

**Choose a text, translate it into your language and consider the cultural implications for translation.**

**Kate James**

**July 2001**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

“Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions.” (Toury 1978:200). As this statement implies, translators are permanently faced with the problem of how to treat the cultural aspects implicit in a source text (ST) and of finding the most appropriate technique of successfully conveying these aspects in the target language (TL). These problems may vary in scope depending on the cultural and linguistic gap of the two (or more) languages concerned (see Nida 1964 :130).

The cultural implications for translation may take several forms ranging from lexical content and syntax to ideologies and ways of life in a given culture. The translator also has to decide on the importance given to certain cultural aspects and to what extent it is necessary or desirable to translate them into the TL. The aims of the ST will also have implications for translation as well as the intended readership for both the ST and the target text (TT).

Considering the cultural implications for a translated text implies recognising all of these problems and taking into account several possibilities before deciding on the solution which appears the most appropriate in each specific case. Before applying these methods to the chosen text, this essay will examine the importance of culture in translation through a literature review. The different general procedures of treating the cultural implications for translation will be examined as well as analysing the ST and the aims of the author. The translation process will also be treated using specific examples found in the ST before discussing the success of aforementioned theoretical methods applied to the TT.

Although corresponding to cultural categories examined, the title will be considered separately in order to determine the pertinence of conserving, highlighting or excluding certain aspects. Its place is necessarily at the end as all other cultural implications need to be considered beforehand.

## **2. THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE IN TRANSLATION**

The definition of ‘culture’ as given in the Concise Oxford Dictionary varies from descriptions of the ‘Arts’ to plant and bacteria cultivation and includes a wide range of intermediary aspects. More specifically concerned with language and translation, Newmark defines culture as ‘the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression’(1988:94), thus acknowledging that each language group has its own culturally specific features. He further clearly states that operationally he does ‘not regard language as a component or feature of culture’ (Newmark 1988:95) in direct opposition to the view taken by Vermeer who states that ‘language is part of a culture’(1989:222). In the case of Newmark, Vermeer’s stance would imply the impossibility to translate whereas for the latter, translating the SL into a suitable form of TL is part of the translator’s role in transcultural communication.

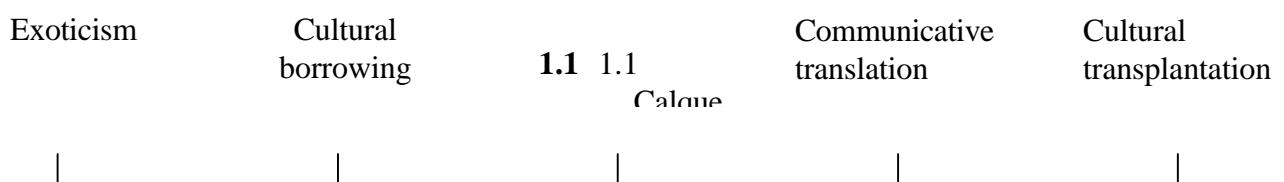
The notion of culture is essential to considering the implications for translation and despite the differences in opinion as to whether language is part of culture or not, the two notions appear to be inseparable. Discussing the problems of correspondence in translation, Nida confers equal importance to both linguistic and cultural differences between the SL and the TL and concludes that ‘differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure’ (Nida, 1964:130). It is further explained that parallels in culture often provide a common understanding despite significant formal shifts in the translation. The cultural implications for translation are thus of significant importance as well as lexical concerns.

Lotman’s theory states that ‘no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture ; and no culture can exist which does not have at its centre, the structure of natural language’ (Lotman, 1978 :211-32). Bassnett (1980 : 13-14) underlines the importance of this double consideration when translating by stating that language is ‘the heart within the body of culture’, the survival of both aspects being interdependent. Linguistic notions of transferring meaning are seen as being only part of the translation process, ‘a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria’ must also be considered. As Bassnett further points out, ‘the translator must tackle the

SL text in such a way that the TL version will correspond to the SL version... To attempt to impose the value system of the SL culture onto the TL culture is dangerous ground' (Bassnett, 1980 :23). Thus, when translating, it is important to consider not only the lexical impact on the TL reader, but also the manner in which cultural aspects may be perceived and make translating decisions accordingly.

## 2.1 General cultural implications for translation

Language and culture may thus be seen as being closely related and both aspects must be considered for translation. When considering the translation of cultural words and notions, Newmark proposes two opposing methods, transference and componential analysis (Newmark, 1988:96). As Newmark mentions, transference gives 'local colour', keeping cultural names and concepts. Although placing the emphasis on culture, meaningful to initiated readers, he claims this method may cause problems for the general readership and limit the comprehension of certain aspects. The importance of the translation process in communication leads Newmark to propose componential analysis which he describes as being 'the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message' (Newmark, 1988 :96). This may be compared to the scale proposed by Hervey et al, visualised as follows :



(Hervey et al, 1992:28)

Nida's definitions of formal and dynamic equivalence (see Nida, 1964:129) may also be seen to apply when considering cultural implications for translation. According to Nida, a 'gloss translation' most typifies formal equivalence where form and content are reproduced as faithfully as possible and the TL reader is able to 'understand as much as he can of the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression' of the SL context (Nida, 1964 :129). Contrasting with this idea, dynamic equivalence 'tries to relate the receptor to modes of behaviour relevant

within the context of his own culture' without insisting that he 'understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context' (idem).

### **3. SOURCE TEXT**

#### **3.1 The nature of the source text**

The text chosen for translation ('*Les Loukoums chez l'Arabe*') is an extract from *La Première Gorgée de Bière et autres Plaisirs Minuscules* (L'Arpenteur, 1998) by the prize-winning French author, Philippe Delerm (see appendix 2). It is a self-contained chapter of a collection of similar extracts where the author's intention to present certain aspects of French life in a lyrical way presents matter for thought both culturally and linguistically. The subject matter is centred around thoughts on Turkish Delight and the Arab shop where this sweet can be bought, thus introducing not only French, but North African cultural aspects. Reflections on the subject, action and dialogue are all presented in the same narrative form where the voice of the author is omnipresent. The text contains several culturally-specific words and notions whose implications for translation merit attention.

#### **3.2 The ideal reader**

A question that needs to be asked when considering a text for translation is for whom the original text was destined and whether this readership corresponds to the potential TT reader. Thus two types of ideal reader may be distinguished : the ST ideal reader and the TT ideal reader. In the text *Les Loukoums chez l'Arabe*, this notion may be seen as particularly relevant due to the literary nature of the extract with the subject matter being specifically linked to culture.

##### **3.2.1 The ideal ST reader**

Coulthard (1992) highlights the importance of defining the ideal reader for whom the author 'attributes knowledge of certain facts, memory of certain experiences ... plus certain opinions, preferences and prejudices and a certain level of linguistic competence.' When considering such aspects, it should not be forgotten that the extent to which the author may be influenced by such notions is dependent on his own sense of belonging to a specific socio-cultural group.

These principles may be applied to '*Les Loukoums chez l'Arabe*' and conclusions may be reached concerning Delerm's ideal reader in the following way :

- i) **Certain facts.** The author supposes that his ideal reader has a knowledge of historical events and links between France and Northern African countries as well as a certain cultural familiarity with the customs of these countries.
- ii) **Memory of certain experiences.** The experiences in this instance may be considered as contact with cultural situations described in the text such as a previous visits to the kind of Arab shop described and other cultural elements (French town life).
- iii) **Certain opinions, preferences and prejudices.** In this category may be placed the widespread French associations concerning Arab immigration. Delerm does not seek an anti-immigrant or racist readership yet inherent cultural prejudices are not avoided.
- iv) **A certain level of linguistic competence.** The text chosen corresponds to the description of the average text for translation given by Newmark, namely for 'an educated, middle-class readership in an informal ... style (Newmark, 1988 :13). It may be considered that the social category 'middle class' may find an approximate corresponding category in France. On a semantic and cultural level, there are several potential problems for a reader not corresponding to the criteria of the ideal reader.

### 3.2.2 The ideal TT reader

Once the ideal ST readership has been determined, considerations must be made concerning the TT. Coulthard states :

'The translator's first and major difficulty ... is the construction of a new ideal reader who, even if he has the same academic, professional and intellectual level as the original reader, will have

significantly different textual expectations and cultural knowledge' (Coulthard, 1992 :12).

In the case of the extract translated here, it is debatable whether the ideal TT reader has 'significantly different textual expectations', however his cultural knowledge will almost certainly vary considerably.

Applied to the criteria used to determine the ideal ST reader it may be noted that few conditions are successfully reached by the potential ideal TT reader. Indeed, the historical and cultural facts are unlikely to be known in detail along with the specifically cultural situations described. Furthermore, despite considering the level of linguistic competence to be roughly equal for the ST and TT reader, certain differences may possibly be noted in response to the use of culturally specific lexis which must be considered when translating.

Although certain opinions, preferences and prejudices may be instinctively transposed by the TT reader who may liken them to his own experience (in Britain, for example, comparing Algerian and Moroccan immigrants to Indian or Pakistani communities), it must be remembered that these do not match the social situation experience of the ST reader. Therefore, the core social and cultural aspects remain problematic when considering the cultural implications for translation.

#### **4. THE TRANSLATION PROCESS**

It has already been noted that the text in this case is surely intended for 'an educated, middle-class readership' and, more specifically, a French one with knowledge of the foreign cultural aspects implied. The problems when translating such a text are therefore not only of a purely lexical character but also of an equally fundamental nature - the understanding of a social, economic, political and cultural context (see appendix 3) as well as connotative aspects of a more semantic character. As with all texts of foreign literature, historical, political and other such cultural references are always of a certain importance and the TT reader is unlikely to have a full understanding of such notions. When considering the cultural implications for translation, the extent to which it is necessary for the translator to explain or complete such an information gap should be taken into account ; on the

basis of conclusions reached concerning the ideal TT reader, the translator should decide how much may be left for the reader to simply infer.

Taking these last points into consideration, different elements will be discussed in relation to their cultural implications for translation. The different aforementioned theories will be considered and their relative pertinence examined.

#### **4.1 Cultural categories**

Adapting Nida, Newmark places ‘foreign cultural words’ in several categories (Newmark 1988 :95-102). Following these categories, in the text ‘*Les Loukoums chez l’Arabe*’, the examples leading to cultural implications for translation may be classed essentially as material culture, and as gestures and habits although other cultural terms are also present. These aspects may be translated in different ways according to their role in the text and the aims for the TT reader. Newmark also states the relevance of componential analysis in translation ‘as a flexible but orderly method of bridging the numerous lexical gaps, both linguistic and cultural, between one language and another’ (Newmark, 1988 :123). The two orientations in translation examined by Nida, namely formal or dynamic equivalence, should also be considered when analysing the cultural implications for translation of elements in these categories.

##### **4.1.1 Material culture**

‘Food is for many the most sensitive and important expression of national culture ; food terms are subject to the widest variety of translation procedures’ (Newmark, 1988 :97). The terms coming under this category are further complicated due to the ‘foreign’ elements present. One such case is the reference to the brightly coloured *pâtisseries tunisiennes* (l.17). Translating according to the French idea of *pâtisseries* would imply using the English ‘cakes’ or ‘pastries’ yet in the context of Tunisian culture this hardly seems appropriate bearing in mind the difference in form of the TL reference. This illustrates the theory developed by Mounin (1963) who underlines the importance of the signification of a lexical item claiming that only if this notion is considered will the translated item fulfil its function correctly. In this case the translation as ‘sweets’ seems to correspond to the idea of the

original signification, even if it is a more abstract translation of the French original, and is therefore more appropriate concerning its function in the TT than a translation of formal equivalence.

Another example of material culture includes an eponym, namely *bouteilles de Sidi Brahim* (1.42). In France this low-quality, Algerian wine is widely known and is the traditional drink with North African dishes, therefore widely sold in supermarkets as well as this type of small shop. This example can be seen as corresponding to the new ideal reader as described by Coulthard, having different cultural knowledge (Coulthard, 1992:12) as an English-speaking reader would not necessarily know the name of this wine and even less its associations. By using strictly formal equivalence, all meaning would be exempt which would imply unnecessary translation loss. It would however be possible to neutralise the original term *Sidi Brahim* by translating as ‘wine’ or else to introduce a form of componential analysis, translating as ‘cheap, Algerian wine’. *Sidi Brahim* being the area where the wine is produced, it seems appropriate to keep the original term in the TT but it is necessary to add a precision, here ‘wine’. In this way, although the cultural implications are not so strong as for an ‘initiated’ French reader, the information is passed on and clarified by a precision. The cultural implications automatically understood by the ST reader, namely the notion of cheap, low-quality wine, are not however conveyed, the emphasis in this context being on the exotic nature of the product as conveyed by *Sidi Brahim* and not on the low cost.

#### **4.1.2 Gestures and habits**

Newmark points out that gestures and habits are ‘often described in ‘non-cultural’ language’ (Newmark, 1988:103). In this extract many gestures and habits are implied yet not specifically described thus making an entirely communicative translation difficult. Once again, these are cultural references which imply a certain knowledge of the way of life of the North African community in France and attitudes towards it.

North African men, often working in groups, are often caricatured by the French as being crafty. As well as this, the popular French expression ‘*un travail d’Arabe*’

used to describe work that has been poorly done further explains popular attitudes. Due to linguistic and cultural factors, lower class Algerian and Moroccan men appear overtly servile in French society. All of these factors are inherently present in the text yet their full cultural significance is difficult to portray without such background knowledge.

The most representative example of this aspect is illustrated in lines 19-24 (TT l.20-25). The possible lack of cultural knowledge of the TT reader implies translating in a way so as to clearly convey notions which may otherwise go unnoticed. The proposed translation of '*obligeance*' (l.22) as 'obsequiousness' may overemphasise the strength of the original ST term yet the mockingly over-servile attitude aimed at being conveyed by the author is respected. When explaining certain principles of dynamic equivalence, Nida states that 'the emotional tone must accurately reflect the point of view of the author' (Nida, 1964 :139). Newmark's definition of compensation, being 'when loss of meaning...in one part of a sentence is compensated in another part' (Newmark, 1988 :90) may seem relevant here. By translating in this way, although culturally implicit translation loss is here inevitable, a form of dynamic equivalence through compensation is adopted in order to counterbalance such loss and seems an appropriate way of conveying cultural implications present in the ST.

The collocation *d'après le café* (l.8) also needs further explanation. In French society, this would immediately be understood as being after the small espresso coffee drunk at the end of a meal. As Sapir claims, 'no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality' (Sapir, 1956 :69), and even a lexical item seen as having an apparently simple translation (here, *café* =coffee) may have a considerably different signification. The emphasis given by Nida on a TT having to produce the same response as the original (Nida, 1964) encourages the addition of 'mealtime' as does the aforementioned theory developed by Mounin. In this way, the lexical function is transferred as far as possible in the TT as are the ST cultural connotations.

## 4.2 Cultural references

Three examples of potentially opaque cultural references for the TT reader may be found in the text. The first of these (l.27) is '*un Berbère à petit beret bleu*'. The author regrets not finding a typical Berber shopkeeper each time he goes into an Arab shop, a notion full of cultural meaning given the context of French colonisation of Algeria and Arab immigration yet of no great cultural significance for the TT reader. The slightly ironic touch portrayed by the image of a typical Berber man wearing the classic symbol of a Frenchman, namely a blue beret, may not be entirely lost on a TT reader yet without understanding the historical and cultural background the depth of the irony of comic paradox may be lost. It does not however seem appropriate to explore Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence by replacing this image with a TL equivalent as the cultural implications here are extremely specific. The text-type as well as the definition of the ideal TT reader and his motivations may imply preferring the use of transference or formal equivalence despite translation loss concerning cultural implications.

Secondly, the term '*kabyle*' must be considered (l.44). This is another reference which has strongly attached associations due to the same cultural and historical factors and the meaning is only fully understandable if these associations are known. A literal translation of the text would be '...where even the red piles of coca cola cans have taken on a small, Kabyle look'. An educated French reader would have enough knowledge of Algerian problems to instantly associate Kabylia with a fiercely independent community which has always refused to be influenced culturally, linguistically and politically by the surrounding countries despite great pressure. A communicative approach implies an explanation of this cultural reference and may be obtained by the addition of explanatory adjectives in the TT, thus translating as '...even the red piles of coca cola cans have taken on that fiercely independent Kabyle look'. This potential solution is not a direct translation of the ST, however it enables the TT reader to approach the cultural reference in a more meaningful way, yet again illustrating Nida's concern that a TT should produce the same response as the original.

Lastly, the term '*boétien*' needs consideration. Transferring this term using formal equivalence would have little cultural effect on an English-speaking reader and be of no value considering the text-type and the definition of the ideal TT reader. Indeed, Boeotians in Antique periods were considered to be a nation of rough peasants lacking in culture. In French the term *béotien* maintains this concept and although the adjective could be translated formally as 'Boeotian', the true sense would be lacking in the TT. The cultural implications for translation require a full understanding of the notion rather than an emphasis on the original SL reference. In this case an appropriate translation would consider the use of a cultural equivalent and the term 'philistine' could be used to represent a similar cultural concept.

#### **4.3 Lexical feature**

The text presents an example of lexis which may have a different effect on the ST and the TT reader. The reference '*dans la fraîcheur du soir*' (1.50) would seem welcoming to a ST reader used to hot days where fresh temperatures provide a welcome relief. To a British reader however, this may not produce the pleasurable effect intended by the author and care must be taken to convey the drop in temperature positively. By translating as 'in the cool of the evening', the same positive aspect may be maintained on the TT reader as in the SL country.

#### **4.4 The translation of the title : '*Les Loukoums chez l'Arabe*'**

The title of this extract may also be considered as having cultural implications for translation. Considering the titles of the other chapters in the collection (see Appendix 4), it may be noted that almost all have cultural connotations and that this is one of the author's aims. According to Newmark, in literary translation 'the title should sound attractive, allusive, suggestive ... and should usually bear some relation to the original' (Newmark, 1988 :56). This can be seen as relevant here, the aim being to portray culturally bound aspects ; thus the title may be seen as conveying aspects of the narrative and deserves further attention.

##### **4.4.1 *Les Loukoums***

Firstly, the word *loukoums* must be considered. There are basically two possibilities when translating this word, keeping the original term or using the

wider known term, Turkish delight which may however carry a semantic incompatibility with *chez l'Arabe*. *Loukoum* is a term that is used in English but probably by a smaller community, those familiar with Oriental customs and countries, particularly Turkey and Greece. It may be misleading to introduce such a term which could be interpreted as an exotic translation using the scale presented by Hervey et al, shown previously.

On the other hand, a translation where *loukoums* are referred to as Turkish delight may introduce a widely accepted yet false cultural notion, namely that such a sweet is primarily Turkish and not something equally common to North African culture. In French no other term exists, *loukoum* is a cultural word that has been transferred as such and French links with North African countries reinforce the notion of *loukoums* as a cultural feature.

In English the term *loukoums* would need an explanation in the context of this text, destined for a wide general readership. The cultural knowledge of the TT does not correspond to the ST reader and it would therefore be difficult to justify the use of *loukoum* instead of Turkish delight, a word instantly understandable to the ideal TT reader and thus corresponding more to the notion of communicative translation as defined by Hervey et al (1992 :31-32) and Newmark (1988 :47).

#### **4.4.2 *Chez l'Arabe***

This part of the title has several cultural implications to be considered when translating. Whilst conserving the original aspect of the ST title, a non-French reader would not necessarily react in the same way to the word '*l'Arabe*'. As we have seen with the historical context, the French have obvious reasons to feel cultural implications when dealing with *l'Arabe* and an average French reader would necessarily have a large range of associations connected to the word, not primarily positive. Here, the word refers not only to the ethnic origin of the shopkeeper but also to the notion 'Arab shop', a place which is always open and where almost everything can be found. This notion deserves to be maintained although a culturally bound translation loss is inevitable due to missing background knowledge. To translate the title simply as 'Turkish Delight' would minimise the

importance of *l'Arabe* in the SL cultural context and reinforce this loss. This case may be seen to illustrate Nida's aforementioned theory that differences in culture are often greater problem than language differences.

It must also be noted that a precision must be added to fully translate *chez l'Arabe*. Several possibilities may be considered, ranging from 'Turkish Delight *bought from the Arab*', '*...sold by the Arab*', '*...bought at the shop of the Arab*', '*...from the Arab shop*'. Considering the lack of background knowledge for the TT reader, the last possibility may be the most appropriate, the idea conveyed by 'Arab shop' implying a notion of difference in French/Arab culture. Following Newmark who claims 'the additional information a translator may have to add to his version is normally cultural (accounting for difference between SL and TL culture), technical...or linguistic' (Newmark, 1988 :91), it may in this case prove useful to explain further this relationship by adding a footnote. An example may be 'North Africans have strong colonial ties with France and many have set up local shops open long hours and selling a large variety of goods, both of French and native origins.'

## 5. CONCLUSION

A variety of different approaches have been examined in relation to the cultural implications for translation. It is necessary to examine these approaches bearing in mind the inevitability of translation loss when the text is, as here, culture bound. Considering the nature of the text and the similarities between the ideal ST and TT reader, an important aspect is to determine how much missing background information should be provided by the translator using these methods. It may be seen that in order to preserve specific cultural references certain additions need to be brought to the TT. This implies that formal equivalence should not be aimed at as this is not justified when considering the expectations of the ideal TT reader. At the other end of Nida's scale, complete dynamic equivalence does not seem totally desirable as cultural elements have been kept in order to preserve the original aim of the text, namely to present one aspect of life in France.

Thus the cultural implications for translation of this kind of ST do not justify using either of these two extremes and tend to correspond to the definition given by Newmark of communicative translation which “attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership” (Newmark, 1988:).

## REFERENCES

- Bassnett, S. 1991. *Translation Studies*. London : Routledge
- Coulthard, M. 1992. ‘Linguistic Constraints on Translation’. In *Studies in Translation / Estudos da Tradução, Ilha do Desterro*, 28. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, pp. 9-23.
- Hervey, S., Higgins, I. 1992. *Thinking Translation*. London : Routledge.
- Lotman, J., Uspensky, B. 1978. ‘On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture’, *New Literary History*, pp. 211-32.
- Mounin, G. 1963. *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction*. Paris : Gallimard.
- Newmark, P. 1988. *A Textbook of Translation*. New York : Prentice Hall
- Nida, E. 1964. ‘Principles of Correspondence’. In Venuti, L. *The Translation Studies Reader*. London : Routledge.
- Sapir, E. 1956. *Culture, Language and Personality*. Los Angeles : University of California Press.
- Toury, G. 1978, revised 1995. ‘The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation’. In Venuti, L. *The Translation Studies Reader*. London : Routledge.
- Vermeer, H. 1989. ‘Skopos and Commission in Translational Activity’. In Venuti, L. *The Translation Studies Reader*. London : Routledge.

## **APPENDICES**

- **Appendix 1**

- The source text : Les Loukoums chez l'Arabe, Philippe Delerm
- The proposed translation
- Gloss translation

- **Appendix 2**

- Philippe Delerm : **Bibliography**

- **Appendix 3**

- The historical context of the text

- **Appendix 4**

- La Première Gorgée de Bière : **Contents**

## Les loukoums chez l'Arabe

Parfois, on vous offre des loukoums dans une boîte pyrogravée. C'est le loukoum de retour de voyage ou, plus aseptisé encore, le loukoum-cadeau-du-dernier-moment. C'est drôle, mais on n'a jamais envie de ces loukoums-là. La large feuille transparente glacée qui délimite les étages et empêche de coller semble empêcher aussi de prendre du plaisir avec ce loukoum entre deux doigts – loukoum d'après le café qu'on appréhende sans conviction du bout de l'incisive, en secouant de l'autre main la poudre tombée sur son pull.

Non, le loukoum désirable, c'est le loukoum de la rue. On l'aperçoit dans la vitrine : une pyramide modeste mais qui fait vrai, entre les boîtes de henné, les pâtisseries tunisiennes vert amande, rose bonbon, jaune d'or. La boutique est étroite, et pleine à craquer du sol au plafond. On entre là avec une timidité condescendante, un sourire trop courtois pour être honnête, déstabilisé par cet univers où les rôles ne sont pas distribués avec évidence. Ce jeune garçon aux cheveux crépus est-il vendeur, ou copain du fils du patron ? Il y a quelques années, on avait toujours droit à un Berbère à petit bérét bleu, on se lançait en confiance. Mais maintenant, il faut se risquer à l'aveuglette, au risque de passer pour ce qu'on est – un bêtard gourmand désemparé. On ne saura pas si le jeune homme est vraiment vendeur, mais en tout cas il vend, et cette incertitude prolongée vous met un peu plus mal à l'aise. Six loukoums ? A la rose ? Tous à la rose, si vous voulez. Devant cette obligeance prodiguée avec une désinvolture que l'on craint légèrement moqueuse, la confusion grandit. Mais déjà le « vendeur » a rangé vos loukoums à la rose dans un sac en papier. On jette un œil émerveillé sur la cale au trésor, carénée de pois chiches et de bouteilles de Sidi Brahim, où même le rouge des boîtes de coca empilées a pris un petit air kabyle. On paie sans triomphalisme, on part presque comme un voleur, le sachet à la main. Mais là, sur le trottoir, quelques mètres plus loin, on a soudain sa récompense. Le loukoum de l'Arabe est juste à déguster comme ça, sur le trottoir, en douce, dans la fraîcheur du soir – tant pis pour la poudre qui s'éparpille sur les manches.

Sometimes, you get offered Turkish Delight in a white wooden box, with a pattern burnt onto the lid. That's the sort of Turkish Delight brought back as a holiday souvenir or, worse, the Turkish Delight bought as a last-minute gift. Funnily enough, you never really fancy eating that sort of Turkish Delight. The wide, shiny transparent plastic sheet separating the layers and stopping them from sticking together also seems to take the pleasure away from that Turkish Delight, held between two fingers – the kind of Turkish Delight you eat after the mealtime coffee, dubiously biting into it with your incisors whilst your free hand brushes off the icing sugar that has fallen onto your jumper.

No, in fact the only desirable sort of Turkish Delight is the kind you can eat in the street. You catch sight of it in the shop window, forming a modest but authentic-looking pyramid, sat in the middle of boxes of henna and Tunisian sweets with their almond green, candy-pink and buttercup yellow colours. The shop is narrow and packed full from top to bottom. You go in with condescending timidity and a smile too courteous to be honest, made unsure by this universe where the roles are not easily identifiable. Is the young, frizzy-haired boy the shop assistant or rather a friend of the shopkeeper's son ? A few years ago you were sure of being served by a Berber with his small, blue beret and you could quite confidently launch into things. But now you have to blindly take the risk, risking to be taken for exactly what you are - a helpless and greedy philistine. You'll never know whether the young man really is the shop assistant but in any case he's prepared to sell and your prolonged doubts make you even more uneasy. Six pieces of Turkish Delight ? Rose flavoured? All of them rose-flavoured if you like. Faced with such casual obsequiousness, smacking of mockery, your confusion grows. But the 'shop assistant' has already put your rose-flavoured Turkish Delight in a paper bag. You glance wondrously at the treasure trove, packed with chick peas and bottles of Sidi Brahim wine, where even the red piles of coca cola cans have taken on that fiercely independent Kabyle look. You pay without triumph, you leave almost like a thief, clasping your bag. But right there, on the pavement, a few yards away, you reap your reward. You can savour the Turkish Delight from the Arab shop just as it is, on the pavement, secretly, in the cool of the evening - who cares about the icing sugar sprinkling over your sleeves ?

Philippe DELERM  
Bibliography

### Novels

• <i>La cinquième saison</i>	Editions du Rocher	1983
• <i>Un été pour mémoire</i>	Editions du Rocher	1985
• <i>Le buveur de temps</i>	Editions du Rocher	1987
• <i>Autumn</i>	Editions du Rocher	1990
• <i>Les amoureux de l'Hôtel de Ville</i>	Editions du Rocher	1993
• <i>Mister Mouse</i>	Editions du Rocher	1994
• <i>Sundborn ou les jours de lumière</i>	Editions du Rocher	1996

### 6. Short Stories

• <i>L'envol</i>	Editions du Rocher	1995
------------------	--------------------	------

### Essays

• <i>Le bonheur - Tableaux et bavardages</i>	Editions du Rocher	1986
• <i>Le miroir de ma mère</i>	Editions du Rocher	1988

### 7. Texts

• <i>Le bruit de la dynamo</i>		
• <i>La sieste assassinée</i>		
• <i>Plaisirs minuscules</i>		
• <i>La première gorgée de bière</i>		
<i>et autres plaisirs minuscules</i>	L'Arpenteur, Gallimard	
	1997	
• <i>Rouen</i>	Champ Vallon	
	1987	

### Children's books

• <i>La fille du bouscat</i>	Milan	1989
• <i>En pleine lucarne</i>	Milan	1985
• <i>C'est bien</i>	Milan	1991
• <i>Surtout, ne rien faire</i>	Milan	1995
• <i>Sortilège au Muséum</i>	Magnard	1996

## LES LOUKOUMS CHEZ L'ARABE

### The historical context

- In 1830 the French colonised Algeria, took land and fortune away from the Muslim community and settled in large numbers. Algeria was split up and transformed into three French administrative areas or *départements*.
- During the Second World War, Algerian nationals were given French citizenship which gave them the right to live and work in France where they were often considered to be cheap, unskilled labourers. By 1954, over a million people of French descent (known as *pieds-noirs*) were living and working in Algeria as they had been for generations. France was all the more politically attached to Algeria after the discovery of oil in the territory and the possibility of using the Sahara desert as a nuclear test ground.
- In 1954, the French-Algerian war broke out with the Muslims demanding their independence. The *pieds-noirs* were threatened with death if they did not return to France.
- In 1962, the Algerians won their independence after eight years of battle. In France, the war was pushed out of the spotlight and no commemorations of the dead took place. The protection given by France to Tunisia and Morocco was not modified by the Algerian crisis.
- In the 1970's many more North African, and particularly Algerian citizens came and settled in France. Many of these immigrants set up local shops which became renowned for their long opening hours as well as their polyvalent stocks.

*La Première Gorgée de Bière  
et autres plaisirs minuscules*

Philippe Delerm  
L'Arpenteur (Gallimard) : 1997

- Un couteau dans la poche
- Le paquet de gâteaux du dimanche matin
- Aider à écosser des petits pois
- Prendre un porto
- L'odeur des pommes
- Le croissant du trottoir
- Le bruit de la dynamo
- L'inhalation
- On pourrait presque manger dehors
- Aller aux mûres
- La première gorgée de bière
- L'autoroute la nuit
- Dans un vieux train
- Le Tour de France
- Un banana-split
- Invité par surprise
- Lire sur la plage
- Les loukoums chez l'Arabe
- Le dimanche soir
- Le trottoir roulant de la station Montparnasse
- Le cinéma
- Le pull d'automne
- Apprendre une nouvelle dans la voiture
- Le jardin immobile
- Mouiller ses espadrilles
- Les boules en verre
- Le journal du petit déjeuner
- Un roman d'Agatha Christie
- Le bibliobus
- Frous-frous sous les cornières
- Plonger dans les kaléidoscopes
- Appeler d'une cabine téléphonique
- La bicyclette et le vélo
- La pétanque des néophytes