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The write thing for the right reason

Roderick Mallia

The Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival provides the creative space for a dynamic, multilingual encounter. Roderick Mallia hears the word.

I have fond memories of my first international literature festival, in the scorching French summer of 2006: languages invading the narrow alleyways of Lodève's centuries-old streets; the walls resounding colourful accents from every country dipping its feet in the Mediterranean. Literature festivals allow different languages and cultures to come together and speak to each other through their different voices and locally, the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival is the only festival in Malta that provides such a creative space.

Already in its third year, the festival can boast participants the likes of Robert Minhinnick, Biel Mesquida and Valerio Cruciani in previous editions. The festival is being organised by Inizjamed and Literature Across Frontiers in collaboration with the Vittoriosa local council and with support from the Malta Tourism Authority, the National Book Centre of Greece and the Icelandic Literature Fund. As in previous years, the festival will coincide with a one-week residential literary translation workshop being held in Malta.

Alexandra Büchler, a professional translator and director of Literature Across Frontiers project, will be in charge of the workshop in which the writers will be translating each other's works.

Apart from bringing together five foreign and four Maltese writers to blend their talents, the festival will also give a chance to the public to share this literary experience with them. This year's edition is being held in the historic surroundings of Couvre Porte in Vittoriosa, with the closing night being held this evening.

The festival commenced on Thursday, with Greek novelist Chris Chryssopoulos, Maltese poet Claudia Gauci and Palestinian writer and activist Suzan Sahori from Bethlehem. Yesterday saw Slovenian novelist and short story writer Polona Glavan, Maltese poets Caldon Mercieca and Simone Inguanez and Icelandic poet and singer-songwriter Adalsteinn Asberg Sigurdson take the stage. Also yesterday, the Maltese-Palestinian writer Walid Nabhan paid homage to Mahmoud Darwish who recently passed away.

The writers, who will be reading tonight, are Moroccan poet Hassan el Ouazzani and novelist, short story writer and poet Karl Schembri. Italian poet and performer Paola Turroni was also meant to read, but due to unforeseen circumstances, she will not be able to attend; her work, however, will still be presented. The Maltese funk band Zizza Ensemble will be accompanying the authors with their groove-infected tunes.

Despite the festival proposing an experience inspired by the written and spoken word, it will by no means be solely limited to such a medium. Other forms of art will feature in the festival, to both stimulate and challenge literature. Some of the poets are performers in their own right and will be presenting their work through theatre and music.

In addition, the short art film in Maltese with English subtitles, *Halib ix-Xitan* (Hell's Despite), directed by Jule Belami and produced by Dawwara Pictures, was screened on Thursday for the first time in Malta after being premiered at the Sarajevo Film Festival.

Adrian Grima, coordinator of Inizjamed, has stated his wish for the festival to become a reference point for Maltese contemporary literature, both for the Maltese public as well as for those beyond our shores who want to experience our literature. The large audiences of the previous edition prove that there is an appetite for such an ambitious and artistic festival in Malta and this year's edition will surely prove to be yet another success.



Simone Inguanez

This festival is a brilliant opportunity for exchange and networking with fellow writers, both foreign and Maltese. Festivals also offer quite an effective intercultural dialogue. It is very fulfilling to witness the fascination of foreign writers with our works and to collaborate with them for the rendering of our works in other languages. Concerning performed literature, I think it adds another dimension to the written word - it makes me feel much closer to the writers. For my readings, I prepared a selection of works representative of my poetry, some in their original Maltese version, others in translation. My idea was to present a variety of themes, moods and styles. I feel that my Maltese and Mediterranean identity is very much in the foreground of my poetry.



Caldon Mercieca

It is very positive that the festival is being organised in combination with the literary translation workshop. Such occasions are a space for encounter on other levels - exchanging experiences, new insights and discussions. It will be interesting to see the reaction and response from people and readers alike. These occasions can provide platforms for artists, better spaces for encounter and a greater appreciation of existing activity. The multi-dimensional experiences afforded by these festivals are a greater source of enrichment for whoever is present because this multi-faceted presentation is truer to life, which is never a series of clinically separated categories.

**Claudia Gauci**

Working closely with other writers means that I learn from them by establishing a positive rapport. I realise literary translation is not easy and translations can never really capture the true soul of the original piece, but another language can give a work a new soul, slightly different but still faithful. I am curious to know how my work will react when translated in another language. Such festivals have a lot of potential in reaching out to people who are not so aware of the literary bustle on the island and giving a greater exposure to the writers and the literary scene.

**Karl Schembri**

Festivals are a good idea for the audience to get to know the writer in person, and for the author to get a feel of the public's response. I expect a nice crowd with whom I can share my work and get their feedback. I will be reading a piece from the novel I am working on right now - a sort of thriller that takes place in prison - and some poetry, which I can only describe as political and personal. Getting to know the writers that give life to a language is undoubtedly one of the most effective ways to transcend cultural differences, grasp the nuances of life and cherish them.



• *The Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival closes this evening at Couvre Porte in Vittoriosa. Readings start at 8 p.m. and entrance to all events is free. For more information visit <http://www.inizjamed.org>.*