



by Perikles Monioudis

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Fiction

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Land

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review

In this finely crafted, highly personal, and often poetic novel, we follow the wanderings of an anonymous traveller – a young Swiss diplomat – on a personal journey to retrace fragments of his parents' and grandparents' past in their migration around the Mediterranean, which took them from Anatolia to Alexandria and after that to Algeria, Cyprus, Italy, Greece, Albania and Barcelona. On the protagonist's progress from port to port it is the search for the self that is the real *leitmotiv* of this tale, not his quest to find his grandfather's lost recipe book full of patisserie secrets, left behind when the family fled Alexandria before the Six Day War. All the same, the traveller's journeying does not cease until he has translated and transcribed the recipes contained in the leather-bound book and explored the many nuances for himself, tracing routes around the Mediterranean basin as he does so. There is romance – with a German botanist in Barcelona. But, as the lady comments, it is not for her to cure the traveller of his wanderlust, or to lead him from his desert which is the sea.

The reader may from time to time wish to retrace his steps to make certain he is on the right track. But soon it becomes clear that this is a story all about outsiders, moving on, fitting in or not, and about how, within a single generation, the overall pattern can change. Also increasingly apparent is the author's motivation for the anonymity and coolness with which he portrays his main characters – they are homeless, yet strangely attached to the places where they roam.

This is a highly personal story and at the same time a fascinating snapshot of the European zeitgeist. It would encourage one to re-read – or acquaint oneself for the first time – with Fernand Braudel's monumental study *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Reign of Philip II*, or, for stylistic echoes, to sample Javier Marias's *Mein Herz so weiß* or the poetic resonances of Orhan Pamuk's *Rot ist mein Name*. Most of all, however, here is an evocative piece of literature that leaves one with the smell of the sea in one's nostrils and the taste of sweetmeats in one's mouth.

press quotes

'Inspired by the hoarse catchy songs of legendary Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum and by Gottfried Benn's yearning for the blue of the Mediterranean, Perikles Monioudis proves once again what a fascinating storyteller he is. He treats the excesses of the impressions and mentalities of the Mediterranean with a descriptive perspective imbued with an alpine coolness. Land is not least a book about the act of looking and the cult of regard.' – Kulturspiegel

about the author

Perikles Monioudis was born in Glarus, Switzerland, and lives in Zurich and Berlin. His previous works have been translated into a number of languages and have been awarded various prizes including that of the Swiss Society of Authors and the Conrad Ferdinand Meyer Prize. In 2005 Monioudis was a visiting professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, USA. *Land* is his first book with Ammann Verlag.

Previous works include:

Palladium; Eis; Die Stadt an den Golfen; Freulers Rückkehr.

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