

On the right page

Writer, educator and more, Mario Morisi has a thirst for life and literature

By **Athena Karsera**

Most of us would need several lifetimes to have any hope of fitting in what French Italian writer, educator, and more, Mario Morisi has already accomplished.

Speaking to the Cyprus Weekly, Morisi, who is leaving the island tomorrow after presenting a series of education and literature-themed talks organised by the French Institute over the past week, revealed an insatiable energy and genuine interest in people.

These are, perhaps, two of the elements that have resulted in his travelling the world, writing, teaching, working as a journalist, and picking up several languages along the way. If all this wasn't enough, he was once also a serious contender for a professional career in football and delved into the world of politics.

Language and literature

"I was a teacher for a long time, including in Great Britain, in Algeria, and even after becoming a full-time writer continued to talk about literature and the French language," Morisi said of the lead-up to his invitation by the French Institute.

Confiding that Cyprus was the furthest East he had travelled, Morisi listed some of the many other places he has spent time in: "I am French and Italian, I have passports for both countries and my family has a small house near Genoa but I have lived in Birmingham, Algeria, Finland. I'm something of a leaping writer".

Morisi speaks French, Italian, English and German, in his own words, can "get by" in Spanish and Portuguese, and also knows some Swedish, Finnish and Arabic. He has also picked up a few words of Greek during his short stay.

Notes

Showing the Cyprus Weekly a notebook already almost full of written observations and sketches inspired by what he had seen so far in his short visit, Morisi said, on arriving in any country, the first thing he did was observe people in their everyday setting.

Cyprus was no different and this is why, after leaving his luggage at the hotel, he chose to sit at a small café in the Old City of Nicosia and people-watch.

He said: "Walking around over the past few days, I feel like I have seen the story of the whole world written in the streets of Nicosia, in the heart of the Mediterranean between the Eastern and the Western world".

"I like to sit in real places and watch genuine people as I sip an orange juice and soak up the atmosphere, perhaps I will write a novel or a story about my time in Cyprus," Morisi continued.

Research

As an academic and journalist, Morisi has learned the value of research as he says while a strike of inspiration may often be enough



THE writer has been in Cyprus this week for a series of lectures and workshops at the French Institute in Nicosia



ALSO a speaker of many languages, Morisi has written a large number of books, under several pen names

when it comes to poetry, writing a novel, for example: "is more about construction and work than something that comes down to you from God".

His written work includes anything from a novel, biography and play about Italian football great and devout Buddhist Roberto Baggio, to

a fascinating supplement accompanying an exhibition of postcards depicting the French city of Besançon from 1900-1936.

Trail-blazing

Morisi scored a literary coup by meeting with reclusive Finnish writer Arto Paasilinna after Paasilinna learned the French Italian writer had read all his books. Morisi has also written a work using each of Paasilinna's books as chapter in his own work.

Having won the attention of the Finnish media by managing to meet with Paasilinna, Morisi was soon after asked to write about Abbot Regnaud or Renaud Outhier, a member of the Maupertuis expedition to the Pole, which proved that Newton was right and that the earth was flattened at the pole. Morisi and went on to create an education work in which the abbot's exciting tale is made even more interesting by being written in the first person.

As well as being a prolific writer and poet, Morisi's approach and style of work is very diverse and so it is fitting that he also writes under many other names, including Mario Absentès, Frances Contrucci and Richard Aldington. Likening his many pen names to limbs on the same body, Morisi explained he used different names for different types of works, one name for research works, one name for noir novels, and so on. He also joked that, being an only child, he became used to creating imaginary people and worlds early on.

Universal citizen

"My father worked all around Italy and so for the first seven years of my life my mother and I moved around with him, living nowhere and everywhere," Morisi said, adding this was one of the elements reflected in his oeuvre.

Given his general modesty, it is easy to believe Morisi when he says he could have been a football star as he describes his many roles in life which also include revolutionary politics and, what he described as "a Henry Miller-like time of sex, drugs and rock n' roll".

Morisi has more recently been working on the story of his Italian aunt who fled Musso-

Likening his many pen names to limbs on the same body, Morisi explained he used different names for different types of works, one name for research works, one name for noir novels, and so on

lini's Italy in 1922 and lived in the USA until the very day the Berlin Wall came down in 1989.

"We don't know exactly what she did in the USA. Maybe she became a prostitute, maybe she became a feminist," Morisi said, adding he had become fascinated by the idea of what happens to young girls who leave their countries on their own.

"Their destiny is for them to become themselves but there is no one to protect them," he said. Once finished, the work will provide five or six scenarios of what his aunt's life may have been like.

Projects

He is also working on several other projects at the same time and said he belongs to the type of writer, he said, whose work is a tangible part of life.

"There are two types of writers- ambassadors and intellectuals who put themselves outside of their writing and others, like Henry Miller, who live as writers. I am in the second group," Morisi said.

He also jokes his energy may have come from being born on a hill that was once a volcano. Asked what advice he would give to other aspiring writers, Morisi quipped: "Don't follow in my footsteps because I crawled a lot and I fell several times".

He continued: "The most beautiful character in the world of literature and in peoples' minds is Don Quixote. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra had returned from Lepanto (a major clash between the Catholic states and the Ottomans for the control of the Mediterranean) to find a Spain that was like a Manhattan discothèque with all the rich people living it up and so decided to create an entire world to remind people of what was important.

"Reaching out for something more and working to achieve it is the only way to be a real human," he continued.

"Money and riches disappear; there will always be someone younger, more virile, than you. It is not a competition. Find your own dream and fight for it," he said.

Photos by
Stefanos Kouratzis