

(Download) Microcosms

Microcosms

Claudio Magris

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Claudio Magris : Microcosms before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Microcosms:

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Enjoyable and enlighteningBy P. LozarThis is a wonderful, in-depth exploration of a corner of Europe that most people don't know exists. Over the centuries, Trieste and the surrounding region have been a cultural crossroads; as the border between Italy, Slovenia, and Austria shifted, the city was transformed from a rather sleepy backwater to a major port, and back again. This amalgam of cultural influences has made the region unique, and, as a native son, Magris offers an insider's perspective. But this isn't your average travel book; in a series of (mostly) short essays, he vividly portrays aspects of regional life ranging from the whimsical (the bear that never appears) to the gently ironic (Cafe San Marco) to the grim (memories of wars). In the final essay, where he envisions dying while walking in the city park, he revisits themes from most of the other essays and

concludes with a memorable image of "life goes on." I found the book both enjoyable and enlightening as a glimpse into the Triestine mind-set, and I know I'll reread it. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. GEOGRAPHY OF FATE By AV Ashok A companion to "Danube," "Microcosms" extends Claudio Magris's visionary geography in excursions to places around Trieste: the Adriatic lagoons east of Venice, the Neviso forest in Slovenia between Trieste and Fiume, the Collina countryside near Turin, the Croatian Apsyrtides archipelago in the Gulf of Quarnero south of Istria and the valley of Pusteria of the Tyrol. Magris enunciates his distinctive vision of geography in a memorable metaphor: "Place are bobbins where time is wound up upon itself. To write is to unravel these bobbins, to undo, like Penelope, the fabric of history. So it is perhaps not a complete waste of time to try to write something down." For Magris, a place is a complex foundation of existence that is an intricate genealogy of nature, time, history and fate. Each of the places of "Microcosms" has a striking meaning. For example, the Apsyrtides signify immortality or "the pure present moment that is enough in itself and does not tire itself out in the rush towards goals to be reached" or "happiness with no object" from which in "exile" in time "the individual who has lost the absolute seeks to replace it with remedies dreamed out of his own private squalor." The Neviso embodies a remote mystery--of aeons of time and evanescence--from which we humans are inseparable and it leaves us in harmony with "the primordial inchoate, that pulls back into its womb all things and forms." One morning when the clearing of Pomocnjaki in the Neviso is a "perfect cathedral of light," a roe suddenly appears and then disappears--"entering and fading in the impenetrable clarity"--magically freeing Magris from fear of death. Places in "Microcosms" are "wound" with feats of mind and spirit of wonderful lives finding meaning beyond fate. Magris extends lifted admiration and affection for those--like the great poet Biagio Marin who lived in Grado in the lagoons, Don Girotto the archpriest of Revigliasco and the academic and novelist Stefano Jacomuzzi of Cambionia in the Collina--whose lives and writings invoke "the big picture of the infinite, against which all human experience is set," foster the humility of "the smallness of oneself" and of "letting go," promote the conquest of the "vanity" of "taking oneself too seriously" and of "the obsession with impotence" of the "deliriums" of time and indicate a freedom from "fear" of "the vacuous pomp of the world" and above all of death. In a voice of the distilled wisdom of the ages, Magris tells us: "We die because we forget we are immortal." Without the humility of immortality, we succumb to vanity and death or "the darkness in which 'metaphors die': "Perhaps this is original sin, the inability to live and love, to live time, each instant to the full, without craving to burn it up, to use it quickly. Original sin introduces death, which takes possession of life, making life seem unbearable in every hour it proffers in its passing, forcing the destruction of life's time, trying to make it pass quickly, like an illness; killing time, a polite form of suicide." A geographer such as the world has not known, Magris irradiates the earth and residence on earth. "Microcosms" is a celebration of where and when and for whom time and death became immortality. In an existence in which "everything gets misplaced and lost" and "in the fear and the trembling with which life has to be faced" when one "does not know where to find the sense in the things [one] cannot grasp," such men, like "a shepherd to his flock" protecting his "sheep in the midst of wolves," are priceless overseers of wisdom owing to whom "one felt less alone in the shock and the turbulence of things." We turn the pages of this incomparable book page after great page blessed in the majesty of wisdom and compassion of Claudio Magris and the wonder of post-generic creativity of his book and with the uplifting realization that what we are really holding in our hands is a value of existence in whose fold we are "less alone in the shock and the turbulence of things." 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The philosophy and poetry of borderlands By A Reader Like Claudio Magris' earlier book on the Danube, this is a unique variety of travel writing which joins landscape, cultural history, and philosophical reflection, although more personal and perhaps autobiographical. These sketches or essays begin in Trieste and continue to Friuli, the lagoon landscape between Venice and Trieste, a mountain and forest in Slovenia, the countryside outside Turin, islands in the Gulf of Kvarner/Quarnero, and villages in Alto Adige/Südtirol. A few famous names occur (Pier Paolo Pasolini and James Joyce, for instance) but the author is more interested in the colors of the sea and sky and portraits of relatively unknown or ordinary people: a dialect poet, an eccentric pamphleteer, the regulars who frequent a country inn, or the cats in a public park. While he is a keen observer of the small detail, Magris consistently returns to the perspective of world events and cataclysms. He makes us aware of the complex, many-layered history of these places, the beauty of the landscape as well as the horrors of the past, including the crimes of Italian and German fascism and Yugoslav communism. There are many reflections on nationalism, ethnicity and identity, memory, our mortality, and our ambivalent relationship to nature. These microcosms are small corners of Europe, but they are also borderlands where Italian, Germanic, and Slavic cultures have interacted for centuries and where actual political boundaries have shifted back and forth as empires and republics have come and gone. The encounter of different cultures is one of the threads running through this otherwise not very linear narrative; at one point Magris interprets the legend of Jason and Medea in this light. For Magris, borders are both a necessity and a curse--necessary between ourselves and others to maintain our identity, but the cause of conflict and suffering. All endogamies and exclusive groups are suffocating and a negation of life, which, Magris says, is a sea port. Beginning and ending in the sea port of Trieste, this outstanding book is an invitation to travel, think, and experience.

In his acclaimed work *Danube*, Claudio Magris painted a vast canvas stretching from the source of the river to the

Black Sea. Now he focuses on the tiny borderlands in Istria and Italy, where he was born and where he has lived most intensely. From the forests of Monte Nevoso to the hidden valleys of the Tyrol to a Trieste cafe, *Microcosms* pieces together a mosaic of stories -- comic, tragic, picaresque, nostalgic -- from life's minor characters. Their worlds might be small, but they are far from minimalist: in them flashes the great, the meaningful, the unrepeatable significance of every existence. Magris is a profoundly original modern writer. With its illuminating, elegant prose, *Microcosms*, like *Danube*, is destined to become a classic of travel literature.

"A haunting amalgam of travelogue, autobiography and impressionist sketchbook." -- Jonathan Keates, *Literary*
"Claudio Magris is engaged in a seductively exciting journey of the imagination which enriches and enthralls." -- Eileen Battersby, *The Irish Times*
About the Author Claudio Magris holds a chair in Germanic Studies in the University of Trieste, and was for a period a member of the Italian parliament. He is the author of works of literary criticism and plays and has translated works by Isben, Kleist, and Schnitzler. He won international acclaim for his remarkable study of middle Europe, *Danube*.