



by Andri Perl

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Fiction

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The Travel Rules

Die fünfte, letzte und wichtigste Reiseregeln

review

This dazzling debut novel traces a journey across Switzerland and Italy as Christoph Roth follows a series of mysterious poems left to him by his late grandmother. Recently graduated and disappointed in love, he decides just to take the next train and visit the places mentioned in the poems. Christoph's grandmother had mentioned her 'lost brother', Christoph's great-uncle Lorenz, in connection with the poems, but what exactly happened remained a taboo topic. Christoph hopes that his journey in pursuit of the poems might uncover that mystery.

He comes up with five self-imposed travel rules: to travel early in the morning; to leave his mobile phone and thereby all connection to home behind; to save on accommodation but not on food; to talk to a pretty woman every day; and, most importantly, to keep following the route of the poems. He goes on to break almost all of these rules but nonetheless they provide some structure for an otherwise gloriously random exploration of post-university freedom. As he pieces together the reasons why Lorenz left his hometown, Christoph tentatively starts to examine his own life and place within his family, including his relationship with his own brother.

The magical quality of *The Travel Rules* is the effortlessly elegant style in which the author, a completely natural storyteller, presents the different strands of the story, and how he manages to make the most uneventful scenes fascinating to read. One of Perl's main

achievements is the melding of completely realistic descriptions of the everyday (down to the impatient thrumming of a passenger's fingers on an armrest) with an acute sense of the bigger, existential themes in life – questions of love, mortality and deeper meaning – as well as fine observational humour.

Flashbacks are interwoven with the present to create a rich canvas of events and memories of events that all relate, more or less directly, to the journey Christoph is on. Searching to find his place in the world, the twentysomething Christoph is not lost – he is merely at that point before knowing what comes next. In that moment before his own story continues back home, he has decided to concentrate on another's story – a relative, yes, and yet a complete stranger with a mysterious past. The result is an exceptionally astute and elegantly written first work, and a thoroughly accomplished reinterpretation of the picaresque.

press quotes

'Swiss rapper Andri Perl has produced an extraordinary debut, whose charming and old-fashioned style has little to do with rap, aside from the joy of playing with language. Elegant, agile and witty.' – WDR

about the author

Andri Perl was born in 1984 in Chur, and studied German philology, art history, and film studies at the University of Zurich. As a member of the rap crews Breitbild and Bauer he is regularly to be found in the Swiss music charts. In 2007, Perl received Chur's literary prize for the opening chapter of his debut novel, *Die fünfte, letzte und wichtigste Reiseregeln*. www.andriperl.ch

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