



# Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea

*Claudio Magris , Patrick Creagh (Translator)*

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**Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea** Claudio Magris , Patrick Creagh (Translator)

A triumphant celebration of a river that has forever been at the center of the great movements of history.

In this fascinating journey through the history and culture of the Danube, Claudio Magris, whose knowledge is encyclopedic and curiosity limitless, invites the reader to accompany him along the whole course of the river, from the Bavarian hills through Austro-Hungary and the Balkans to the Black Sea. In each town he raises the ghosts that inhabit the houses and monuments: Kafka and Freud; Wittgenstein and Marcus Aurelius; Lukes, Heidegger, and Cline; Canetti and Ovid. He also encounters a host of more obscure but no less intriguing personalities--philosophers, novelists, diplomats, and patriots--on an odyssey that brings middle-European culture to life in its most picturesque and evocative forms.

*Danube* is among the first of a new list of nonfiction paperbacks published as Harvill Press Editions.

## **Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea Details**

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# From Reader Review Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea for online ebook

**Jonfaith says**

**A parasite of hardship, he takes refuge in absolute negation, splashing about comfortably among the contradictions of existence and of culture, and flaunting the frenzy of them, instead of trying to understand the far more arduous contest between good and evil, truth and falsehood, which every day brings with it.**

This is a most episodic erudition, a heartbeat of time through the prism of a lifetime in a chair (recalling Gass) pondering the endless flow of a river, across Europe, across history, eventually allowing the sediment to afford upper case status-- History. My own time by the Danube has seldom been "Blue" as it were but one instead of marvel. I was there once on the Chain Bridge with the woman I love. We were not married then and I was left most mortified at making a move. (I had just read Prague by Arthur Phillips where the protagonist attempts to kiss a woman on the bridge and is rejected).

The quest of Magris along the river does appear solipsistic--but that isn't a complaint. He initially puzzles over the what constitutes the source of the river. There is incredible debate and contention regarding the location. Such assertions have considerable baggage. What do they preclude, what jingoism is evoked? Each page both crackles and groans under the weight of its references: Goethe, Holderlin, Nietzsche, Hofmannsthal.

The book inspires its own echoes -- go see Ister (2004) by David Barison, snuggle up with Cultural Amnesia: Necessary Memories from History and the Arts

The book proceeds down the river, known of course in Ancient Greece as Ister. There is a melancholy of absence--not only of times and traditions, but tongues and manners of grace and civility. I myself was on the banks just a short while back. Looking about at the vineyard my wife's family are cultivating near Sremski Karlovci, or Carlowitz as it was known under the Hapsburgs or Karlofça as it was known by the Ottoman Empire. There is a Roman ruin on a hilltop and down below a 15C church, in the waning light of day the church betrayed a menace and my imagination flinched at the possibility of a Lovecraftean cult of river evil.

Serbia doesn't appear prominent in the book. Magris deliberates on Vienna and its poetic silence.

**Silence is not Marx, it is Wittgenstein or Hofmannsthal: it is Viennese.**

The Ottomans failed in their siege and back in Beograd someone had to answer for the defeat. It would have been so simple to tweet the succession. The book was penned in 1986 before Glastnost led to a change in format. It also predates the Yugoslav Civil War and the NATO destruction of the bridges at Novi Sad. The EU eventually paid for the removal and restoration: trade must prevail!

**It may be that the moment is approaching, when the historical, social and cultural differences will reveal, and violently, the difficulties of mutual incompatibility. Our future will depend in part on our ability to prevent the priming of this time-bomb of hatred, and the possibility that new Battles of Vienna will transform brothers into foreigners and enemies.**

Strange how the subterranean rifts in the YU throughout the 80s are ignored in favor of concerns about

Bulgaria. Maybe the Brexit can be read into such, if it happened along those storied banks?

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### **Kevin Tole says**

I am not sure who is to blame more - the learned poet translator or the wannabee poet intellectual author. Like another reviewer I dragged my way through this book continually affronted by Magris' attempts to blind us with his knowledge and name dropping. This Italian Melvyn Bragg's attempts to provide a book on the diversity of the Danube just ends up as an opportunity for him to namecheck various obscure figures of European thought. HE revels in it along with his bootiful Italian companions. I found it turgid in the extreme. No descriptions of the geography or landscape. There is no heart in this book. Just cold intellectualism. It is dull beyond belief.

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### **Edward says**

*Introduction, by Richard Flanagan  
Map*

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### **Terry says**

"On one such night a famous Greek corn merchant gambled away his fortune, his red neo-classical palace near the Danube, and his wife."

*Danube* is full of lost-treasure-like passages such as this. I felt, when I reached the end, as if I'd just read some sort of sacred text. As travelogue it's absolutely everything you could want and more (well, it doesn't always tell you which hotel to choose or where to eat, though it does accomplish that sometimes). What it does do is expound upon the history, mythology, literature, politics, wars, cultures, migrations, etc, that have visited the cities and realms along the Danube, the Holy River, if there is/was one, of the Holy Roman Empire in its post-Roman, German phase. It also succeeded in making me feel almost totally ignorant of European literature (though I was occasionally pleased to see a name crop up that I recognized or had even read, e.g., Thomas Mann), history, cultures, migrations, etc, etc. I know several people who have taken boat trips on the Danube, and I know that I wouldn't think of going without this book.

Just read this (October 22, 2016), and thought it would make a nice addition to my own thoughts of 7 ½ years ago: Richard Flanagan, "Why Claudio Magris's Danube is a timely elegy for lost Europe," *The Guardian*, October 22, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/22/why-claudio-magris-danube-timely-elegy-for-lost-europe>....

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### **Nikos Tsentemeidis says**

?σο με δυσκ?λεψε στην αρχ? και το παρ?τησα για 2 μ?νες, τ?σο με συνεπ?ρε ?ταν βρ?κα χρ?vo να

του δ?σω τη δ?ουσα προσοχ? και εν τ?λει να το απολα?σω μ?χρι τ?λους.

Το βιβλ?ο ε?ναι πραγματικ? εγκυκλοπα?δεια. Μικρ?ς αφηγ?σεις που συνθ?τουν εν συντομ?α την ιστορ?α, τον πολιτισμ?, τα γρ?μματα των παραδουν?βιων περιοχ?ν των τελευτα?ων αι?νων.

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### **Kelly says**

Update: this is just not going to happen now. I am not in a place for its prose. I'll try again in the winter.

\* \*\*

This was on the shelf next to the Fermor I just bought. Clever clever salespeople. I bought both.

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### **Sciarpina says**

Ecco uno di quei libri di cui non è facilissimo parlare perché quando sono così tanto pieni di tutto e senti durante la lettura che ti arricchiscono e ti nutrono, spesso capita di non trovare tutte le parole necessarie per descriverli. Danubio per me è uno di questi. Né interamente libro di viaggio, né completamente saggio, è piuttosto un libro di atmosfere e memorie dove, partendo dalla sua sorgente (a lungo dibattuta!) a Donaueschingen in Germania fino alla sua foce (altrettanto discussa perché è impossibile identificarne la fine netta) nel Mar Nero in Romania, Magris compie oltre che un viaggio fisico un viaggio nel tempo del territorio danubiano citando fatti storici, battaglie, aneddoti e curiosità, riflessioni e tantissima letteratura. Germania, Austria, Slovacchia, Ungheria, la Jugoslavia di allora, Bulgaria e Romania i paesi toccati e per ognuno tantissimi riferimenti a scrittori e poeti (la maggior parte a me sconosciuti e che mi sono annotata) che nelle loro opere hanno trasfuso l'essenza delle loro terre.

Un libro di non sempre facile lettura, ma per chi è interessato al mondo austro-tedesco-danubiano lo consiglio di sicuro perché imprescindibile fonte da cui attingere per ampliare il proprio bagaglio di conoscenze che gravitano intorno a quel mondo e per iniziare a capire quella parte di Europa orientale che ancora resta molto misteriosa.

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### **Carlos Manzano says**

"El Danubio" es algo así como el paradigma de la literatura de viajes. No es un libro de anécdotas, historias más o menos triviales ni sucesos sin apenas importancia: "El Danubio" se adentra hasta el tuétano en la cultura y la historia centroeuropeas, nos lleva de la mano por sus principales hitos, por su idiosincrasia y por supuesto también por sus aspectos más indignantes, supeditando el viaje físico al intelectual, a la experiencia verdaderamente vital.

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### **Maria Beltrami says**

Ci sono libri che ti guardano per anni dagli scaffali della libreria, di cui senti parlare, ai quali altri scrittori fanno riferimento, tu li guardi, con un mixto di diffidenza e senso di inferiorità, e li lasci lì, finché una notte non riesci a dormire, e quasi per caso te li ritrovi in mano.

Questa è la storia della relazione tra me e il capolavoro di Magris.

Pensavo che fosse un libro di viaggio, e infatti lo è, ma il Danubio, il suo stravagante e infinito percorso tra una sorgente assimilabile a un rubinetto e una foce che è un canale in un porto, sono il pretesto per un viaggio attraverso l'Europa, la sua storia e la sua letteratura, i suoi popoli e le sue contraddizioni.

Davvero un monumento, nonostante per molti versi la storia l'abbia superato, a causa della caduta del muro di Berlino e di tutta la frana che quella caduta ha provocato.

Ma resta la certezza che le acque del Danubio siano più potenti della piccola storia degli uomini, a meno che qualcuno non chiuda il rubinetto ...

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### **dely says**

I really struggled to finish this book. The author travels from the source of the Danube to its outfall and it could have been an interesting travelogue but it isn't. First of all, the language is too difficult, pompous and erudite. Sometimes I had the feeling that the author wanted only to show how cultured he is. The author also uses too long sentences with several subordinate propositions and it was a torture to read those sentences. But, maybe the worst part of this book, is that the author takes for granted that the reader already knows everything about history and historical characters and events, geography, philosophers, writers and characters in books. He doesn't talk about important events that occurred in the places along the Danube, but mainly about anecdotes or small curiosities. Therefore the reader needs to know the background and the historical event of these anecdotes and curiosities in order to understand them. The author also mentions characters from the Iliad and Odyssey or other books, thinking that everyone has read them and knows what he is talking about. There weren't notes, not a map, nothing. At the beginning I looked up a few things on Google, but then I gave up because I wasn't enjoying the book and the way it was written, and I didn't want to waste even more time with this unintelligible book.

Maybe who has a wider culture than me, will enjoy this book, but for me it was a real torture and I don't know why I didn't give up after the first chapters. I found interesting only short parts of this book, i.e. the parts where the author talked about authors I know and of which I have read the books. Did this book teach me something new? Not at all. On the contrary, I was only confused. But as said, if a reader is cultured, then maybe he will enjoy this book because it will add a lot of anecdotes and curiosities that maybe can't be found in ordinary history books.

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### **Habemus\_apicellam says**

#### **Frammenti di Mitteleuropa trascinati dalla corrente**

Non è una lettura agevola, quella di queste 600 pagine dense di cultura, storia, letteratura. Magris sceglie di raccogliere riflessioni anche molto brevi (a volte meno di una pagina) in un percorso che segue il grande fiume europeo, costellato di presenze di filosofi, letterati, artisti che hanno costruito la nostra cultura. È un potente e splendido viaggio, ma fatto in silenzio, dove contano i segni della storia e della letteratura, più che le visioni e le esperienze e dove le idee si fanno materia viva e vera, amalgamata da uomini realissimi uniti da un'acqua che è sempre diversa (e sempre la stessa).

Lo spirito è raffinato e vagamente malinconico (sempre stemperato da una intelligente ironia), in perfetta risonanza con quanto è stata la Mitteleuropa, della cui letteratura l'autore è massimo esperto. E qui e là risuonano echi borgesiani, attratti dalle continue e variegate metafore che il Danubio suscita

Nella prima parte, dove Magris attraversa Germania e Austria, l'autore sempre più sicuro, preciso, a proprio agio; ma quando si passa la Cortina di Ferro (ai tempi ancora ben presente) il passo si fa più incerto ed insicuro, si abbandona il grande fiume per seguire il vagare della vecchia Nonna Anka alla ricerca di un filo nella mescolanza di genti, storie, racconti, pagine passando per Transilvania e Ungheria.

Mi sento di consigliare la lettura con uno schermo a portata di mano, dove esplorare mappe e immagini: da questo punto di vista i mezzi tecnologici odierni ci permettono di vedere e percepire più chiaramente ciò che Magris ci racconta...

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### **Erwin Maack says**

Procurar as origens da Torre de Babel? Não me seria surpreendente se algum entrevistador conseguisse esta dúvida como resposta ao porquê de ter escrito tal livro. Foi o que senti no decorrer destas páginas. Desde as suas origens (do rio) até o seu delta as histórias se aprimoram nos fatos e nos deixam um grande espaço para refletir e sonhar. Afinal de contas não saberemos jamais a resposta para a nossa mais profunda dúvida, como é que poderíamos encontrá-la em algum lugar? Entretanto não é ela que importa - a resposta - e sim o passeio, aliás, excepcional, maravilhoso.

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### **Ryan Iseppi says**

This one almost broke me.

I reckon it took me about six months to finally come to the end of this book, reading it as I did in short angry spurts, and while it made a certain impact on me psychologically, I don't expect to retain much at all of the dizzying accumulation of historical happenings, personal anecdotes, literary analyses, and harebrained philosophizing that Claudio Magris packages as a "travel" book.

*Danube* is relentlessly intellectual, pedantic, and frankly, aimless, as Magris attempts to fit every single iota of information vaguely related to the Danube region that he has ever encountered into one absurdly ambitious narrative. After this long, hard slog of a book, I don't feel consider myself to have any greater understanding of the region, its cultures, and the interactions between the two, nor can I recall a wealth of anecdotes and incidents worth remembering. Magris apparently cannot help himself when it comes to naming local personalities both known and obscure (though he skews heavily towards the obscure), and though for the first few chapters of the book I read with a Wikipedia page at the ready, after about a hundred pages the constant requirement of researching the people and events mentioned fleetingly paragraph to paragraph became a headache-inducing ritual. This is particularly disappointing in that this is one of the very reasons I picked up this book - I'm always looking for interesting novelists outside the classical European literary canon. Imagine my disappointment to find that a great number of the authors Magris praises, scrutinizes, and eulogizes over the course of this book have never been translated into any other languages, nor have they been in print for decades. Furthermore, Magris drops many rather obscure names (last name only, naturally) as though they are standard household reference points. Büsching, Popa, and Stifter - all chosen randomly from the text - are just three examples of writers known primarily to academics of Magris's

stature, yet they are written of as if they represent some universal quality apparent to anyone familiar with European literature.

It must be mentioned, I suppose, that some of the language in this book is truly exquisite. Magris is clearly operating on a different level than the vast majority of mankind, and one gets the feeling that he wrote this book for others in his own intelligence bracket. However, this does not excuse his conflating every bit of Danubian history, culture, and literature, no matter how significant or not, into a model, typification, or microcosm for the human experience. Certain passages are frankly comical, as the reader is swept from a relatively mundane description of a forgotten Wallachian or Lipovenian poet's career into an overarching commentary on the nature of life, or death, or both. A sentence near the end of the book is quite telling: "Every cemetery [is] a continual epos, to beget and suggest every possible novel." Magris has seemingly attempted to literalize this sentiment. Every square meter of earth that lines the Danube contains a trove of tales for our author, some interesting, others not so. However, in failing to discriminate and in consistently over-evaluating the significance of each of them, Magris has come up with something too unreal and melancholic to ever reach the average reader - Magris's Danube never appears to be sensual. The reality of the landscape and the people who inhabit it always takes a back seat to the kind of foggy cultural introspection from which Magris never raises his head. All in all, this is a work by an author with a tremendous intellect, who never once pauses to consider his reader.

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### **Martha says**

Not the travel book I was expecting! I haven't met so far any actual inhabitants along the river or much of the actual river itself - rather historical vignettes, philosophical musings and grappling with the third Reich.(which are very interesting and kept me going to my iPad to find out more) But I haven't put it down as I keep thinking I might. Still, I wish I were traveling with Femor.

At the very end of this challenging book , I found what I was thinking I would be reading - just a few lines: "As the boat passes their houses, people come to the doorways and windows, and with cheerful hospitality beckon us to stop and pay them a visit. Some of them, with a few strokes of the paddle, come alongside us offering fresh fish in exchange for rakia." Sadly, they remain just nameless, faceless cheerful people. I would like Margris to have taken up their invitation, gone in their homes and shared a drink. But this is not a book of those living along the Danube but of the dead.

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### **Carla says**

#### **CEMITÉRIOS NA ESTRADA**

*Há uma poesia de Novomeský dedicada a um cemitério eslovaco. Em numerosas aldeias, entre as montanhas, os cemitérios não têm muros ou têm-nos tão baixos que não se notam, são cemitérios abertos e transbordam pelas ervas dos prados, correm ao longo do caminho, como em Matiasovce, em direcção à fonteira polaca, ou ficam à entrada da aldeia, como um jardim diante da porta de casa. Esta familiaridade épica com a morte – que reencontramos por exemplo nas sepulturas muçulmanas da Bósnia, tranquilamente instaladas nos hortos das casas, e que o nosso mundo tende, pelo contrário, cada vez mais neuroticamente a exilar – tem a medida da justiça, é um sentido da relação entre o indivíduo e as gerações, a terra, a natureza, os elementos que a compõem e a lei que preside à sua combinação e desagregação.*

*Nas drevenice vizinhas dos cemitérios assomam rostos grandes e mansos, parecidos com a boa madeira das suas casas. Os cemitérios isentos de tristeza dizem-nos como é enganador e supersticioso o medo da morte. Talvez, do mesmo modo que estes cemitérios se encontram em frente ou ao lado do dia-a-dia, e não numa zona afastada e recusada, devêssemos aprender a olhar a morte de outra maneira. Lemos numa poesia de Milan Rúfus: «Só pela frente a morte faz medo. / Por trás / só uma bela inocência súbita. / Máscara de carnaval, com que, / depois da meia-noite apanhas água / para beberes ou te lavares do teu suor».*

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## **Orsodimondo says**

Tutta la mia stima a Magris, lo leggo spesso sui giornali. Ma i suoi libri sono un'altra cosa. Si parla da anni di premio Nobel per lui, ma non credo che ce la far?? mai. E confermerebbe la mia opinione sul Nobel alla Letteratura: spesso non va ai veri grandi scrittori viventi, ma a quelli importanti. Che ?? un'altra cosa.

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## **William2.1 says**

Erudite meditations on the Danube and the blood-soaked lands through which it winds. *Danube* is not a travel narrative in the classic sense. The river is here a device for writing about a mix of colorful events and persons associated with it. Magris is a critic and his assessment of cultural phenomenon along the river's course is often excellent, especially when he deigns to tell the reader what he's writing about. It's a densely allusive work.

That said, the long essay on Louis-Ferdinand Céline—who stayed at Sigmaringen Castle on the Danube when the collaborationist Vichy government was forced there by the retreating Germans—is fascinating. Céline went from "the great voice of the people" before World War 2 to that of "an iniquitous traitor, an anti-semitic hunted down and reduced to the scum of the earth on a level with the Nazi butchers" afterward. Yet Magris makes a compelling argument for his greatness while at the same time acutely rendering judgement.

The section on Jean Paul was beyond me. I never got a handle on the Catherine Wheel of abstractions Magris was spinning there. If there's a problem with this book, it's that the author—this, assuming the translation is accurate—fancies himself a stylist. I'm with V.S. Naipaul on this one: "good writing doesn't draw attention to itself." Yet the book is full of interesting arcana if you're willing to endure the flights of fancy.

Magris seems to have read everything and he wants you to know it. There are short essays on Hermann Schmid's little Danube tale, *Franzel the Negress*, a fiction in which her white lover makes her famous through his play *The Queen of Sheba* which, Magris writes, "exposes the whole savage shallowness of racism." The section called "The Archivist of Affronts" tells the story of one Ferdinand Thrän—known for *The Cathedral of Ulm: an Exact Description of Same*, 1857—who almost destroyed the cathedral by "his obstinate belief in a 'law' of arches which he was convinced he had discovered." More interesting to this reader was Thrän's *File of Rudenesses Received*, whose "precision and completeness . . . may [have] given a pleasure that compensated for the repulsiveness of what is actually noted."

The insight into the life and writings of the 19th-century Austrian writer, Adalbert Stifter—a great favorite of W.G. Sebald—was most welcome, as was the overview of Sankt Florian Church and monastery where Anton Bruckner played organ and wrote his great symphonic works. Other meditations include the double

suicide of Crown Prince Rudolf and Maria Vetsera at Mayerling, 1889; a scathing critique of Wittgenstein's house at 19 Kundmanngasse; the split between humanity and the natural world which Magris sees lasting as long as we eat other animals; an image of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa riding to war across the stone bridge at Regensburg, ca. 1150; a consideration of the putrefactive vigor of the soil in the Central Cemetery, Vienna; a brief overview of Hungarian Marxist scholar György Lukács's life and work, especially how his adherence to Stalinism compromised him; and a canny summation of the poetry of Romanian-born Paul Celan who Magris sees as "...probably the last Orphic poet, a religious reformer of Orphic poetry, bringing it to a blinding, primeval purity before it is snuffed out."

I started this book after finishing Patrick Leigh Fermor's *A Time of Gifts* and *Between the Woods and the Water*, also memoirs-cum-travelogues-cum-histories of the Danube. At first I thought that Magris's failure to cite Fermor a trifle fishy. But now I'm relatively certain that Magris, who wrote in Italian, was not influenced by Fermor.

Fermor's travels on foot along the Danube as an 18 and 19 year old in 1934-35 saw him meeting with Gypsies, interacting with locals, learning their languages (German, Romani, Hungarian, Romanian, etc.), sometimes drinking to excess, picking up girls. He often did not know from one day to the next where he would sleep. Some nights it was on a thatch of fresh tree limbs, on others in the splendor of some ducal château. At one point in the second volume Fermor rides a magnificent black stallion—Malek—across the Great Hungarian Plain. The river and its banks are much more visibly present in his books due to his gift for rich descriptive writing. One gets from Fermor a sense of the river's every turning, the vast changes in its topography as it moves more than 2000 km to its delta in the Black Sea. In Magris this travel aspect is minimal. Magris does not evoke such an intimate view of the river and its banks, much less mix it up with the common people. We hardly get to know even those friends with whom he travels.

In closing, the book is a rich source of information. However, it's a hodgepodge. It doesn't gel; it never seeks to be an extended narrative. It's an anthology of curios. Moreover, Magris is tremendously private. We learn only of his intellectual inclinations, not his personal ones. Who are these friends so fleetingly mentioned? Where does he live, city or country? We want to know *something* about him, but he keeps his guard up, there is virtually nothing. This is why, while Magris' book is certainly worthwhile, for me the Fermor books are the far more accessible reads about this fascinating river and its diverse peoples.

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### **Zozetta says**

Τα π?ντε αστερ?κια δεν ε?ναι αρκετ?. Απ? τα ωραι?τερα βιβλ?α που ?χω διαβ?σει.

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### **Caroline says**

This is an amazing compendium of history, literary criticism, travelogue, and meditation on twentieth century European crises. Giving four stars is perhaps picky, but a number of times Magris gets so wound up in his prose that he goes off in paragraphs that don't really make any sense or contribute anything. The book is so long that I began to begrudge him these self-indulgences. Also, it sags in the middle, as he talks about Vienna. In contrast to the really focused and insightful things he has to say about German culture, especially in the section on Ulm, the Viennese are rather amorphous easy-going folk who get a lot of pages because the Hapsburgs are an important topic, but the place itself seems to elude his grasp of anything that will give us a

concrete sense of how it feels. Also the earlier section on Germany has a delightful section on an exhaustive study of the upper Danube by an engineer, Neweklowsky.

But overall it's phenomenal. I have highlighted sentences on almost every page, that encapsulate a period or an author. One recurrently strange thing, reading it in 2014, is that Magris traveled down the Danube in 1983, and from east of Vienna his writing is suffused with observations on life under Communism. Granted, the comments are wedged in among reflections on the ethnic tides and military alliances since Roman times, but it hangs over his encounters and colors his comments on contemporary literature. So odd to think how shortly things would change, at least to some degree.

The other fascinating theme is the ethnic mix and variety of assimilation attitudes in what was still Yugoslavia--whether the surface tension would hold or not.

'Events which occurred many years or decades ago we feel to be contemporary, while facts and feelings a month old seem infinitely distant and erased for ever. Time thins out, lengthens, contracts, forms all but tangible clots or dissolves like fog-banks into nothing.'

'Today, questioning oneself about Europe means asking oneself how one relates to Germany.'

'Shi Huang Ti, the Chinese Emperor who was uncertain whether to destroy or to construct, divided himself equally between these two conflicting passions by building the Great Wall and buring all the books.'

'[the Black Sea] 'Those waters which sometimes look black, as if night had her cradle there,' write Vintila Horia.'

'...it reveals an interest in those emptinesses, those absences, those things which are not and to which Austria nonetheless gives expression, like Robert Musil's Parallel Action, consisteing of the events which do not happen and initiatives which are not taken'

'In this sense the Emperor [Marcus Aurelius], although he travels through remote Pannonia and dies so far from Rome--at Vindobona--is what Gadda would call a sedentary, the sort of man who with patient consistency forms his own personality. The nomadic poets, Baudelaire's vrais voyageurs, wander without destination, trying every experience and deliberately dispersing their specific personal identity, losing themselves and dissolving into nothingness.'

'So it comes about that, in Germany, freedom in the modern, democratic sense of the word is countered by the liberties of the classes and corporations, their ancient rights which defend the social inequalities stratified over the centuries. It is not universal human nature that decided on the values and the rights of man, but the concrete historical facts.'

'This presage of the end is, however, tranquil and majestic, rich with fertile vitality. In the Balta the Danube merges with the meadows in a vast, inextricable jungle of water, dense trees overhanging the river to form liquid caverns, deep flowing lairs, dark green and as blue as the night, in which it is impossible to tell the soil from the water and the sky. Vegetation covers everything, climbing and twisting everywhere in an exuberant proliferation, a play of mirrors reflecting one another.'

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## **SurferRosa says**

Appassionante e interessantissimo viaggio nella geografia, nella storia, nella letteratura e cultura dell'Europa danubiana, dalle incerte e dubbie sorgenti alla foce placida e stanca, ma ugualmente non univoca, del grande fiume. Disincantata e spesso malinconica avventura interiore, le cui sponde sono lambite da acque cangianti come quelle dell'esistenza che scorre dalla nascita alla morte, comparendo inaspettata per poi disgregarsi e sciogliersi nella sua fine.

Il viaggio di Magris è un viaggio senza tempo, perché guidato dall'unica stella polare che (purtroppo) non mente: la consapevolezza della nostra caducità, resa ancor più dolorosa dall'inevitabile slancio, dal desiderio irrealizzabile di eternità che in fondo ognuno di noi si porta dentro. La stella polare brilla sempre così luminosa davanti agli occhi dell'autore che, a rileggerlo oggi che sotto i ponti del Danubio è passata tanta di quell'acqua che il mondo è completamente un altro, anche certe riflessioni figlie dell'ideologia rimangono valide e conservano un loro fondo di verità, almeno una loro verità, quella verità che risponde alla consapevolezza di cui sopra, cioè che l'inesorabile scorrere del tempo fa della Storia degli uomini un discontinuo puzzle, o un mosaico se si preferisce, che non viene mai portato a termine perché sono gli stessi pezzi o tessere che prima o poi, più o meno rapidamente, mutano e che quindi una verità che sia valida per tutti non è mai raggiungibile, così come di due azioni tra di loro contraddittorie, compiute a distanza di molti anni e in situazioni diverse, non necessariamente una deve essere sbagliata. E così Magris, ripercorrendo anche storie antiche come quella degli Svevi e dei Sassoni che nel 1200 si imbracavano a Ulm per andare a bonificare e coltivare terre e costruire città nel Banato o in Transilvania, è consapevole della caducità della realtà contemporanea che osserva nel suo viaggio e, per esempio in Jugoslavia sembra presagire il disastro balcanico che seguirà di lì ad alcuni anni e, lungo tutto il percorso, sembra ardentemente desiderare una unità europea, consapevole e rispettosa di tutte le diversità, a tutt'oggi lontanissima dall'essere raggiunta.

E così quello di Magris è forse soprattutto un viaggio filosofico, se così si può dire, il viaggio del viaggiatore consapevole del fatto che non si viaggia per arrivare da qualche parte, ma che la meta del viaggio è il viaggio stesso. Passando per città famose e piccoli borghi, narrando la grande Storia di guerre e imperatori - quella dei manuali, per intenderci - così come le tante piccole storie degli illustri sconosciuti che nei manuali non ci entreranno mai, Magris segue il corso del grande fiume (che non è blu! quello al massimo è il suo affluente Inn che, perbacco, potrebbe tranquillamente aspirare ad essere lui il corso principale ed il Danubio un suo affluente!) che via via raccoglie nel suo alveo detriti su detriti che vanno a formare una straordinaria congerie culturale.

Da leggere e rileggere per le infinite divagazioni e suggestioni contenute, io mi sono trovato praticamente ad ogni pagina così incuriosito dalle storie che non conoscevo da desiderarne l'immediato approfondimento. Un libro utile contro i paraocchi di ogni foggia e colore, perché un baricentro non esiste, tutto scorre, e dovremmo ricordarci più spesso che ogni nostro pensiero è sempre e solo il nostro limitatissimo (e spesso arrogante) punto di vista.

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