A pig's unexpected and disorderly run on a rainy evening through the streets of Brussels, a multilingual, multicultural city (commonly known as THE European political capital), an old man who survived Auschwitz, European officials, an assassin, an exalted Polish Catholic, a slightly offbeat Austrian economist, a loyal police superintendent, a lobbyist: in the first chapters, the main protagonists of The Capital already set the scene.

Robert Menasse, Austrian writer and translator, offers what one might suppose an entertaining detective or spy novel. But it is much more than that. Through the characters, we are presented with a human portrait of Europe, sketched out with great precision and veracity. We discover the mysteries of the European Commission, a multinational micro-society of civil servants, the hierarchy of the Directorates-General – DGs in insider language - the codes, the complex inner mechanisms, the ambitions, the inter-state competition. Also, the networks of influence, the "think tanks", the lobbies that gravitate around the institutions. It is a "journey into Eurocracy" (to use the title of an old book) in a sometimes caustic but realistic way, offered by a connoisseur of the Union and its institutions.

With the aim of restoring the prestige of the Commission, suffering a poor image amongst European opinion, the Big Jubilee Project is entrusted to the Communication Directorate of DG Education and Culture, nicknamed Noah's Ark. To counter the widespread perception that the Commission is an abstract bureaucracy, one of the officials puts forward the idea of having Holocaust survivors testify, as a reminder that what was to become the European Union was created so that the atrocities and disasters of the Second World War could not be perpetrated ever again.

Parallel to the preparation of this celebration, Commissioner Brunfaut's police investigation continues, pursuing the desperate flight to Poland of the "warrior of God", who hit the wrong target. But the instigators of the murder will not be unmasked: NATO, the Vatican? Everything is political... (sic). The presence of the pig might seem anecdotal, and yet its funny meanderings through the streets of Brussels is in some ways the Ariadne's thread of history, from its origin to its end.

The book, published in Austria in 2017, is particularly resonant in the present context, when we note with dismay the resurgence of nationalism, the social, economic and political difficulties of receiving migrants, religious terrorism... Each character, through his or her personal journey, is a symbol of European history. Through the voice of the character Alois Erhart, an economist, Robert Menasse ardently pleads the cause of "a Europe of sovereign citizens with equal rights (...) the dream of the Founding Fathers of the European unification project".

May 9 2020 will mark the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, the cornerstone of European integration, and The Capital, a militant work, offers the reader an original but also serious, sometimes harsh, unsettling way of challenging ourselves about the future we want for our Continent.

Book review by Cécile Antonini