



## 2025 French-American Foundation Translation Prize

**Prize winner Interview with John Lambert,  
translator of *V13: Chronicle of a Trial* by Emmanuel Carrère (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)**

**Q: What did you enjoy most about translating *V13: Chronicle of a Trial* by Emmanuel Carrère?**

**John:** The book is a devastating account of the trial of the most brutal terrorist attacks in French history, so "enjoy" here is a big word. Nevertheless from start to finish I got a huge satisfaction from learning about the details of this monumental trial. Carrère puts a year of legal ins and outs into one clear and for me gripping book. And as we go along there are many moments that I do enjoy, and that I enjoyed translating. If I were to pick one out it would certainly be the final chapter, "Allahu akbar." I still remember how I read it in French to my wife and daughter in the kitchen. I wanted to share it with them, and we were all moved by the beauty and humanity of that short text.

**Q: In a 2017 interview with Farrar, Straus & Giroux, you described your experience translating Emmanuel Carrère's work and your encounters with what you call "carrèrisms," Carrère's unique use of the French language. How do "carrèrisms" affect your general approach to translation? Did translating *V13* alter your previous understanding of the "carrèrism"?**

**John:** Carrère is always keeping me on my toes! As a translator you must be vigilant, with Carrère's strikingly precise use of the French language it's doubly so. In my definition, a carrèrism involves using words that we commonly see in a general sense in a more precise sense than I as a translator and even many French people may be accustomed to. Although translating *V13* did not alter my understanding of this, Carrère keeps it up here. For example, on page 121 of the French text he writes "les avocats généraux, qui *veulent convaincre* l'accusé d'association de malfaiteurs terroriste" ("the prosecutors, who *seek a conviction* for criminal terrorist association"). The joke is that the verb "convaincre" is almost exclusively understood by French people as "to convince". Here, however, Carrère uses it in its technically precise legal sense, meaning "to prove someone guilty", or "seek a conviction". Other examples of precise usage – perhaps even too precise for some readers, I fear – involve vocabulary



from the forensic evidence. I imagine in his way the author had a field day with this.

**Q: The French-American Foundation Translation Prize seeks to honor translators and their craft, and recognize the important work they do bringing works of French literature to Anglophone audiences. What does being named a winner for this prize mean to you, and, in your own words, why does a Prize like this matter?**

**John:** Gosh, this is a huge honour. Certainly for me it's one of the very high points of a whole adulthood with books, and with translation. I started out as a student in Paris with Jean-Philippe Toussaint's *Monsieur*, that was in 1989, I still remember how awed I was when I met the publisher Marion Boyars in London and she told me stories about Beckett and the book world. Since then I've kicked around Berlin with Jean-Philippe (I actually figure in one of his novels), and lunched with Emmanuel at the "conspiracy café" which is featured so memorably in *V13*, where we hobnobbed with philosophers and lawyers from his book! Without wanting to sound overly modest though, I must say that *V13* is a different sort of work, where the merit of the translation – be it ever so accurate – dwindles in comparison to the weight of the text. Yet I am thrilled to be this year's winner of the French-American Translation Prize, and feel strongly that it does much to recognize the hours that so many of us spend racking our brains – and scratching our heads!