche/Schoenberg proceeds, finding nurturing in Flaubert's Egyptian orgy and thus affording a mirrored reading of *Leg Over Leg*: Shidyaq is thusly embraced.

There are links between Rimbaud's amputation and Edward Said's piano playing -- if you look for them. Despite such erudite architecture, this is also a novel of opium, wine and unfortunately beheadings. Etymology, poetry and emancipatory politics make for cumbersome bedmates but the reader can only benefit

from such congestion. Matters did appear to lose momentum but I felt it to be tremendously moving throughout. 4.5 stars

Paul Fulcher says

Now on the outstanding longlist for the 2017 Republic of Consciousness Prize for 'gorgeous prose and hardcore literary fiction' from small, independent presses.

In Germany they impose the Scriptures on you in the back of the bedside table drawer, in Muslim countries they stick a little compass for you into the wood of the bed, or they draw a wind rose marking the direction of Mecca on the desk, compass and wind rose that can indeed serve to locate the Arabian Peninsula, but also, if you're so inclined, Rome, Vienna or Moscow: you're never lost in these lands. I even saw some prayer rugs with a little compass woven into them, carpets you immediately wanted to set flying, since they were so prepared for aerial navigation.

Matthias Enard's *Compass*, translated, like his wonderful novel *Zone*, by the highly accomplished Charlotte Mendel, is a novel dedicated to, inter alia, "The Circle of Melancholy Orientalists" and the Syrian people.

The book consists of the recollections and stream of associations, during one insomnia filled night in Vienna, by Frank Ritter, a musicologist specialising in the influence of the oriental on Western Music.

*I've shown that the revolution in music in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries owed everything to the Orient, that it was not a matter of 'exotic procedures' as thought before, this exoticism had a meaning, that it made external elements, alterity, enter, it was a large movement and gathered together, among others, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Liszt, Berlioz, Bizet, Rimsky-Korsakov, Debussy, Bartok, Hindemith, Schoenberg, Szymanowski, hundreds of composers throughout all of Europe, all over Europe the wind of alterity blows, all these great men use what comes to them from the Other to modify the Self, to bastardize it, for genius wants bastardy, the use of external procedures to undermine the dictatorship of church chant and harmony, why am I getting worked up all alone on my pillow now, probably because I'm a poor academic with a revolutionary thesis no one cares about. No one is interested any more in Felicien David who became extraordinarily famous on 8 December 1844 after the premiere of *Le Desert*.*

Franz has just received an, albeit unconfirmed, diagnosis that he is suffering from a (unspecified in the novel) degenerative and ultimately fatal condition, prompting his night of reflection, particularly on his unconsummated relationship with Sarah, whose PhD thesis kicks off his memories and thoughts. It began:

*There are certain wounds in life that, like leprosy, eat away at the soul and diminish it," writes the Iranian Sadegh Hedayat at the beginning of his novel *The Blind Owl*; the little man with round glasses knew this better than anyone.*

And he reflects:

Today as I reread the beginning of this text, I must admit there was something strong and innovative in these four hundred pages on the images and representations of the Orient, non-places, utopias, ideological fantasies in which many who wanted to travel had got lost: the bodies of artists, poets and travellers who have tried to explore them were pushed little by little towards destruction; illusion as Hedayat said, ate away at the soul in solitude - what had long been called madness, melancholy, depression was often the result of

friction, a loss of self in creation, in contact with alterity.

This concept of alterity is crucial to the novel. Franz's thoughts take us widely through the history of music, literature, archaeology and those Westerners who embraced the East. But he is equally aware that one can only really become the other if one erases oneself:

When Chateaubriand invented travel literature with his Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem in 1811, long before Stendhal and his Memoirs of an Egotist, more or less the same time as the publication of Goethe's Italian journey, Chateaubriand was spying for the sake of art; he was certainly no longer the explorer who spied for science or for the army: he spied mainly for literature. Art has its spies, just as history or the natural sciences have theirs. Archaeology is a form of espionage, botany, poetry as well; ethnomusicologists are spies of music. Spies are travellers, travellers are spies. 'Don't trust the stories of travellers,' says Saadi in The Gulistan. They see nothing. They think they see, but they observe only reflections. We are prisoners of images, of representations, Sarah would say, and only those who, like her or the peddler, choose to rid themselves of their lives (if such a thing is possible) can reach the other.

A contemporary note is sounded by his contrasting his own experience in Syria to what he sees in the news today, as the country is caught between the forces of the Syrian state and the Islamic State for example reflecting on a visit on the 1990s to the Baron Hotel in Aleppo:

In the evening as the day faded the bar filled up not only with hotel clients, but also with tourists staying elsewhere coming to soak in the nostalgia, drinking a beer or an arak whose smell of anise, mixed with that of peanuts and cigarettes, was the only Oriental touch on the decor.

[...]

This Baron Hotel that still reeked of nostalgia and decadence, just as today it reeks of bombs and death.

[...]

Impossible at that time, at the bar of the Baron Hotel, to foresee the civil war that was about to seize hold of Syria, even if the violence of dictatorship was omnipresent, so present that you'd rather forget it, for there was a certain comfort that foreigners found in police regimes, a muffled, silent peace from Deraa to Qamisilhi, from Kassab to Quneytra, a peace humming with suppressed hatred and fates bending under a yoke to which all the foreign scholars willingly accommodated, the archaeologists, the linguists, the historians, the geographers, the political scientists, they all enjoyed the leaden calm of Damascus or Aleppo, and we did too, Sarah and I, reading the letters from Annemarie Schwarzenbach the inconsolable Angeline in the bar of the Baron Hotel, eating white-coated pumpkin seeds and long, narrow, pistachios with light brown shells, we were enjoying the calm of the Syria of Hafez-el-Hassad, the father of the nation.

This is a novel full of what the publishers blurb describes, accurately, as "generous erudition." This isn't research gleaned from Wikipedia or indeed a book that requires frequent use of Wikipedia to follow it, although the reader, should he or she so choose, can follow up on the many fascinating references to novels, music and fascinating characters such as Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, Annemarie Schwarzenbach and Marga d'Andurian.

I couldn't help but draw the contrast to last year's deeply unimpressive Man Booker winner and this is the very type of novel that makes me prefer the Man Booker International variant. One for the shortlist and a contender for the overall prize.
