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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2016

Farida translation brings Naïm Kattan to Sherbrooke

By Gordon Lambie

Tomorrow afternoon, November 22, the public is invited to a reading and discussion of the first ever English translation of Naïm Kattan's 1991 novel *Farida* at the University of Sherbrooke. Animated by the author as well as translator Norman Cornett, the open discussion will address the context of pre-world war two Iraq and how the issues at play in that society still play a major role in the world today.

Published in 1991 during the height of what's now known as the first gulf war, *Farida* tells the story of a popular Jewish singer struggling with her freedom in a world that is rapidly moving toward war, along a path that involves sex, murder, and intrigue.

"My fingers were singed in translating some sections," Cornett joked. "it's a real page-turner."

"When you read *Farida* it's like watching the nightly news," the novel's translator continued, noting that Kattan grew up as a part of an ancient Iraqi Jewish community that is now nonexistent. "He knew the Sunni, he knew the Shia, he knew the Kurds, he knew the Armenians, and of course he knew about the western powers that wanted to get their hands on the petroleum in his native Iraq."

Although the present-day news out of his homeland is largely about the rise of Islamic extremism, Kattan said that the Iraq of his childhood was a land of diverse cultures that have gradually disap-

Farida gives an insight into now
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Looks like a dusting of snow?



Look closer...



PHOTOS BY MATTHEW MCCULLY

By Matthew McCully

The Record received a phone call on

was quite a sight to see in a field off Route 251.

This reporter arrived to find thou-

sands of snow geese had stopped for a break in the cornfield neighbouring the home of Richard Goodhue.

While geese are no stranger to his area, Goodhue said he was more used to seeing smaller flocks of Canada

Geese in the fields around his home.

The last time Goodhue remembered seeing Snow Geese was five years ago.

"I think there were more this time," he pointed out.

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LOCAL NEWS

The original dual-purpose infrastructure was estimated to cost about \$300,000, while the single-purpose bike trail is expected to cost \$230,000.

Woman arrested after teen injured in Dixville hit-and-run

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crossing Highway 147, near 415 km mark. The driver did not stop.

The victim was taken to hospital with serious injuries, but is now reported to be in stable condition.

During the subsequent investigation,

police were able to locate a suspect vehicle in Coaticook. A 38-year-old woman has been arrested in connection with the incident.

The suspect has been interrogated and witnesses interviewed by the Sûreté

du Québec.

The suspect driver is scheduled to make her first appearance by phone and will be back before the court early this week.

Piant pleads guilty to sex offences

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after his arrival in Canada last September, confessed to computer luring, incitement to sexual contact, and sexual contact with a person under the age of 16, as well as production and possession of child pornography and the transmission of sexually explicit material to a person under 18 years of age.

Recommendations for sentencing will be heard on December 12. Piant waived

his right to a bail hearing and will remain behind bars in the meantime. Several of the charges are punishable by minimum prison sentences of one year in prison.

Piant committed his offences between May 2015 and September 2016, after he met a teenager from Sherbrooke through an online game. A native of the Lorraine region of France, he was ar-

rested the day after his arrival in Sherbrooke on the property of the adolescent's family home.

Piant confirmed to a Sherbrooke Police investigator that he was prepared to have a complete sexual relationship with the adolescent girl he had come to meet, even though he knew she was underage. He said he had fallen in love with her during their virtual relationship.

City abandons extreme skating project

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in the city in January. In a statement, the Riders Cup promoter blames the City for taking too long to make a decision.

Having received the news in a letter sent mid-afternoon Thursday, the City says that the executive committees and Destination Sherbrooke decided to recommend that council not go ahead with

the proposed development of a permanent extreme skating track on Mont Bellevue.

On the other hand, they do support the construction of a permanent mountain bike trail, which was also part of the larger project. In the original presentation of the project, the City argued that

matching the two activities made it possible to provide infrastructure adapted to both sports at a lower cost. The original dual-purpose infrastructure was estimated to cost about \$300,000, while the single-purpose bike trail is expected to cost \$230,000.

The City of Sherbrooke has abandoned its Permanent Extreme Skating Track project at Mont Bellevue following the cancellation of the 2017 Riders Cup event, which was to be held

Naim Kattan

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society lived with all these differences before," the author reflected. "If you see the news today it's about Mosul and Qaraqosh, which is a very small Christian city near Mosul. The Christians in Iraq are the oldest Christians in the world, they still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus, but now they too are disappearing."

Cornett, a religious studies scholar, said that it was the context of that cultural crossroads between different religious communities that inspired him to translate the book, but said that he sees the value of the story going further. For example, the story touches heavily on matters of women's liberation that have great bearing on current conversations about the hijab.

"I had known, when I was a young boy, the best singer in Iraq, and it inspired me to write this book," Kattan said, explaining that while the book is a fiction, it deals with the difficulties of being a woman, Jewish, and an artist at a time and in a place where women were and are expected to hide themselves away. "These same difficulties for women in Arab lands are still common now in a certain way."

In addition to looking at the high costs for a woman seeking the right to free expression, Cornett said that he feels the book's discussion of interfaith dialogue opens a door to its use as a tool for generating real discussion between English and French speaking populations in the province of Quebec.

"This is what Tuesday's event is about," the translator said. "Believe it or not Naim Kattan has published over fifty books in French, and yet Farida is only the fifth book available in English."

Cornett said that he found it remarkable that Kattan, who is a Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur in France and an Officer of the Order of Canada for his

internationally recognized writing, is so relatively unknown in English. By working to translate Farida, the scholar said that he is working to try to balance that scale.

"In this way we make the best of Canadian Literature available to both major language groups," Cornett said. "It is a way to get beyond the caricatures and actually talk to each other."

Kattan shared that the idea appeals to him, in part, because of his long-time friendship with Hugh MacLennan, author of the book seen as the definitive voice on Quebec's divergent linguistic communities; *Two Solitudes*.

"I wrote the introduction to the French translation of his book," Farida's author shared, explaining that he strongly believes in the work of building bridges through literature between Francophones and Anglophones in Quebec.

Despite the arguments about the value of the ideas in Farida, however, but Kattan and Cornett underlined the fact that this is not an academic text and that Tuesday's discussion is not meant to be an inaccessible scholarly talk.

"It's more of an open-mic afternoon," Cornett said. "There's only one wrong question, and that is the unasked question."

In addition to the innate value of the story itself, which Cornett called a "barn-burner", the translator encouraged people to come out to the discussion of Farida because of the rare opportunity to interact with a very prominent author.

"How often does the public at large get up close and personal with an internationally renowned writer?" Cornett asked, noting that Kattan has flown in from Paris specifically for

the discussion.

Tuesday's talk begins at 4pm in room 166 of the A4 pavillion of the University of Sherbrooke and is expected to last just over an hour.

Christmas Tea & Sale

at **Grace Village**
1501 Campbell St., Sherbrooke
Thursday, November 24
from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Tea and Refreshments will be served at 2:30 p.m.

Admission is \$4. and includes two door prize tickets, tea, squares and musical entertainment!

Please take highway 108 then the 147 since Winder Street is temporarily closed.