



A FRENCHMAN IN NEW YORK

Author Marc Levy's works have sold 28 million copies worldwide and have been translated into 45 languages.

Can you explain why you're so successful, why you're the most widely read author in France?

I've never tried to put it into words. Perhaps because I took a risk in changing genres every time—spy novel, adventure, romantic comedy, etc. Filmmakers change genres, yet their artistic style remains the same. Character and artistic style are two unifying factors. I always associate two elements: travel and ordinary people dealing with extraordinary situations.

You have traveled a great deal yourself...

I began traveling when I was 24. I've always loved experiencing the world's diversity in all its splendid colors. My family was persecuted, hence my respect for the foreigner. I'm an expat, and like all expats, I try to cultivate a cultural diversity in myself that complements my own cultural identity without destroying it. I remain French. I loathe

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the pretentiousness of the concept of the "French cultural exception," but I have deep respect for the identity of France. And the identity of every country.

Has living in New York changed how you see Europe?

When I'm abroad I really miss France; it's an underlying suffering that enhances my love for my country. I dislike when people say negative things about it. Expats are ambassadors of their homeland. France has many great qualities, talents, beautiful aspects. I regret that chronic "narcissistic self-flagellation"—which may be more Parisian than French. France in its regional diversity is one of optimism and courage. This media-hyped culture of loathing the other is a huge mistake in terms of integration. US society has embraced multiculturalism. In 50 years, they've gone from apartheid to electing a black president.

Your first trip was to America. The America of Kerouac, of *On the Road* and the Beat Generation.

America has nourished my mythology. My father was in the French Resistance, so I'm naturally drawn to the idea of the GIs, freeing my country. In my fiction and movies, Americans have given their lives. There's also Kerouac, and my passion for jazz. When I was 15 or 16, I was fascinated with 1930s America, black history and the evolution of the country.

Your latest novel, *Un sentiment plus fort que la peur*, is about three women over three generations: two powerful women, the grandmother (Liliane) and the granddaughter (Suzie), and a devastated woman, the mother (Mathilde). A quest for redemption seems central to the narrative. Is this an important concept for you?

Absolutely. When I was four, I discovered my family was of Turkish origin, and that my grandfather had been a powerful benefactor, creating the first women's hospital in Smyrna, donating his own home for the site. I don't know if there's a genetic component to memory, but when I got to Istanbul, without knowing about this story, I fell in love with the place. I felt I could live there. A few years later, in *The Strange Journey of Mr. Daldry*, I looked at the Armenian genocide. In my latest novel, Suzie feels her duty is to rehabilitate her grandmother's memory. Yet she is living with painful memories of her sacrificed mother and the need to find excuses for her. Hence what she says when she meets her grandmother: "I forgive you for the harm you caused my mother." This makes me think of something my father, a Jew, once said: "We won the real war afterwards." How? By being capable of continuing to love, get married, have children. I believe in this transmission of one generation to another. We can choose hatred or love. Those who hate make humanity regress.

You have lived a lot of different lives—management and IT, a computer graphics company, an office design firm, then suddenly a first novel, *If Only It Were True*. What triggered this?

I wrote a book at age 35 that my son could read when he was 35. It was a way of cheating time. My sister read it, and convinced me to send it to a publisher. The real media hype began after Spielberg adapted it for the screen.

Literary success, a happy marriage, children, money, you have it all. What more can one want?

If you take nothing for granted, your appetite remains intact. You have to win your wife's love every day. I experienced solitude for years. I know you can lose everything. Love for one's work is about learning to write, book after book. One never perfectly masters one's profession. Love is boundless. I know what hunger is like. I know that we aren't the proprietors of anything, merely tenants. Of life, and of what you love. |