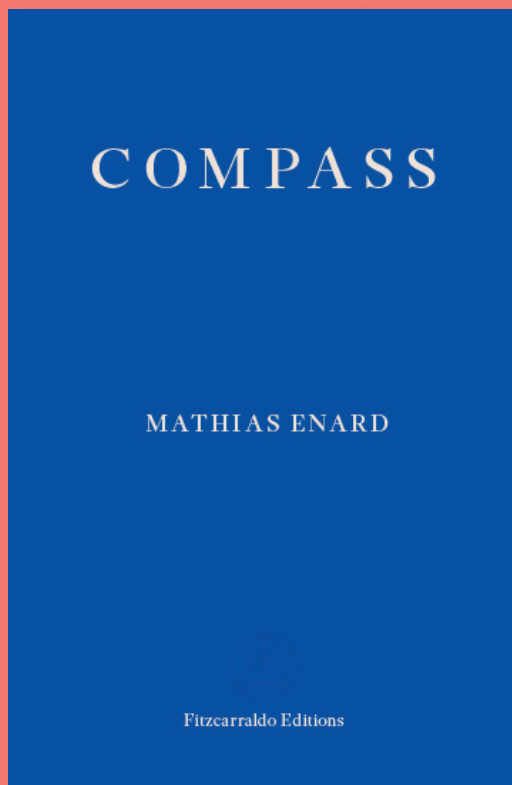




Reader's Guide



Other novels by Mathias Enard
Zone (2010)
Street of Thieves (2012)

Compass Mathias Enard

Translated by Charlotte Mandell

Fitzcarraldo Editions

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About the author

Mathias Enard, born in 1972 in Niort, France, studied Persian and Arabic and spent long periods in the Middle East. He has lived in Barcelona for about 15 years, interrupted in 2013 by a writing residency in Berlin. He won several awards for *Zone*, including the Prix du Livre Inter and the Prix Décembre, and won the Liste Goncourt/Le Choix de l'Orient, the Prix littéraire de la Porte Dorée, and the Prix du Roman-News for *Street of Thieves*. He won the 2015 Prix Goncourt for *Compass*.

About the translator

Charlotte Mandell has translated fiction, poetry, and philosophy from the French, including works by Proust, Flaubert, Genet, Maupassant, Blanchot, and many other distinguished authors. She has received many accolades and awards for her translations, including a Literature Translation Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for *Zone*. Born in Hartford Connecticut in 1968, she lives in New York State.

About the book

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 centre of these memories is his elusive, unrequited love, Sarah, a fiercely intelligent French scholar caught in the intricate tension between Europe and the Middle East. An immersive, nocturnal, musical novel, full of generous erudition and bittersweet humour.

Discussion points

This book largely centres around Franz Ritter's memories, brought on by chronic insomnia and illness. To what extent should these memories, in particular his memories of his relationship with Sarah, be trusted?

'For readers who ask literature to do what history and politics cannot, unravelling Enard's arabesque yields a bounty.' *Publishers Weekly*. How is it possible for literature to do what journalism, history and politics cannot, particularly when it comes to examining the intricate relationship between the East and the West? And to what extent will this book serve as a 'memory' of a country now in ruins?

Enard's book takes in the entire history of orientalism, from Balzac all the way to the rise of ISIS and the destruction of Palmyra. Can it justifiably be called a political novel?

'Franz's mental circumnavigations constitute a celebration of the civilizing power of knowledge and "the beauty of sharing and diversity."' Sam Sacks, *Wall Street Journal*. Essentially, this book is about the cultural influence of the Orient on western culture, how does the understanding of this influence change your own perceptions of the relationship between the East and West?

Themed reading

Claudio Magris *Danube*
Sadeqh Hedayat *The Blind Owl*
Gertrude Bell *Poems from the Divan of Hafiz*
Gustave Flaubert *Salammbô*
W. G. Sebald *The Rings of Saturn*
Lawrence of Arabia *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*
Edward Said *Orientalism*