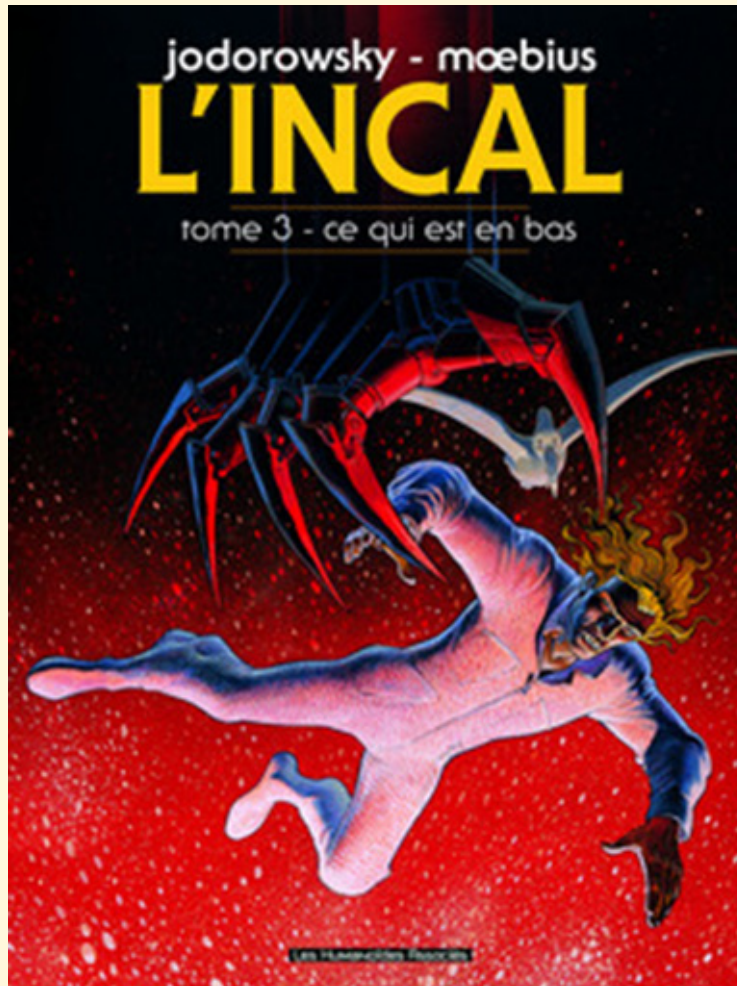


A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION  
OF THE ATA'S LITERARY DIVISION

NO. 69

FALL 2016

## COMICS, GRAPHIC NOVELS, AND THEIR TRANSLATORS



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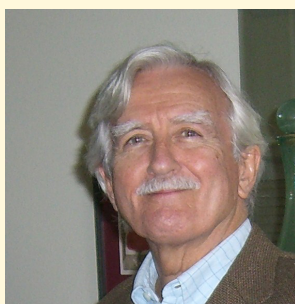
BTW Cartoons by Tony Beckwith

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# FROM THE EDITORS



**Michele Aynesworth**  
Editor-in-Chief



**Tony Beckwith**  
Associate Editor



**Patrick Saari**  
Chief Copyeditor

Comics were long viewed as low-brow, lightweight entertainment for children, teenagers, and newspaper readers. This traditional perception has shifted so dramatically over the past few decades that comic books and graphic novels, and their translators, are now being given the high standing they deserve. This is the subject of *Source's* Fall issue.

Tony Beckwith starts with a wide-ranging conversation on humor, culture, politics, and translation with the prize-winning Anglo-Argentine writer and journalist Andrew Graham-Yooll, who is also one of the English translators of *Mafalda*, Argentina's most famous comic strip. Mercedes Guhl and Nanette McGuinness discuss the challenges and pleasure of working for children and young adults, the largest target group for comic books, translating from English into Spanish, in the case Mercedes, and from French and Italian into English, in the case of Nanette. Patrick Saari pays tribute to the French artist Jean Giraud (aka Mœbius), joining the chorus of those who praise the relatively new visual language of comic books as a fully developed art form, with its classics and masterpieces.

Rafa Lombardino reviews a novel about a translator looking for her writer in Brazil, *Ways to Disappear*, by Idra Novey, who is herself a translator-turned-writer. Jesse Tomlinson's Letter from the LD Administrator provides us with an overview of the program of literary translation sessions and speakers for ATA57 in San Francisco, and Part III of her interview with Professor Erik Camayd-Freixas (see our two previous issues for Parts I and II) focuses on the ethics of interpreting and the 2008 Postville case that drew nationwide attention on the plight of immigrants.

## Upcoming Issues

We look forward to our readers' contributions to *Source's* Winter and Spring issues. The Winter issue will be reviewing literary translation events at ATA's 57th Annual Conference, and in Spring 2017 we will have a special issue on French literature, language, and translation (see Submission Guidelines, page 4).

## ABOUT THE EDITORS

**Michele Aynesworth** specializes in translating Argentine and French authors.

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**Tony Beckwith**, a native of South America's Southern Cone, resides in Austin, where he works as a writer, translator, poet, and cartoonist. E-mail: [tony@tonybeckwith.com](mailto:tony@tonybeckwith.com).

**Patrick Saari**, born in Pasadena, California, now living in Quito, Ecuador, writes, translates, and interprets in English, French, and Spanish. Email: [patricksaari@netlife.ec](mailto:patricksaari@netlife.ec).

Special thanks to **Jamie Padula** for proofreading and especially to Literary Division Administrators **Jesse Tomlinson** and **Paula Arturo** for their support.

# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

**Topic for the Winter issue:** A review of literary translation events at ATA's 57th Annual Conference

**Topic for the Spring 2017 issue:** In the wake of troubling events in 2015 and 2016 in France, a tribute to French literature, language, and translation

*As the journal of the ATA's Literary Division, Source is both a forum for the discussion of literary translation and a vehicle for LD members and guest contributors to publish their work. Novice translators, as well as those with more experience, are encouraged to submit translations of poetry and prose together with their meditations on the process. We are also constantly on the lookout for submissions from Asia, Africa, and all other less frequently represented cultures.*

FORMAT: Submit articles up to 1600 words, Word or text file, single-spaced. Palatino Linotype size 14 with indented paragraphs (1 tab), no line breaks between paragraphs and no word breaks. Unjustified righthand margin. Endnotes please, not footnotes.

Please include a brief, factual bio and photograph. Links and illustrations, etc., are encouraged. Submissions may be edited.

Submissions go to [michele@mckayaynesworth.com](mailto:michele@mckayaynesworth.com)  
*Submissions deadline for the Winter issue: November 21.*

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# LETTER FROM THE LD ADMINISTRATOR

Dear LitDiv members,

*Source* is marching on as a dynamic platform for discussions on literary translation, interviews with translators, and translations of poetry and literature. The devoted team of Michele Aynesworth, Patrick Saari, and Tony Beckwith (to name a few) make this possible, along with contributions from authors, translators, and members of the literary translation community, as well as ATA's help.

Thank you, *Source* people, for contributing your dedication, time, and effort to produce this publication!

ATA57 is close enough to get a whiff of it from the winds blowing down from San Francisco to Guadalajara, Mexico (where I live). Get doubly excited about the Literary Division's offerings this year because two literary translation heavyweights who have translated Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* will be speaking about retranslating the classics: Rosamund Bartlett, as Division Guest Speaker, and Marian Schwartz, as Marilyn Gaddis Rose Lecturer. On conference Friday they will appear together to present their different approaches to working on the same novel. Also for the LD, Mercedes Guhl and Nanette McGuinness will be sharing their



*Jesse Tomlinson is an interpreter, translator, editor, and voice talent. Originally hailing from Canada, she now lives in Mexico and translates from Spanish into English and interprets in both languages. Her special interest lies in Mexican culture, the tequila industry, and literature. Her upcoming publication, The Consummate Art of Dreaming, the Art of Rocío Caballero, will be released at the Guadalajara International Book Fair this year and is published by Black Coffee Gallery.*

experience translating children's books, and Paula Arturo will be discussing literary translation contracts.

The ATA conference this year also includes many celebrated and experienced literary translators participating in other divisions' guest speaker lineups. For the German Language Division, Philip Boehm will discuss translating theater texts. Daniel Hahn, in two sessions for the Portuguese Language Division, will do a close reading of what is involved in literary translation and what it means to be a literary translator today. For the Japanese Language Division, Jay Rubin will be giving a two-part session on translating authors living and dead. Translating the memoir of a Himalayan sherpa heading the 1950 ascent of Mount Annapurna is the subject of Corinne McKay's presentation for the French Language Division. This year's Susana Greiss Lecture of the Slavic Languages Division will be delivered by Madeline Levine, who will focus on translating Polish literature. Plenty of great sessions for those interested in literary translation!

Please let me know by email if you are interested in joining members of the Literary Division for lunch at the conference between sessions on Thursday. We need to confirm your attendance before making arrangements at a restaurant.

See you in San Francisco!  
Jesse

Literary Division Administrator:  
Jesse Tomlinson, [jesse@tomlinsontranslations.com](mailto:jesse@tomlinsontranslations.com)

Assistant Administrator:  
Paula Arturo, [paula@translatinglawyers.com](mailto:paula@translatinglawyers.com)

# **Literary Translation Program of Sessions and Speakers for ATA57 in San Francisco, November 2-5, 2016**

## *Literary Division Sessions*

### **Translating *Anna Karenina*: Two Approaches**

Rosamund Bartlett and Marian Schwartz

(Thursday, November 3, 3:30-4:30 pm)

### **Marilyn Gaddis Rose Lecture: The Business of Retranslating the Classics**

Marian Schwartz

(Friday, November 4, 10:00-11:00 am)

### **Literary Translation and Lateral Thinking: How to Publish New Versions of the Classics**

Rosamund Bartlett

(Friday, November 4, 11:15 am-12:15 pm)

### **Literary Translation Contracts: What's Really Lurking in There?**

Paula Arturo

(Saturday, November 5, 2:00-3:00 pm)

### **Translating Children's Books: When Fidelity Calls for Freedom**

Mercedes Guhl and Nanette McGuinness

(Saturday, November 5, 3:30-4:30 pm)

## *Advanced Skills and Training (AST)*

### **Finding the Voice in Literary Translation**

**Day Course, separate registration and fee required**

Philip Boehm

(Wednesday, November 2, 1:00-4:30 pm)

## *Language Division Sessions*

### **From Murakami to Sōseki: Checking Your Translations with Authors, Both Living and Dead, Parts I and II**

Jay Rubin

(Thursday, November 3, Part I: 11:15 am-12:15 pm; Part II: 2:00-3:00 pm)

**Place and Space in Translation: Machado, Noll, and O. Henry Find Their Way in English and Portuguese**

Jayme Costa-Pino, Adam Morris, and Karen Sotelino  
(Thursday, November 3, 11:15 am-12:15 pm)

**Translating *Sherpa: The Memoir of Ang Tharkay***

Corinne McKay  
(Friday, November 4, 2:00-3:00 pm)

**Bottom, Bless Thee! Thou Art Translated (Translating for the Stage)**

Philip Boehm  
(Friday, November 4, 2:00-3:00 pm)

**Die Fremde hier (Preserving Foreignness in Translation)**

Philip Boehm  
(Friday, November 4, 3:30-4:30 pm)

**Being a Translator: The Rise of a Powerful New Professional**

Daniel Hahn  
(Saturday, November 5, 8:30-9:30 am)

**Literary Translation in Action: A Close Reading**

Daniel Hahn  
(Saturday, November 5, 10:00-11:00 am)

**In the Shadow of Russian: 40 Years of Translating Polish Literature (Susana Greiss Lecture)**

Madeline Levine  
(Saturday, November 5, 11:15 am-12:15 pm)

For further information, check the Literary Translation section of the ATA57 web page: <http://www.atanet.org/conf/2016/byspecial/#L>

Also see the webpage for Sessions by Language:

<http://www.atanet.org/conf/2016/byspecial/#L>

And the webpage of Speaker Bios at:

<http://www.atanet.org/conf/2016/bios/#249480>

## READERS' CORNER



Cheryl A. Fain

**Cheryl A. Fain**, the official translator for the Embassy of Switzerland in Washington, is pleased to announce the recent publication of her German-into-English translations of the following books on Swiss and Swiss-American culinary history by Ambassador of Switzerland Martin Dahinden and Mrs. Anita Dahinden:

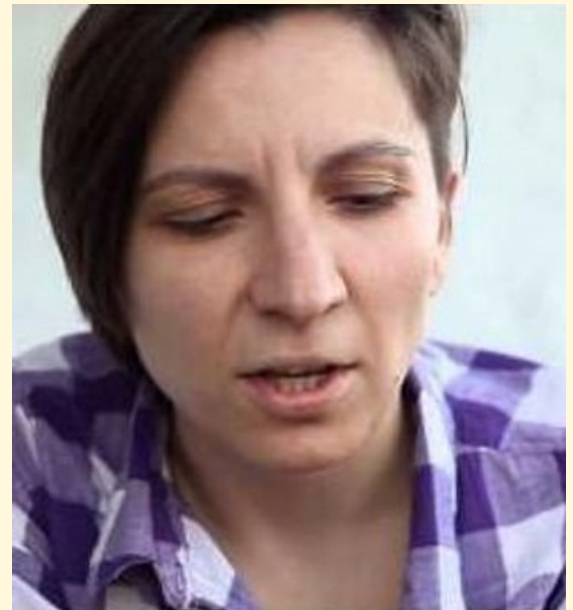
- *Joseph Favre: The Revolutionary and His Culinary Dictionary*
- *Anna Weckerin and Her Delightful New Cookbook*
- *The Swiss Contribution to the World of Ice Cream Treats.*

### **Paula Gordon**

[www.dbaPlanB.com](http://www.dbaPlanB.com)

Paula's translation of an interview with Serbian writer Dragoslava Barzut, along with a short poem, was published on the *Words without Borders* "Dispatches" blog in July 2016: <http://tinyurl.com/wwbinterview>.

Paula's translation of three short stories by Bosnian visual artist and writer Shoba will appear in *Copper Nickel* 23 (September 2016). *Copper Nickel* is the literary journal of the University of Colorado Denver. Paula first read an excerpt of one of the stories at the Literary Division's After Hours Café in Chicago in 2014.



Dragoslava Barzut



## READERS' CORNER continued

**Anne Milano Appel's** latest publications:

Giuseppe Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You're Afraid* (*Non dirmi che hai paura*, Feltrinelli, 2014), August 2016, Penguin Press. The British edition appeared earlier in the year with a different title: *Little Warrior*, Faber and Faber, 2016.

Roberto Saviano, *My Italians* (*Vieni via con me*, Feltrinelli, 2011), May 2016, Penguin UK.

Francesca Borri, *Syrian Dust* (*La Guerra Dentro*, Bompiani, 2014), April 2016, Seven Stories Press.

And for those who may read Italian, here is an interview of mine that appeared on August 7, 2016: Emanuela Schenone, "I grandi italiani in altre parole" [Great Italians in Other Words], *Il Secolo XIX*, National Culture Section, August 7, 2016.

Subtitle: "In tempi di best seller globali, i traduttori diventano protagonisti. Anne Milano Appel, voce americana di Magris e Giordano: 'Con il mio lavoro infondo nuova vita a un'opera'" [In an age of global bestsellers, translators are becoming leading players. Anne Milano Appel, the American voice of Magris and Giordano: 'With my work, I instill new life into a text'].

[http://amilanoappel.com/xte\\_schenone.pdf](http://amilanoappel.com/xte_schenone.pdf)

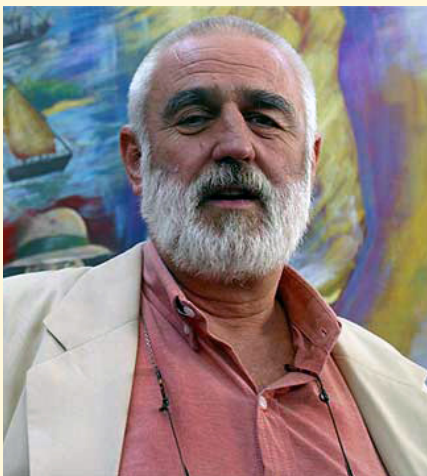


# MAFALDA

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW GRAHAM-YOOLL,  
TRANSLATOR OF THE FAMOUS ARGENTINE COMIC STRIP  
BY TONY BECKWITH



**MAFALDA and QUINO**



**Andrew Graham-Yooll**

**M***afalda is an extraordinary phenomenon. Created by the Argentine cartoonist Joaquín Salvador Lavado—better known by his pen name, Quino—it first appeared in a Buenos Aires magazine in 1964. Mafalda, the eponymous main character of the strip, is a 6-year-old girl who, in brief conversations with her family and friends, provides wry commentary on the daily life of Argentina’s struggling middle class (among other topics of varying depth). The strip became a huge success in Argentina and throughout the Spanish-speaking world, and Quino kept on producing it for the next ten years. It has been translated into over thirty languages<sup>1</sup> and, to this day, has devoted fans all over the world.*

*Andrew Graham-Yooll was born in Buenos Aires in 1944, of a Scottish father and an English mother. He is the author of about thirty books, in English and in Spanish, including the now-classic A State of Fear: Memories of Argentina's Nightmare (Eland, 1985). He joined the English-language newspaper The Buenos Aires Herald in 1966, but left ten years later when he had to go into exile during Argentina's military dictatorship, and settled in the UK. In Britain, he worked for The Daily Telegraph and The Guardian, and covered the Malvinas/Falkland Islands war in 1982. In 1989 he was appointed editor of Index on Censorship magazine (1989–1993). In 1994 he returned to Argentina and The Buenos Aires Herald, where he became editor and chairman of the board. He left the Herald in 2007 to become the Ombudsman at the Buenos Aires weekly Perfil, where he remained until 2013.*

*During his time in London he was also a Press Fellow at Wolfson College, University of Cambridge (1993–1994). In 2002, he was made a member of the Order of the British Empire (OBE). He has translated Argentine poetry and plays into English, and British and US poets and playwrights into Spanish.*

**Let's start with the fundamental question: What is humor?**

It is the light relief essential to any language, resorted to for the possibility of reducing seriousness in any and every circumstance or, simply, a form of entertainment.

**Do you believe each culture has its own kind of humor?**

Each culture and every subculture therein has to have its own brand of humor because that helps to convey certain aspects of particular groups that are usually expressive of a way of life and, more often, a way of enduring and overcoming difficult circumstances.

**Have you ever written humor, or used humor somehow in your work?**

I've never intentionally written humor, but often there is humor in certain moments and the way they are reported. Humor can spring from the way in which something is presented or written.

**Do you regularly read the comics in the paper?**

No longer regularly. I used to start reading the paper from the back, so always got to the comics first. The Internet changed my reading habits, even after working in a newsroom most of my life.

**Which are your favorites?**

The Herald used to print *Mutt & Jeff* and *Peanuts* (US), and they were always my favorites until *Andy Capp* (UK) came along. All were reflections of society in some way or another. *Peanuts*, of course, was seen as intellectual food.

**Have you always been a *Mafalda* fan?**

*Mafalda* started in the early 1960s and ran and ran. I met its creator, Quino towards the end of that decade when I interviewed him, and we remained sort of friends. But well before that meeting my wife and I enjoyed *Mafalda* in the *El Mundo* newspaper and in one of the weekly magazines. *Mafalda*'s life was a running commentary on the world around us and, at that time, the Cold War. She had an extraordinary ability to see things as they really were. "Everybody" read her.

**What is the secret of *Mafalda*'s success, locally and throughout Latin America?**

*Mafalda*'s success, in the early days, was based on her ability to criticize just about everything that was part of our daily life without being branded a subversive by the military regimes of various different stripes that controlled the country in the 1960s. She had something for everybody in Latin America. And as the decades passed, we learned that she was timeless.

**What comic strip would be *Mafalda*'s equivalent in the USA?**

The character is reminiscent of the *Nancy* cartoon—if only because of the round mop of hair. The strip owes next to nothing to *Peanuts*, but many people in the English-speaking world see a similarity between *Mafalda* and the Lucy character. These opinions must therefore be taken into account, whether one agrees with the comparison or not.





### How much of *Mafalda* is a product of Argentina, and specifically of Buenos Aires?

Mafalda's struggling middle-class family could be seen as a reflection of life in Buenos Aires in the 1960s: the man working his life away in an office to buy a Citroën 2CV, the jargon of the passers-by (mainly older men), and some specific political references. But the beauty of *Mafalda* was that she was born international or, at any rate, Latin American.

### Did the strip continue to appear during the repressive years of the Argentine dictatorships? How did Quino handle that situation?

Quino went to live in Italy. He chose exile rather than the silent survival that so many other Latin Americans had to accept. He liked Milan. But by the 1976 dictatorship, which was the most brutal, he had stopped drawing the *Mafalda* strip. His other cartoons, the single panel variety,



contained far stronger political and social commentary. In any case, his fame was based on *Mafalda*'s huge popularity, and the military disliked him for that (although many officers had actually been fed *Mafalda* in their teens and beyond).

A well-made comic strip is a work of art. It is not unreasonable to say that the military were oblivious to the fact that they were perceived throughout Latin America and elsewhere as being terrified of a good set of humorous drawings. If the military had understood quality art, then history might well have been different. The fact that a comic strip can be good art makes it a strong critical weapon.

**Would you say that *Mafalda* is the voice of a fairly broad cross-section of the Argentine public? Or is it broader than that?**

In its heyday the *Mafalda* strip had two million readers in Argentina, a swath of society that was considered to be the middle class. However, the little lady now represents all sorts and all classes. Some of the revolutionaries in those days may not have read the strip, but her image was often used on rebel posters and at demonstrations.

**Politics can be very local, and yet *Mafalda*'s appeal is virtually universal, especially in the Spanish-speaking world. How does Quino pull that off?**

Quino is a man of his time, although shy and withdrawn. He had this idea, which began as an advertisement he was commissioned to design and then the commission was withdrawn. So the character was born into the consumer market, and it grew from there.

**Now let's talk more specifically about the translation and your involvement in the project. How and when did it start? Who called you?**

I am not a full-time translator, but I liked the challenge of *Mafalda*. However, I could not take it on at the time because I was too involved in running the newsroom at the Buenos Aires Herald. A polite refusal was all I could offer. Then Quino and his publisher, Daniel Divinsky, came

back with the idea that I should be the “supervisor” until I was under less newsroom pressure. It was an opportunity that could not be ignored, especially since it came from the artist-author himself. The back-room work of supervising the English translation started in 2003, and I took over as translator in 2007.

**You worked as a translator earlier in your career. Please tell us about your previous literary translation projects.**

My feelings about translation are easily explained. I did not want to be full-time because I was afraid to make mistakes, because I had no training. I had my other job, in a newsroom, which I loved. So many people, at least in my part of the world, say they are translators and their offerings are atrocious. Translation quality is getting better, but still there is a lot of work that is quite poor, especially when government employees claim they can do the job. *Mafalda*, however, was a challenge that demanded one’s best effort.

Given my history as a copy-editor in the newsroom, whenever I look at an article I start thinking about how to improve the text, right or



wrong. Every writer contemplates changes in their copy, and translation involves rewriting other people's writings. Perhaps the exercise is best described as a transfer from one language to another, and that means changes. It became obvious to me that I should avoid translating. I did not even translate my own books, in either direction because I spent so much time wondering if the words were adequate, if they improved the text, or if the change was even necessary.

I translated five plays from the Theater for Identity series created by the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a protest group in Buenos Aires that works to learn the identities of children stolen from their captive mothers, many of whom were later murdered, by the military dictatorship in the 1970s. The English versions were published in Britain by Index on Censorship magazine, and then staged at a north-London theater. After completing the ten *Mafalda* books, I was asked to translate another comic strip—about a cat called *Gaturro*—by Nik (the Argentine artist Cristian Dzwonik), and am currently at Book 4.

I have translated two books of poetry by Argentine writers, and compiled two bilingual anthologies of Argentine poetry in English. I translated into Spanish a book of poems by the English playwright Harold Pinter. I have sometimes had to translate my own articles into Spanish or English, but I always seem to make a huge meal out of it. I want to rewrite it from scratch, which is time-consuming for me and, quite rightly, annoying to those who have approached me to get something translated. It just takes too much time, so these days I prefer to refuse.

**When you translate, which is your preferred direction, from English to Spanish or vice versa?**

I am one of those cross-cultural products of empire, an Anglo-Argentine. I am proud of my two cultures and enjoy using both. I therefore move easily from one language to the other. We should all have two languages, it is a genuine response to the way the world works. It makes us better able to communicate in our two tongues, which is a starting point for learning more.





Please tell us about your preparation and process for the *Mafalda* project. Did you have a sort of checklist of aspects that you considered as you absorbed the words and images and the “message” of the text? Did you have any sort of classifying system based on subject matter or environment? Did you have set priorities to regulate the selection of what might have to be left out?

I cannot think of *Mafalda* as a project. It started as a test, almost a game for me, and moved on from there. To be honest, it was something that happened rather than something that was planned. I am sure that what I translated some years back will soon be picked up by others and changed, improved, expanded. Language moves, and translations shift with social changes. The language—the bubble dialogue of the comic strip—will have to adjust to the times when each remark is expressed in another language, even if the original Spanish never changes.

In preparation for translating *Mafalda* I researched several books, including Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (Routledge, 1995) and Giovanni Pontiero's *The Translator's Dialogue*, edited by Pilar Orero & Juan C. Sager (Benjamins, 1997). But

none of them had what I was looking for, which was advice on how to translate humor. The subject was mentioned a few times, but never in any depth.

The “message” of *Mafalda*, I think, is to entertain readers in a contemporary context. Words are chosen and put on a shelf, and from there each statement, each remark is shaped, as the translator and then the reader select what shape they want to give the dialogue.

Not much was left out because most of it could be adapted. There were only one or two strips that I found politically “incorrect” and out of step with the kind of changes that happen in every language.

**Who else was involved in the process?**

The first five books were translated by Terry Cullen, a very able translator. I took over later, after the early “supervision” stage, at the request of the author and the publisher.

**Did you have someone to bounce things off?**

No, but comments did flood in after the first and second books. This was good, because it meant that a large number of anonymous readers were out there watching, and they were not inclined to be courteous in their comments.

**Some Argentine Spanish is very autonomous. Did you have trouble finding universal ways in which to express certain very local expressions?**

This is where language becomes a living, free body. It is possible to dig up words with wide-ranging usage and meanings, but they must accurately reflect the original. It was great fun to search for just the right words, though some readers may feel I did not dig deeply enough. In some cases (fiction, poetry, humor, etc.), translation is a stiff and incomplete word; I prefer the idea of a language transfer.

**Were some of the challenges of this project reminiscent of translating poetry? The brevity of the text, for example?**



The brevity of the bubble text might be the only part that compares to a line of poetry. Otherwise, I prefer to think that each goes its own way. The comparison might appear to be in the use of encompassing words, which is so beautiful when done well in poetry, but I prefer to think of the comic strip as something different.

**The translation of that bubble text sometimes sounds British. Was that a conscious marketing choice, or does it sound that way because that's the English you naturally speak?**

The translation sounds British at times because that was what the author wanted and what I have always used. I think what we sought to create was a kind of mid-Atlantic style which I agree does not always work.

**You also had to deal with the historical time factor. *Mafalda* first appeared in 1964; much has changed since then, adding another layer to what a translator has to deal with.**

There were numerous "dated" words that clearly belonged in another age. For example, references to computers, PCs, notebooks, etc. In those days in Argentina, IBM was the only computer manufacturer, and everybody referred to computers as "la IBM". Keep in mind, too, that the strips were published during the Vietnam War, U Thant was the UN Secretary General, and so on. In each case the language and names had to be brought up to date or silenced in some way.

**What was the hardest part about the *Mafalda* project?**

Parting with the copy. At times I drove the publisher daft trying to explain that I absolutely needed to rethink one word on page 52 or wherever. That is not acceptable in commercial publishing. So they would send someone on a bike to fetch the copy, and I kept whinging about being unsure until the package had left my hands.

**What was the greatest reward?**

As always, seeing the product in print.

## Is Quino still producing comic strips?

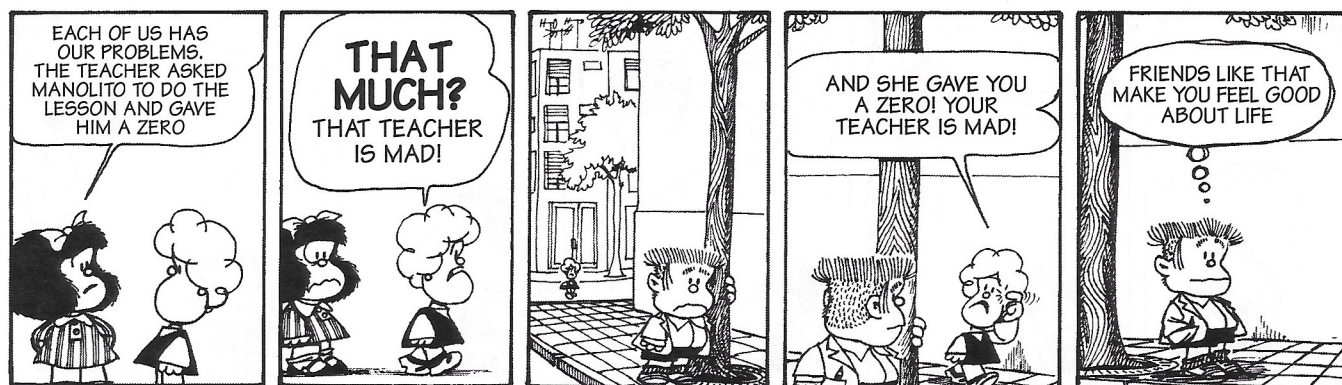
Quino no longer produces *Mafalda* or any other comic strip. He is like many of us oldies who wonder about the continuing success of *Mafalda*. It is still in bookstores and on newsstands.

## One final question: do you think you can be objective enough to say whether *Mafalda* is as funny in English as it is in Spanish?

I can't be objective. People express their own opinions and may be credible, but are not necessarily objective. I think *Mafalda* in Spanish is seriously funny, which explains the strip's original appeal. I would not argue that my translation is as good as Quino's original simply because it is not the original. Quino is the inventor, I cannot improve on his work; hence *Mafalda* is funnier in Spanish. Humor is partly a product of its background. When transferred to another environment it might not be so funny. So, it is reasonable to say that a translation can work but not have the same impact as the original.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The English version appeared as a series of books, *Mafalda & Friends*, published by Ediciones de la Flor in Buenos Aires.



# WAYS TO DISAPPEAR

## BY IDRA NOVEY:

A TRANSLATOR-TURNED-WRITER  
WRITES A NOVEL ABOUT A TRANSLATOR  
LOOKING FOR HER WRITER IN BRAZIL



**Rafa Lombardino** is a translator and journalist from Brazil who lives in California. She is the author of *Tools and Technology in Translation — The Profile of Beginning Language Professionals in the Digital Age*, which is based on her UCSD Extension class by the same name. Rafa has been working as a translator since 1997 and, in 2011, started to join forces with self-published authors to translate their work into Portuguese and English. In addition to acting as content curator at *eWordNews.com*, a collective blog about translation and literature, she also runs *Word Awareness*, a small network of professional translators, and coordinates *Contemporary Brazilian Short Stories (CBSS)*, a project to promote Brazilian literature worldwide.

**W***ays to Disappear* is not a book in translation, but it's so closely related to what we do for a living that you cannot but overanalyze it while reading it.

Maybe it's just me, but do book translators read for pleasure anymore? Most of the time, I catch myself translating in my head after I read each sentence. Other times, I end up putting the book down to think about word choices and turns of phrases. It is only when a book falls into my "guilty pleasure" category—anything zombie—or when I'm reading to my children that I can finally relax as a reader. And I must say I was not completely relaxed while reading *Ways to Disappear*.

Here's the synopsis: Portuguese-to-English translator leaves everything behind in her quiet snowy town in the United States to go looking for the elderly writer she's been studying and translating for years and who has suddenly disappeared from steamy Rio de Janeiro. Parallel to the plot, I kept thinking about Idra Novey's own backstory. In this debut novel, Novey places Emma, the translator, at the center of the story. Still, she isn't quite the protagonist, but rather an observer who is living in the shadows of the true main character, the writer, a woman who is no longer there.

### *Listen to an [interview](#) with the author*

Emma seems to be two people at once: a mild-mannered American in Pittsburgh, who has a live-in boyfriend and appears to be content with her life, thus delaying plans to get married and start a family; and the Portuguese-speaking foreigner who is willing to take risks, both emotionally and physically, while looking for her other self—author Beatriz Yagoda, a woman who is deep in debt because of gambling issues, leaving her two grown children somewhat worried about her sudden disappearing act, although it's not the first time it happens.

This is not a book in translation, but everything indicates that Novey made a conscious decision to write it as if it were. Critics praised her style, which mixes thriller and humor, but it is the linguistic solutions she found along the way that actually speak volumes, especially to readers who are themselves translators. She kept untranslatable words intact in Portuguese, added some made-



up vocabulary entries, and made many cultural references to Rio and Brazil, to such an extent that some readers may think there are far too many of them in the book. I personally wondered whether these references were fully appreciated by readers who don't speak the language and have never visited the country. Then again, the author opted for the internationalization of her story to take readers, Brazilians and non-Brazilian alike, to the scalding hot weather below the equator while following Emma everywhere she goes.

*Read the author's [interview with The Guardian](#)  
and listen to a [podcast episode](#)*

All in all, the writing style may be innovative and intriguing, but the story itself seemed somewhat incomplete. Perhaps it was the author's attempt to conclude with a fantastic twist a tale that is firmly rooted in reality. Still, one powerful sentence remains as a striking image of a translator's task to disappear into the authors and books she translates:

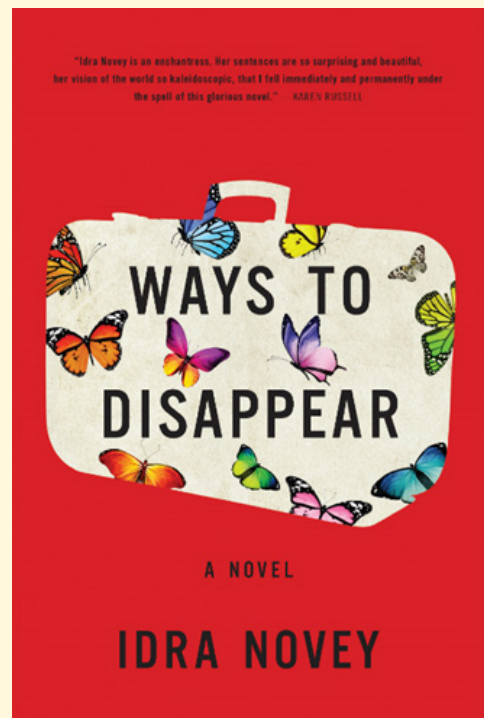
In the bathroom mirror, Emma stared at the reflection of her hand, the brush in it that was not hers but to whose bristles she had just added a layer of her hair. In her mind, a medieval courtroom appeared. (...) everyone in the gallery was staring in her direction. They could see her, or at least found her legible enough to be tried for her alleged crimes."

### *Ways to Disappear*

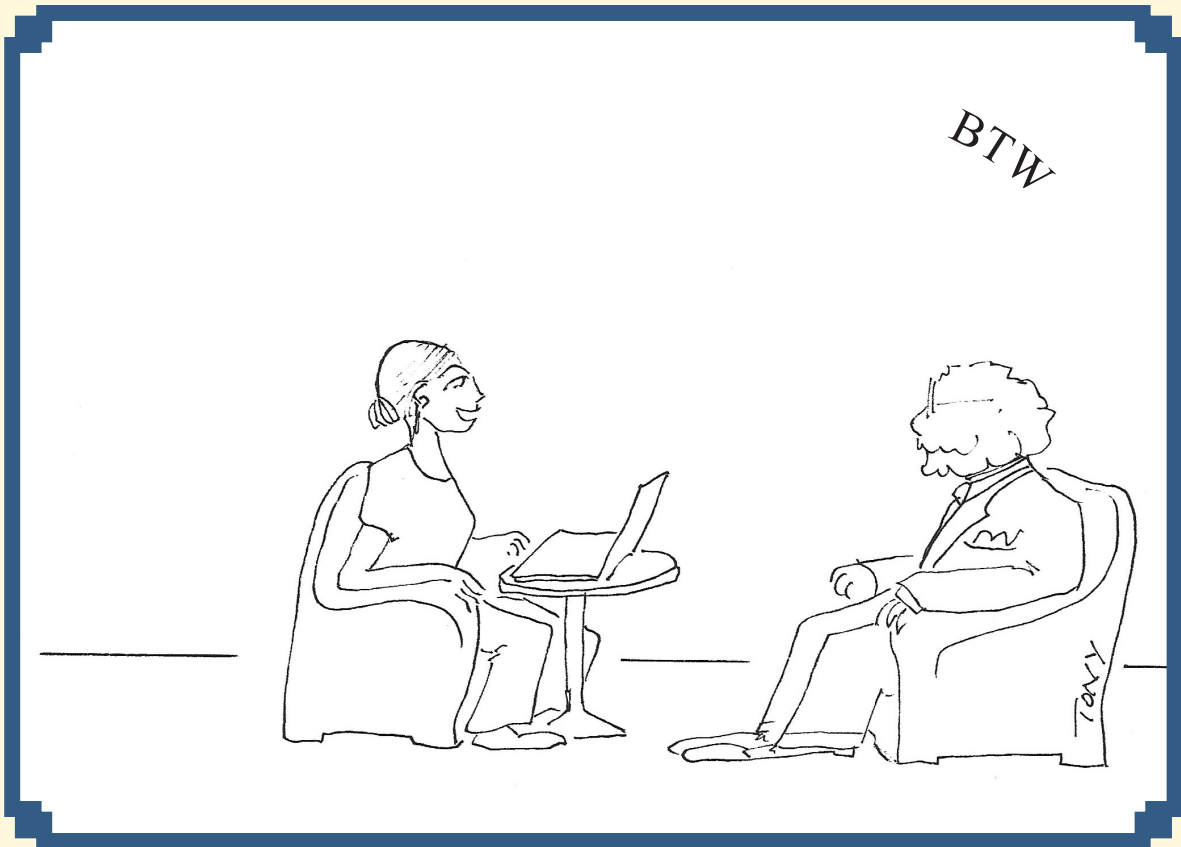
Idra Novey

Little, Brown & Company, 2016

[Paperback](#) | [Kindle](#)







*"I did it again! I overshot the learning curve  
and crashed into a language barrier."*

# TRANSLATING CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS: NANETTE MCGUINNESS AND MERCEDES GUHL IN CONVERSATION



**Nanette McGuinness** is the translator of over 40 books for children and adults, including several popular graphic novel series—Geronimo Stilton, Dinosaurs, Thea Stilton, and The Sisters—Vittorio Giardino's No Pasaran Vol. 3, the latest Sherlock, Lupin & Me and Enchanted Emporium novels, and California Dreamin' (upcoming). An award-winning opera singer, Nanette earned her PhD from UC Berkeley and BA from Cornell University. She first translated libretti/lyrics/documents for her studies and performances, beginning freelance translation in 2001 and literary translation, as well as her blog <http://MusicAndWordsOnTheRoad.blogspot.com>, in 2008. Published in national and local magazines, Nanette gave the first-ever translation session for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) in 2015.



**Mercedes Guhl** started translating children's books in 1990, while completing her BA in Philosophy and Literature. After getting her MA in Translation Studies at University of Warwick (UK), she combined translation teaching at the graduate level in Colombia along with free-lance translation, mainly for the book industry, first for Colombian publishing houses and then for Dominican and Mexican ones. For several years she wrote book reviews for literary magazines and for publishers, and now she comments on translation in her blog: [traduzcoluegoescribo.mercedesguhl.com](http://traduzcoluegoescribo.mercedesguhl.com). Since 2008, she has been involved in organizing the Mexican Translators Organization's annual conference within Guadalajara's International Book Fair (FIL).

**N**anette McGuinness and Mercedes Guhl met each other virtually. Prolific translators, each has a long list of publication credits in children's and young adult (YA) literature, as well as in other genres. They are scheduled to give a joint presentation at the ATA 57th Annual Conference in San Francisco this fall. The following is a dialogue between them about children's books, young readers, and translation.

**Nanette:** How did you become a children's book translator?

**Mercedes:** My background is in philosophy, literature, and publishing; it was merely by chance that I became a children's book translator. I started working in the children's books division of a publishing house, so I got to know the field. Over time I discovered that there is playfulness in the language in books for young readers that I didn't always find in those for adults. Translating children's books meant I had the opportunity to find a way to play with language, too. How about you?

**Nanette:** My entry point as a literary translator was also sideways. I've written all my life, as well as being an opera singer. While I have a Master's degree in Vocal Performance, I also have a PhD specializing in musicology, which is essentially writing about music history. During an extended period of health issues when it was harder for me to perform, I found myself drawn to writing and translating for children, as I spoke French before English. Once healthy—my singing career thriving again—I continued to write and translate. Children's books, and especially graphic novels for children, make up the bulk of my translation list.

**Mercedes:** I've noticed a tendency among some publishers and critics to think that children's books and graphic novels are written by authors who somehow never grew up. Do you think this stereotype applies to children's book translators at all?

**Nanette:** A bit. People are coming to respect the challenge and art of translation for readers of any age, although there is occasionally less

respect given to a children's book/graphic novel translator, as if s/he were learning the craft on children before growing up to translate "real" books.

**Mercedes:** I beg to differ with this line of thinking, as creating books for children is one of the most important things a writer or translator can do!

**Nanette:** No argument here. As for never growing up? That's missing the point. A lot of what I do as a singer is quite grown up: for example, over the past five years I've been performing works associated with poets and composers exiled or killed during the Holocaust, resulting in my latest CD, "Surviving: Women's Words." So I don't lack for "adulthood" chops. I think, rather it's more the case that most writers and translators—and musicians, for that matter—are simply multifaceted, and that those who work in children's literature are still able to look at the world through a child's newer, less-experienced eyes.

**Mercedes:** Something else comes to mind in that connection. Although many people think you need to have had children in order to write or translate children's books, I don't agree. Still, having children changed my approach to translating and even to reading children's books.

**Nanette:** I never lost my love of children's books and graphic novels; having a son just allowed me to revisit my old favorites and invited me to reenter a literary world that I had loved as a child. I read extensively—all writers and translators do, I think—and I get to read material for all ages.

**Mercedes:** One big difference between adult and children's books is, of course, the vocabulary, and how much books in different languages and from different cultures simplify or don't simplify the word choice and linguistic structure for children's books, whether conventional or graphic.

**Nanette:** Yes, that differs; it's partly a function of the writers' styles, too. Interestingly, I've found that the widest divergence from one



culture to the next exists in books for middle grade readers (ages 7-12, approximately)—both in conventional and graphic novels. Have you found any differences in translating books for different age levels?

**Mercedes:** Definitely. When looking at the bigger picture, using reader age as the vantage point, I've found that the younger the reader, the bigger the liberties the translator can and possibly must take, adapting names, puns, jokes, cultural references, etc. Wordplay can be such a huge part of a children's book, as can literary devices such as alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia, and they all require the translator's "ear," as well as creative flexibility and freedom, to be rendered in another language.

**Nanette:** Exactly! Picture books, which are generally for under age 7, are so much like poetry, where each word is precious, and the sound, meaning, rhythm, and rhyme (if present) are all crucial. In a 400-word picture book, there is no room for verbal fat nor for a lack of native "clarity" or missing the flavor of the original, whereas in a 30,000-word middle-grade novel, even though all of those are important (minus rhyme, generally), AND every word is still precious, there's a little more room for linguistic fat and thus more leeway.

**Mercedes:** You have to take the visuals into account when translating picture books and books for the youngest readers, because the visuals are telling half the story, if not more. Also, translating visual genres (picture books and graphic novels) requires less time, or perhaps publishers give you less time, as there are fewer words. Yet it does not mean that translating a picture book or graphic novel is easier than a conventional novel. In fact, often it can take a good deal longer to translate 100 words in a visual genre than 100 words in a conventional children's novel, because you have to rack your brains a good deal more to accommodate the added complications! What are your thoughts about translating graphic novels for children?

**Nanette:** Translating graphic novels for children is a bit of a mixed genre, as its linguistic feet are in two camps: translating a children's book and translating a visual book. Structurally, a graphic novel is more like a picture book than it's like a conventional novel, because in a graphic novel, over half the narrative and plot are carried by the illustrations, and, except for sidebars and captions, the text is almost exclusively dialogue. Much is only made clear in the illustrations.

**Mercedes:** Just like in a picture book, because the text doesn't convey all the details.

**Nanette:** Yes. And since there's virtually no narrative description on the page in a graphic novel, the images are key for knowing what the action is, how to render the expressions the translator puts into a given character's mouth, and even how that character feels about it—especially as one wants to make the dialogue for each character ring as “true” as possible. Plus, due to graphic novels' roots in comic books, sight gags, jokes, wordplay, and visual wordplay are a large part of the genre.

Compared to a graphic novel, a conventional novel requires a different set of translational “muscles,” too, as the length and scale are different, i.e., one is a long form and the other, a short one. A conventional novel has tens of thousands more words than a graphic novel, so translating a conventional novel takes different pacing and stamina.

**Mercedes:** And more time. The sheer number of words in a conventional novel makes it longer to translate than a graphic novel.

**Nanette:** That's true. Also, while there's always dialogue in both genres, dialogue carries much less narrative “weight” in a conventional novel, where there are extensive paragraphs of pure description. These can require different kinds of thinking and internal listening. Due to the different proportion of dialogue to description and also the length of the text, it can feel as though one needs to get much more deeply under

the “skin” of the author’s and characters’ voices in a conventional novel compared to many graphic novels.

**Mercedes:** It seems like there’s often more slang in graphic novels.

**Nanette:** And they’re more “talky,” too. It’s a function of the amount of dialogue versus description. Still, whether I’m translating graphic novels, picture books, or conventional middle-grade or young adult novels, I find translating for young readers a delightful task—and an important one—so that the youngest minds around the world can hear diverse voices from different cultures rendered in their own language, starting from the earliest age.

**Mercedes:** That’s very important, and something that a number of organizations and publishers are starting to recognize. Translations can and do sell well, for readers of all ages, and growing up hearing varied voices is very important in today’s global society.

**Nanette:** In the end, translating for children is different mostly in scale and scope from translating for adults. Whether you’re working with adults’ or children’s books, graphic novels or conventional ones, the art of the literary translator is always—magically, with a lot of work—to inhabit the writer’s universe, language, and style, honoring both the work’s origin and destination, and somehow transmuting it alchemically, conveying its words, style, sound, and meaning into the new language as faithfully and accurately as possible—no matter the age of the reader.

**Note:** Parts of this conversation originally appeared in McGuinness’ 2015 interview with translator Avery Fischer-Udegawa:  
<http://scbwi.blogspot.com/2015/06/translation-at-la15scbwi-avery-udagawa.html>

# AN INTERVIEW WITH ERIK CAMAYD-FREIXAS PART III: INTERPRETING ETHICS

BY JESSE TOMLINSON  
(SEE PAGE 5 FOR HER BIO AND PHOTO)



Dr. Camayd-Freixas

**Dr. Camayd-Freixas** is a professor of Spanish and Director of the Translation and Interpretation Program at Florida International University. A Harvard-trained communications analyst, social theorist, and expert linguist at federal and state courts, he has testified before Congress, contributed as *amicus curiae* to the U.S. Supreme Court, and received human rights awards from the American Immigration Lawyers Association, the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, the Guatemalan Foreign Ministry, and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. He has interpreted for ten heads of state, including President Obama and Pope Benedict XVI.

*Dr. Camayd-Freixas has lectured on linguistic, literary, and cultural studies, immigration, labor, ethics, and human rights in law schools, bar associations, and professional organizations nationally and internationally. Dr. Camayd-Freixas specializes in cultural studies, literature, and historiography of the colonial and contemporary periods of Latin America and the Caribbean and has a number of very interesting articles available online.*

(See <http://dll.fiu.edu/people/faculty/erik-camayd-freixas/>.)



In May 2008, Dr. Camayd-Freixas served as a certified Spanish-language court interpreter at hearings in the case of a raid at a meatpacking plant in Postville, Iowa, carried out by a U.S. Homeland Security agency, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). As a result of this experience, a month later, in an essay entitled “Interpreting after the Largest ICE Raid in US History: A Personal Account,”<sup>1</sup> he explored the following questions: When does participation become a conflict of interest? What does it mean to be part of a system that criminalizes illegal immigration? What are the ethics involved in helping put innocent people in jail?

On July 11, 2008, *The New York Times* published a front-page article including a link to his essay and highlighting the case, its proceedings, and how Dr. Camayd-Freixas had spoken up about the plight of immigrants:

*In 23 years as a certified Spanish interpreter for federal courts, Erik Camayd-Freixas has spoken up in criminal trials many times, but the words he uttered were rarely his own.*

*Then he was summoned here by court officials to translate in the hearings for nearly 400 illegal immigrant workers arrested in a raid on May 12 at a meatpacking plant. Since then, Mr. Camayd-Freixas, a professor of Spanish at Florida International University, has taken the unusual step of breaking the code of confidentiality among legal interpreters about their work.*

*In a 14-page essay he circulated among two dozen other interpreters who worked here, Professor Camayd-Freixas wrote that the immigrant defendants whose words he translated, most of them villagers from Guatemala, did not fully understand the criminal charges they were facing or the rights most of them had waived.*

*In the essay and an interview, Professor Camayd-Freixas said he was taken aback by the rapid pace of the proceedings and the pressure prosecutors brought to bear on the defendants and their lawyers by pressing criminal charges instead of deporting the workers immediately for immigration violations.<sup>2</sup>*

Two days later, this article was followed up by a *New York Times* editorial “The Shame of Postville, Iowa.”<sup>3</sup> And in 2013, Dr. Camayd-Freixas examined the case and its implications in greater depth in his book *U.S. Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact: Lessons from the Postville Raid*.<sup>4</sup> The following interview provides an overview of his thoughts about the aftermath of this controversial case.

**Eight years after your essay was published in *The New York Times*, have there been any notable reactions?**

There have been many notable reactions and results. Initially, my decision to speak out was controversial in the inner sanctum of judicial interpreter organizations, although many individual interpreters and, particularly, medical interpreter organizations immediately came on my side. But let me come back to the professional question a bit later, in order to first take a wider view.

The first notable result is that it brought the whole era of the large worksite immigration raids to an end. Shortly after the Postville scandal, an even larger raid was executed in Laurel, Mississippi, on August 25, 2008. Like other large raids, it had been in the planning for almost a year, well before Postville, so Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) went ahead with it. But significantly, only a handful of workers, who had previous deportations, were brought up on federal charges, whereas in Postville all the workers, over 300 of them, were charged with aggravated identity theft. After my essay and congressional testimony, no federal prosecutor or judge would be foolish enough to take on another mass prosecution like Postville’s. The “crimigration” machine had been stopped in its tracks, and the very concept of worksite raids had become the subject of bad press and official embarrassment. The Laurel raid would be the end of an era. It was the last raid of the Bush Administration.

It is important to note that Postville’s was the only felony mass prosecution in U.S. history, indeed in the history of modern democracy. The combination of a massive worksite raid followed by fast-track criminal prosecution for identity theft, months of incarceration, and

deportation without a hearing as a “criminal alien” barred for life from the United States was a pilot project to be replicated at scale across the country and in Group of Eight (G8) states around the world, with dire consequences for human rights. It had to be stopped.

However, stopping the large worksite raids was only a partial solution. In late February 2009, there was a small raid at a factory in Bellingham, Washington. It was the first and last of the Obama Administration, which disapproved of worksite raids altogether. However, ICE responded by increasing home invasion raids instead, in order to maintain their deportation statistics and secure the following year’s budget. Despite President Obama’s best intentions and pro-immigrant executive orders, immigration arrests, incarcerations, and deportations increased to a record 400,000 per year during his presidency. It shows that the real control of immigration enforcement lies not with the Executive, but with the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, which continues to overfund ICE.

In very real sense, the entire U.S. immigration system is corrupt. Migrants are lured by labor recruiters and loan sharks. Once here, they are shamelessly exploited as a captive and indentured labor force by abusive employers with huge political influence, such that labor laws are not enforced. The Feds participate in their captivity by arresting those who stray away from the plantations, incarcerating them in engorged for-profit prisons, and criminalizing them with bogus charges in order to bolster their “criminal alien” deportation statistics and thereby get massive budget increases from Congress. As a result, U.S. immigration enforcement, composed of ICE and CBP (the Border Patrol), is now the largest police force in the world.

But my exposé of the Postville case was crucial in an important U.S. Supreme Court decision (08-108 Flores-Figueroa v. United States). I collaborated with a team from NYU Law School on an amicus brief, and on March 4, 2009, we won a unanimous 9-0 decision to disallow the use of felony identity theft prosecution against harmless workers. This removed the hammer of abusive criminalization for over seven million

undocumented workers in the United States. It took the sharpest teeth out of the American “crimigration” machine.

Going back to the controversy of my speaking out, I have to say that I received numerous human rights awards from different organizations, including criminal and immigration lawyers associations, and yet absolute silence from interpreters organizations, which were not prepared for a challenge to their rigid and simplistic codes of ethics. Nevertheless, all of the experts in professional ethics who have written at length about my case agree with my actions. This includes books by Sibirsky and Taylor (2010); Baker (2011); Dueñas, Vasquez, and Mikkelsen (2012); and Inghilleri (2012).

Most importantly, together with the Interfaith Immigration Coalition (IIC), we were able to help hundreds of families in Iowa, Mexico, and Guatemala. In 2010, I contributed to Luis Argueta’s documentary *abUSed: The Postville Raid*, which features some of these families;<sup>5</sup> and in 2013, I published my book *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, which includes an in-depth analysis of the case.

**In your essay, you describe an interpreter as “a layperson, an outsider, a true representative of the common citizen, [...] an informed layperson [...] the only one who gets to see both sides of the coin up close, precisely because he is the *only* participant who is not a decision maker, and is even precluded, by his oath of impartiality and neutrality, from ever influencing the decisions of others” (p. 9).**

Significantly, in federal law, the figure of the “informed layperson” is the standard of reasonableness for evaluating judicial misconduct, bias, and conflicts of interest, such as, for example, in motions for recusal of judges. The reason you need a lay perspective is because lawyers and jurists, from being immersed in the law, tend to develop an institutionalized, uncritical mentality. Just because there is a legal precedent for something, that does not make it right. Some of the defense attorneys in the Postville case saw nothing wrong with the prosecution of their innocent clients. And yet the U.S. Supreme Court did.



**For me this perfectly sums up the role of an interpreter and also shows the crux of the matter of interpreting. Being an interpreter means never meddling but at the same time wanting to help. The knowledge gleaned from being on both sides of an issue becomes almost too much to let go of.**

That's right. You cannot "un-know" something, and if you try to ignore it, the knowledge of it will haunt you. You just have to learn to manage it. That is why I always say that interpreters are constantly making ethical choices as they interpret: "Should I say 'knife' or 'blade'?"

In every word choice there is an ethical choice, because words have denotations and connotations, and a semantic field that is different in every language. I often find myself evening the score as I interpret: If I feel that my word choice cuts in favor of the defense, I make it a point to next time err on the side of the prosecution. The difference is subtle, but then again, cases are often won or lost on a subtlety.

This is as far as you can intervene while you are interpreting. In the Postville case I had to wait until the cases were closed even to appeal, before I could utter a single word about it publicly. However, there was a big surprise in all of this. During my speaking engagements, I got to know many interpreters across the country and internationally, who are activists for various social causes when they are off the job. It is almost like a way of compensating for having to bite your tongue so much while on the job. So it seems to me that, when they were off the clock and went back to being human, or indeed "informed laypersons," the knowledge of injustice haunted them and prompted them to do something about it. I found ample validation in these colleagues.

**In terms of speaking up against injustice and what you have witnessed as an interpreter, is the situation described in your essay an exception? Or is the challenge you describe always present?**

Because of its sheer size and scope, this case was definitely an exception, something I have never encountered before or since.

Nevertheless, conflicts and issues do arise, which require the interpreter to bring the matter privately to the attention of a judge or presiding

officer. This is precisely what I did in the Postville case. After the sentencing hearings, I spoke privately with one of the eight federal judges, and although he agreed with me, I was distraught to learn that he was completely powerless to do anything about it. The whole thing had been predetermined by Homeland Security and the Department of Justice (DOJ)—two agencies of the Executive Branch co-opting a supposedly independent Judiciary. I was witnessing the breakdown of the separation of powers. That is how exceptional it was, a case with 306 defendants, prosecuted en masse. The thought of this happening again in a democracy is alarming, if not downright horrifying. In any case, when I saw a senior federal judge powerless in his own courtroom, I realized that the matter needed to be scrutinized by the legal community, and this is why I wrote my essay. The fact that it made it to Congress and the Supreme Court was an added bonus.

Whereas the situation itself may be exceptional, the challenge of facing some level of injustice is always present, simply because the legal system is not perfect. But generally such cases affect only a few individuals and do not have such deep ramifications. You definitely have to pick your battles. Moreover, any real or perceived injustices arising from regular cases are normally for the lawyers and judges to sort out, and are of no concern to the interpreter. When I wrote my essay on the Postville case, I was no longer under contract with the federal court, nor was I speaking as an interpreter. I was speaking as a citizen.

### **How do you engage students around this issue?**

The case has so many angles that, in a sense, it depends on what kind of student. You can engage translation and interpreting students from the point of view of professional ethics. Students from the social sciences would be more interested in immigration and human mobility, while law students will zero in on the legal aspects, and those from political science and international relations will mind the policy issues, and so forth.

While speaking at universities around the country I've had occasion to interact with many different kinds of students, and I

can tell you that in every case you have to approach this issue with the utmost diplomacy. I say this not only because of the differences of opinion there might be, but also because the reality of what is going on is so impactful.

I visited a graduate sociology class at Irvine that had my book as assigned reading. One student compared it to Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* about rural Oklahoma during the Great Depression: "It gets sadder and sadder, and it won't let up." For many students, our treatment of migrants comes as an upsetting shock. I often found myself having to reassure students that, despite its problems, this is still a great country and that our democracy, although imperfect, allows us the freedom to dissent and to fight for what we think is just.

**Since the publication of your essay, have there been other situations that have tested you in a similar manner?**

Not nearly to such an extent, but I do feel more empowered to stand my ground in not allowing myself to be used as an interpreter to facilitate any abusive interaction. For example, I sometimes interpret at FBI and DEA interrogations and debriefings, which occasionally get heated, but I will call out anyone who crosses the line of professionalism. In court the judge takes care of that, but when no judge is present, people can get out of line. If as an interpreter you lend yourself to abuse without protest, you lose your impartiality and become a confederate of the abuser.

Another challenging situation I have experienced, similar to Postville, was in Tucson. I was invited to visit the University of Arizona T&I Program, and my colleague there took me to the federal court to observe some "fast-track" Operation Streamline proceedings. Immigrant defendants were brought to court in rapid succession, dozens per day, and charged with a misdemeanor. Because crossing the border illegally is a civil infraction and not a criminal offense, legislators and the DOJ have had to concoct different ways of criminalizing migrants, in order to deport them as "criminal aliens," who would face serious prison time if they reentered. Within minutes each defendant was pressed to take a plea deal, sentenced on average to three months in prison, and ordered

deported without an immigration hearing, by way of an “Expedited Order of Removal” that was a condition of the plea bargain. Like in Postville, justice is short-changed every day, sadly enough, in Operation Streamline proceedings. I truly feel for the interpreters who work at those hearings, because I am familiar with their inner conflict. Still, there are important differences with the Postville case. Here the defendants are charged with misdemeanors and are mostly recent entrants apprehended near the border. In Postville they were charged with aggravated felonies, were already gainfully employed in the Midwest, and many had roots in the community for years, including U.S.-citizen children.

### **What advice can you offer from your experience?**

Very important: whenever you face difficult choices or challenges, consult before you react. Consult with colleagues and other people you trust and respect. During this journey, I consulted with many, many people, at every step of the way.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The full essay, dated June 13, 2008, is available at:

<http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2008/07/14/opinion/14ed-camayd.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Julia Preston, “An Interpreter Speaking Up for Migrants,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 2008. [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/11/us/11immig.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/11/us/11immig.html?_r=1)

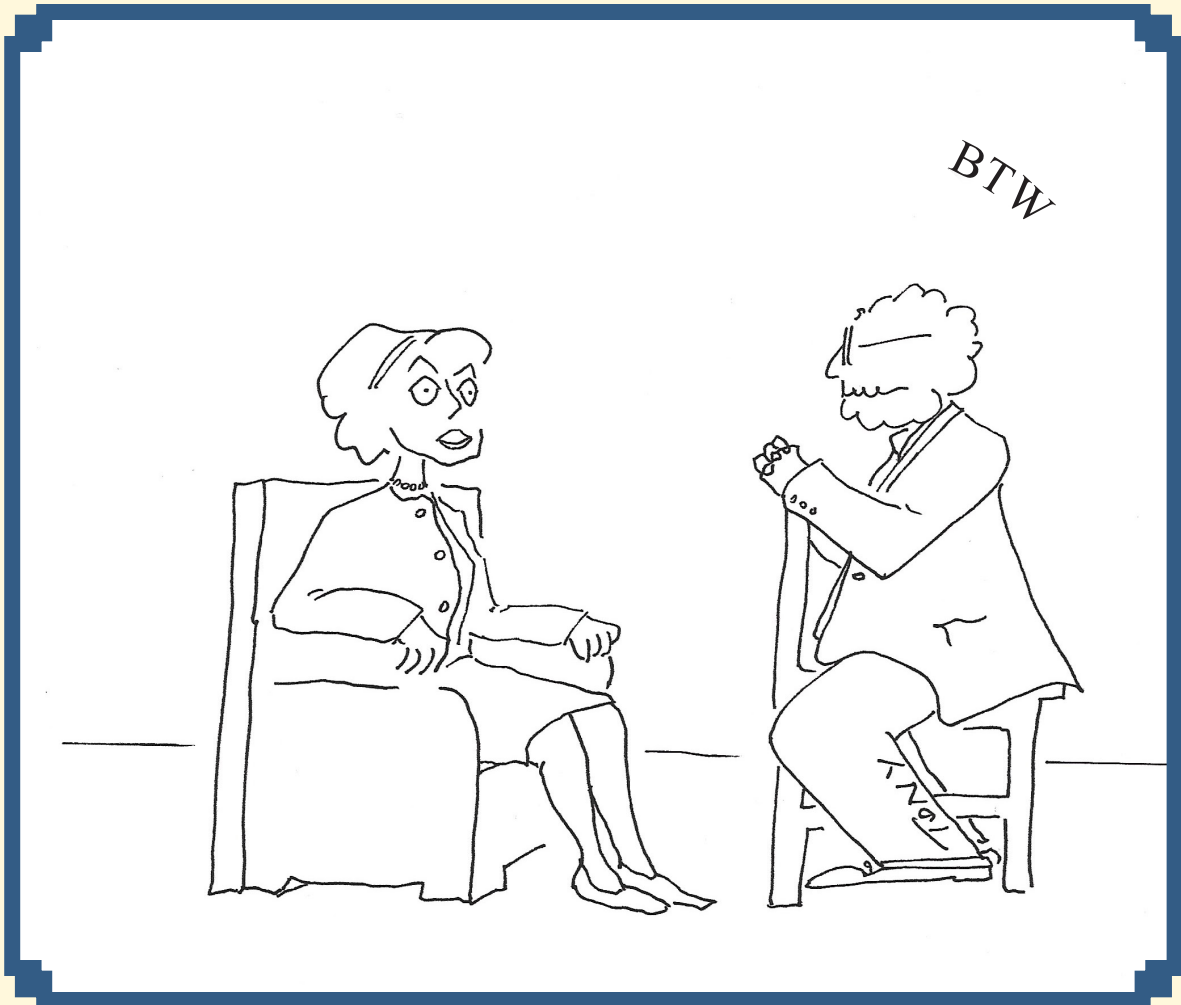
<sup>3</sup> “The Shame of Postville, Iowa,” The Opinion Pages, *The New York Times*, July 13, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/13/opinion/13sun2.html>

<sup>4</sup> Erik Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration and Its Global Impact: Lessons from the Postville Raid* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<http://www.palgrave.com/us/book/9780230105850>

<sup>5</sup> Luis Argueta documentary *abUSed: The Postville Raid*, 2010. See trailer at the website <http://www.abusedthepostvilleraid.com/>





*"I had a terrible nightmare! I was forced to stand up in public and admit I had never read anything by Proust."*

# A TRIBUTE TO THE COMIC BOOK ARTIST JEAN GIRAUD (AKA MŒBIUS)

BY PATRICK SAARI





Jean Henri Gaston Giraud  
(aka Moebius)

**Jean Henri Gaston Giraud (1938–2012)** *was a prolific French artist, cartoonist, and writer who garnered worldwide acclaim. Esteemed by Federico Fellini, Stan Lee, Hayao Miyazaki, and William Gibson (Neuromancer), he is probably the most influential bandes dessinées artist after Hergé of Tintin fame. Under the pseudonym “Mœbius,” he created a wide range of science fiction and fantasy comics, including the wildly imaginative and sophisticated illustrations for the epic mythological series The Incal (1981-1988), written by the Chilean filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky. The Incal is considered by many to be the world’s all-time best comic book/graphic novel. Giraud also inspired and/or contributed to films such as Ridley Scott’s Alien and Blade Runner, George Lucas’ The Empire Strikes Back (Star Wars), Luc Besson’s The Fifth Element, and James Cameron’s Abyss.*

Somewhere on the other side of the Tiber in Rome, not far from the Vatican, there is a large *palazzo* with hundreds of paintings dating back to the Renaissance. The painters had been the contemporaries of Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Bernini, Botticelli or Caravaggio, but no one knows about them. They are good enough to still be on display and have the walls of a handsome palace to hang on, but when placed alongside their more famous peers, they seem pale and conventional. It is a powerful reminder that someone like da Vinci or Michelangelo emerged out of a culture that produced hundreds, even thousands of painters, and thrived because, over centuries, millions cared about good pictures, although only a handful of masters still command our attention.

The same holds true for Mœbius. When he was a teenager in the fifties, comic strips of all kinds were appearing all over the world, from mangas in Japan to superhero tales in America. And Hergé's *Tintin*, already well-established in Europe since the thirties, was becoming an international hit thanks to translation. By the time Mœbius came out, in 1963, with his first truly original comic, *Blueberry*, the story of a rough U.S. Army cavalry lieutenant, who after the Civil War has dozens of adventures in the Far West but is more akin to Clint Eastwood in Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns than to John Wayne, the golden age of comics had come to an end, making way for a new age of increasing sophistication and maturity, to such an extent that, in America, the new term "graphic novel" was coined to replace the lowbrow popular term "comics." And Mœbius was going to ride high on this new wave.

It's not haphazardly that Mœbius is mentioned in the same breath as the Renaissance. In an interview 20 years ago in Mexico,<sup>1</sup> Mœbius urged illustrators to go to museums and examine the work of great painters:

You have to scrutinize the old masters, those who use their paintings to speak to us, regardless of the art movement they belonged to or the historical period they painted in, because that doesn't matter; you have to examine them taking special care to make out both the physical structure and emotional composition of their paintings. You have to decipher how a specific combination of lines used by a specific artist reaches out to us and touches our heart directly.

Mœbius was also a great proponent of working outside (*en plein air*) as the Impressionist painters Monet and Renoir, the Barbizon school artists Millet and Corot, and the Englishman J.M.W. Turner had done in the nineteenth century: "It's better to draw from real space than from photographs, so you can exercise your skill in bringing perspective into play." According to Mœbius, for authenticity, illustrators have to be keen observers of people as well. "When an artist or draftsman goes out walking, he doesn't see the same things normal people see.

What he sees is a documentary about how people live, about people themselves." Bodies and faces are the focus of all great comics: "To make sure readers believe the story, the characters have to have their own lives and personalities, gestures that come from who they truly are, from their illnesses, because the shape of the body changes depending on the life it has led. And the anatomy's structure, the location of body fat, each individual muscle, every wrinkle you see on the face and body are capable of transmitting a message. It's something you spend your entire life observing."

In contrast to *Tintin's* Hergé and *Asterix's* Uderzo, who had clearly defined styles that remained unchanged throughout their careers, Moebius played with different looks, colors, and types of drawing, even within a single series. In the case of *Tintin*, for example, all the figures are rounded and clearly etched just like those from Walt Disney's animated feature movies. Moebius, however, makes his characters evolve and rub shoulders with others who are very different. In *The Incal*, an Honoré Daumier caricature seems to be the source of inspiration for the hero (or rather anti-hero), John Difool, a scrawny frazzled partially brain-washed second-rate detective. He has deeply lined face, a grim mouth, a powerful hooked nose, long crazy red hair pulled back in a ponytail, but over time his traits are softened, and by the end of the series he looks almost handsome and wise. By contrast, Animah, the psychic guardian of the sacred Incal, who becomes Difool's lover, is a conventionally beautiful, delicately drawn lady fit for a catwalk in a fashion show, as is her only offspring, the androgynous prophet Sunmoon (*Solune* in French).

In Moebius's 1986 album of illustrations, his famous painting of the *Starwatcher* highlights a completely different style: the otherworldly face of the girl astronaut is painted with the fine shading technique called *sfumato* invented by Leonardo da Vinci, which he used to good effect for his angels, madonnas, saints, and the *Mona Lisa*. For his *Blueberry* series, however, Moebius initially patterned the rugged look of his Far West anti-hero, Lieutenant Blueberry, after Jean-Paul Belmondo. In another comic book series, *Arzach* (1975), ground-breaking because it does not



have a single caption or speech balloon, the eponymous warrior flying on a pterodactyl and the vast gothic universe he inhabits are unique. In *The Airtight Garage* (*Le Garage Hermétique*) (1976-1979), Major Grubert, the tall, straight-backed, lanky German space explorer (dressed as a British major with a colonial uniform and helmet) who creates an asteroid called the Airtight Garage, is also utterly distinctive, as is the parallel world he's created.

And in 2010, when Moebius was commissioned by the 180-year-old French high fashion luxury goods manufacturer Hermès to make paintings on the travels of the Greek god Hermes, he came up with six impressive paintings, one of which, entitled *Baudrillard* (*Good Wave* in English), pays tribute to the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) and his notion of "hyperrealism" but is also reminiscent of the famous 1830 woodblock print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by the Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai, once again confirming the exceptionally broad range of Moebius's talent and his interest, late in life, in continuing to explore and fine-tune different visual styles.

Although the art in individual panels can be explored and admired, comic books are narratives, and each image must be part of a whole, interlocked with an evolving plot from frame to frame, from page to page. In his 1996 interview in Mexico, Moebius explained how visual resources can be used by illustrators to contribute to the narrative flow of their stories:

We have to examine the layout of our stories, because a page or a panel is like a face staring back at readers and saying something to them. It's not just a series of meaningless framed drawings. Some panels are full, others are empty, some have a vertical thrust, others a horizontal spread, and when you choose either one or the other, it's for a clear purpose. A vertical drawing gives impetus; a horizontal one brings appeasement; a diagonal drawing toward the right, for those of us who belong to Western civilization, represents action aimed at the future, whereas a diagonal drawing toward the left brings action back to the past. Dots represent a scattering of energy. Something placed at the very center of the panel bundles energy and attention, makes readers focus.

In addition to landscapes, crowd scenes, and battles, yet another element that links Mœbius back to the Renaissance is his interest in the clothes of his characters. Renaissance painters lavished color and shading to capture the contours, flow, and expressiveness of the togas, capes, dresses, mantles, and coats worn by the characters in their paintings, whether from Greek, Roman or Biblical times. And Mœbius showed the same concern:

The characters' clothes are also important: the wear and tear, quality, and texture of the fabric are a testament to their experiences, their lives, their current status in the adventure, and they can say a great deal without the need for a single word. In a dress, there are a thousand wrinkles and folds, but you have to choose only two or three, and they have to be the right ones.

If Mœbius had been living in the 1820s in Paris, he would have been forced to take sides in the debate about whether Aristotle's classical unities should be upheld as Jean Racine had done in the seventeenth century or ignored as Shakespeare had done. The Romantics, with Victor Hugo and Stendhal at their helm, had gone straight for Shakespeare, and Mœbius, with his parallel worlds, far-flung galaxies, crazy blend of gritty humor, sensuality, and intense action-fueled adventure, as well as his love for all that is wildly beautiful, sublime, imaginative, and mystical, would have followed suit.

In his 1996 Mexico interview, in his parting recommendation, Mœbius called on illustrators to draw for the universal ideals of greater awareness and communication:

Nowadays you'll find readers everywhere on the planet. You have to keep that in mind. First of all, drawing is a personal way of communicating, but that doesn't mean an artist must lock himself up in his private bubble; it involves communicating with friends and family, with yourself, but also with people you don't know at all. Drawing is a way for us to communicate with that larger family, those we've never met before, the public, the world.

## Note

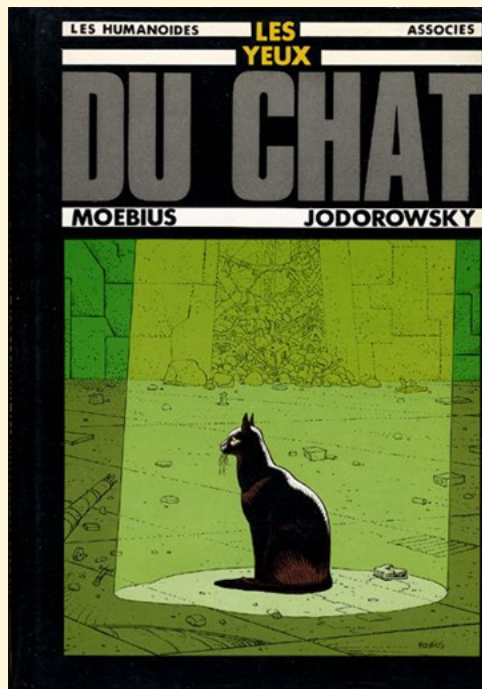
1 On August 18, 1996, in Mexico City, Moebius was interviewed by Una Pérez Ruiz for the Mexican Sunday cultural supplement *La Jornada Semanal*. On that occasion, speaking in Spanish (Giraud had lived in Mexico when he was child), he provided 18 simple, practical, and wise pieces of advice to illustrators, entitled “Breve manual para historietas.” All quotes are taken from this interview. The full original interview in Spanish is available at: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/1996/08/18/sem-moebius.html>.

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For further information about Moebius and his work, along with full-page excerpts of his graphic novels, see the website of his principal publisher Les Humanoïdes Associés:

<http://www.humano.com/profil/Moebius#.V9Ru0ZjhDIX>.

For a better understanding of comics and cartoons as a visual language, see Dr. Neil Cohn’s blog: <http://www.thevisuallinguist.com/>.



# CREDITS

## Cover

Cover for Volume 3 of *The Incal* series, Jean Giraud (Mœbius) & Alejandro Jodorowsky, *Ce qui est en bas [What Lies Beneath]* (Paris: Les Humanoïdes Associés, 1982). <http://www.humano.com/album/35667#.V9RtLZjhDIU>  
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Photo of Dragoslava Barzut:  
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### Quino and Mafalda

<http://www.biografiasyvidas.com/biografia/q/quino.htm>  
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<http://www.idranovey.com/books/ways-to-disappear>

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Cover for Volume 4 of *The Incal* series, Jean Giraud (Mœbius) & Alejandro Jodorowsky, *Ce qui est en haut [What is Above]* (Paris: Les Humanoïdes Associés, 1985). <http://www.humano.com/album/35852#.V9RISJjhDIU>  
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Jean Giraud at the International Festival of Comics in Łódź, Poland, October 4, 2008, photo by Jarek Obważonek  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moebius\\_Lodz\\_2008.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moebius_Lodz_2008.jpg)

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Cover for Jean Giraud (Mœbius) & Alejandro Jodorowsky, *Les Yeux du chat [The Eyes of the Cat]* (Paris: Les Humanoïdes Associés, 1978)  
<http://www.humano.com/book/3327>  
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