



by Melitta Breznik
Luchterhand Literaturverlag
March 2009 / 256pp
Fiction

This book is outside of the five-year window for guaranteed assistance with English language translation. We suggest getting in touch with the relevant funding body for an informal conversation about the possibility of support. Please refer to our recommendations page for books that are currently covered by our funding guarantee.

Light of the North *Nordlicht*

review

A forty-five-year-old childless woman psychiatrist living in Zurich, unhappily married to a man fifteen years older than herself, has reached a point at which both her work and her marriage have finally become intolerable. She also fears she may have inherited mental illness from her grandmother. She separates from her husband, resigns her job, stops taking her anti-schizophrenia medication and contemplates, but decides against, suicide. Subsequently she travels to the Norwegian archipelago of Lofoten to spend at least the winter months there and radically reassess her life. Part of her reason for choosing this location is that her father was a member of the Wehrmacht stationed there during World War II, and she takes his notebooks with her in the hope of finding out more about him and understanding him better than she had during his life.

On Lofoten she meets a woman called Giske, who lives on a farm inherited from her mother. It becomes apparent (to the reader, but not yet to the newcomer) that Giske is the illegitimate daughter of a German soldier, born on Lofoten at the end of the war, and that her mother was ostracized by the community and forced to give her up for adoption. After a stay of about eighteen months on Lofoten the newcomer (whose name, Anna, is not revealed until about half-way through the book, when the narrative is temporarily taken up by Giske), feels that her crisis has passed and decides to take up a job in psychiatric medicine which has become available in nearby Stokmarknes. Some months later the two women visit an elderly

neighbour who produces some old photographs taken during the war, and, somewhat contrary to the reader's developing expectations, it emerges that Anna's father and Giske's father were friends.

This is a very 'modern' novel. Both its structure and its preoccupations – switches of tense and narrative personae, explorations of female identity and relationships, problematic family history, the fate of World War II collaborators, as well as its Scandinavian setting – chime in well with current tastes. It compares favourably with works by, for example, Kate Atkinson, Jenni Diski or Hilary Mantel and is altogether a pleasure to read.

press quotes

'A stunning first novel.' – *Publishers Weekly, on Night Duty*

'A haunting novel ... Breznik applies warmth in her novel like a gauze bandage: winding carefully, one layer at a time.' – *Benjamin Anastas, The Village Voice*

'You are not a better person when you have read Melitta Breznik, but your feelings are deeper, you can see more clearly, you think more sharply. What more do you want from literature?' – *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*

'A crystal-clear narrator.' – *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

about the author

Melitta Breznik was born in 1961 in the Austrian province of Styria. Her novels have all received high critical acclaim.

Previous works include:

Das Umstellformat ('The Transfer Form', 2002); *Figuren* ('Figures', 1999); *Nachtdienst* (Night Duty, 1995) – all Luchterhand.

Translated editions have been published in:

The Netherlands (Uitgeverij Ambo); Spain (Editorial Cuarto Propio); USA/UK (Steerforth); France (Editions Jacqueline Chambon).

rights information

Verlagsgruppe Random House GmbH

Neumarkter Str. 28

81673 Munich, Germany

Tel: +49 89 41 36 3313

Email: gesche.wendebourg@randomhouse.de

Contact: Gesche Wendebourg

www.randomhouse.de/luchterhand

Luchterhand Literaturverlag was founded by Hermann Luchterhand in 1924 and has been publishing literary titles since 1954, an early and triumphant success being Günter Grass's novel *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*, 1959). Its list includes literary fiction and poetry as well as definitive editions of selected writers' complete works. In 1997 the firm was voted Publishing House of the Year by the German trade journal *Buchmarkt*. It is now part of the Random House Group. Authors include Christa Wolf, Ernst Jandl, Pablo Neruda, António Lobo Antunes, Will Self, Frank McCourt, Hanns-Josef Ortheil, Terézia Mora and Saša Stanišić.