

MORE ABOUT JEAN-MARIE BLAS DE ROBLÈS AT ZULMA



> LÀ OÙ LES TIGRES SONT CHEZ EUX (WHERE TIGERS FEEL AT HOME)

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Prix Médicis 2008

Shortlisted for the Prix Goncourt 2008
(1st and 2nd list)
FNAC 2008 Prize (novel category)

65 000 copies sold

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Croatia, Korea, The Netherlands, Greece, Egypt, Brazil, Spain.*

*Erudition, style and a captivating narrative
hold the reader spellbound until the last page.*

The fruit of ten years of research, this ambitious novel is both a monument of erudition and a subtle cocktail of characters, all of them pursuing knowledge that eludes them. Only the author's perfect control and superb narrative talent could have made this 800-page novel a success.

Eléazard von Wogau is an obscure writer and press correspondent living in the ghost city of Alcântara, lost in the wild northern regions of Brazil. He is also an expert on the 17th century German encyclopaedist, Athanase Kircher. One day, a fascinating biography of Kircher, seemingly written by a German Jesuit called Caspar Schott, falls into his hands. Considered to be one of the greatest minds of the Roman Baroque period, Kircher was a renowned geometer, inventor, linguist, volcanologist, collector of hieroglyphs and astronomer. Eléazard's journey into that biography intertwines with the intriguing destinies of the book's other characters: Elaine, Eléazard's ex-wife, on a jungle expedition in search of precious fossils; Moéma, his drug-dependant daughter; the diabolical governor of Maranao; and Nelson, a child from the favelas determined to avenge his father's death...

THE AUTHOR

In a way, Jean-Marie Blas was born elsewhere. He is a timeless writer, an atypical man of today. Considering the whole world and all the ages, the Mediterranean Sea would be his centre. He was born in Sidi-Bel-Abbes and discovered very early on a taste for departures. Indeed, his family went to live in France, first in Camargue then in Normandy, later in the Vosges and finally in the Var which he left rapidly to go to Paris. There, he studied philosophy at the Sorbonne and history at the Collège de France. Despite his great studies, he still found enough time to sail on the Mediterranean sea. After graduating, Jean-Marie Blas de Roblès went to Brazil as a teacher and the headmaster of the Maison de la Culture Française at Fortaleza University.



At that time, in 1982, he published his first book, an anthology of short stories mixing fantasy with the mystical style, *La Mémoire du riz* which received the Nouvelle Académie Française Prize. It is a book already full of the sublime érudition of the author, his fascination for the mystery of the world ; in this book appears the character of Eleazard. This character appears again in *Là où les tigres sont chez eux*, published in 2008. At the age of 27, Jean-Marie Blas de Roblès is referred to in the magazine *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* as one of the “great Gnostics of our literature” while *The Figaro* considers him as “a new king of the night” heir to André Pieyre de Mandiargues.

He was then transferred to China, at Tien-Tsin University, where he was the first to teach Sartre and Roland Barthes as there, the Cultural Revolution was just ending. He has been a Member of the Archaeological French mission in Libya since 1986 ; every summer, he goes to the submarine digs in Apollonia of Cyrenaïque, in Leptis Magna and in Sabrathé in Tripolitaine.

He was then transferred to the Palerme University. He took this opportunity to visit Tibet on his way back to Europe on the Trans-Siberian Railway. The same year, his first novel *L'Impudeur des choses* was published in which he describes wonderfully the monstrous beauty of the world. In 1989, he published his second novel, *Le Rituel des dunes*, still haunted by the anamorphose of the world.

Jean-Marie Roblès (his actual name ; he borrowed his pseudonym from the original editor of Don Quichote, by Cervantès), was finally transferred to the Taipei French Alliance, in Taiwan. There, he started the long writing process of his third novel. His Great Work had started. He gave up teaching, travelled much, fed his mind with the planet (Peru, Yemen, Indonesia...). He published essays and poetry in literary journals.

Méduse en son miroir was published in 2008 by Mare Nostrum ; and still in 2008, more particularly, he published *Là où les tigres sont chez eux*. He had spent a decade writing it, and almost the same period of time to find an editor. It is a very unusual novel, and the size of the book made it especially original ; his first editor asked him to make it 400 pages shorter, which he refused and every publisher made the same request. Finally, Zulma accepted to publish this almost 800-page long novel, it was scholarly and very complete. This book is a novel of adventure, a philosophical novel about escaping from disenchantment, from the tyranny of numbers, the refusal of mathematical modernity, a novel about the quest for the origins which recreates the swirls of the race of the world, which tangles the dances of the centuries, mixes times, men, places... an ode to creative madness. It may have been a crazy bet, but Jean-Marie Blas de Roblès and the Zulma book house were right, in advance of their time. As soon as it was published, the book was rewarded with the Fnac Prize, followed by the Jean Giono Prize and the Médicis Prize. The book was even présent in the very last list of the Prix Goncourt Prize.

Jean-Marie Blas de Roblès is now in charge of the editing of the *Aouras* journal which is devoted to archaeological digs in the area of ancient Aures. He has created the Archeologies series for the Edisud house which he now runs and in which he published several popularization works.

PRESS

'This novel (...) delights and fascinates. Here, erudition serves a universal saga. Umberto Eco revisited by Indiana Jones, edited by Malcolm Lowry, with a zest of African Queen and Lévi-Strauss with the Nambikwara. But these 'Tropiques' are not at all sad!'

Patrick Grainville, LE FIGARO LITTÉRAIRE

'A baroque novel blending all kinds of knowledge, whose last sentence proves that the author does not disdain life's pleasures: They were playing the latest rage in sambas: Brigitte Bardot Bardoo...'

Didier Jacob, LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR

'One is (...) stunned by the stylistic and Romanesque momentum of these 800 pages of Là où les tigres sont chez eux'

Marie-Laure Delorme, LE JOURNAL DU DIMANCHE

'After Les Bienveillantes, publishers are no longer afraid of big books. In deepest Brazilian Nordeste, a German press correspondent receives a manuscript: the biography of a famous Jesuit of the Baroque period in Rome. He decides to find out more about the mysterious Athanase Kircher.'

LE FIGARO

'Jean-Marie Blas de Roblès toys with illustrious references and mocks magical realism, to produce a book full of gall and impudence. Là où les tigres sont chez eux is erudite, boisterous derision; highly ambitious, a fun-loving palimpsest.'

Clara Dupont-Monod, MARIANNE

'Written with astounding virtuosity (...) this Bergsonian play on mosaics is nevertheless impassioned and droll, especially when the author allows himself a few erudite digressions à la Umberto Eco. But the general profusion never takes away from comprehension; that's what's so captivating about this formidable narrative.'

L'EXPRESS

'In the words of Jacques Griffault: The stories intertwine perfectly in a Brazil that's as frightening as it is seductive. Exquisite writing serves a subtle construction.'

Anne Crignon, LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR