

Awardee: Petros Markaris

Writer, translator and publicist, Greece

Petros Markaris is the world's best-known Greek author of our time. In recent years he has been a dedicated and knowledgeable participant in the debates over the crisis: in his novels, in essays and in the international press. He conveys an authentic image of Greece and is also an honest advocate of Germany in his homeland. Petros Markaris is being awarded the Goethe Medal as a mediator in Greek-German relations, who maintains his intelligent, analytical insights of both countries even in times of crisis.

The books of Petros Markaris have been translated into 13 languages and some have been adapted as films. He regularly gives readings and lectures, particularly in German-speaking countries. His crime novels are affectionate yet socially critical descriptions of modern Greek society and excellent literary images of cultural reality. In addition to Greek, Markaris speaks fluent Turkish and German and considers language to be the key to understanding others. He brought German-language plays to the Greek stage with outstanding translations of writers such as Brecht, Goethe, Schnitzler, Bernhard and Kroetz. Even in strained situations, Petros Markaris retains his (self) critical outlook on Greek politics and society and his equally critical estimations of German economic policy and the German media landscape. His assessments stand out in their dissimilarity from the bulk of reporting and have contributed to keeping the positive aspects of the many years of German-Greek relations in memory, according to the explanatory statement by the conferment commission.

Petros Markaris was born in Istanbul in 1937 as the son of Armenian-Greek parents. He learned German at the Austrian *Realgymnasium* in Istanbul; since graduating he has spoken the language like a native speaker. He studied Economics in Vienna and Stuttgart and initially worked as a businessman. He first became known as a playwright and screenplay writer: his play *The Tale of Ali Retzo* debuted on Athens stages in 1971 during the Greek military dictatorship and became a great success. He worked with director Theodoros Angelopoulos on *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) and other films. Markaris became known to a broader audience in the early 1990s with his series of novels about police investigator Costas Haritos. Crime novels are his way of expressing social criticism in a literary form. His translation of *Faust* (Parts I and II) into Greek was also a great success in 2001. At the age of 76, Markaris is at the peak of his literary powers; he writes commentaries for newspapers in Greek and German, publishes on average one novel a year, translates and regularly goes on reading tours. Most recently, he wrote as a "Greek from Constantinople" for *Daring to Remember*, the southeastern European literature project by the Goethe-Institut. Petros Markaris lives in Athens.

Quotes by Petros Markaris

“Athens is not dying of heart failure, but of Alzheimer’s [...]. The city’s memory is gradually fading and Athens is losing its means of existence.” (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, March 2013)

“The Greeks master the culture of poverty very well. What they lacked was the culture of wealth.” (*Ypo to miden*, literally *Below Zero*, Athens, 2011)

“When I announced in 2009 that I was writing a trilogy about the Greek crisis, most Greeks thought I was mad because they either did not want to recognize any crisis or they thought it would soon end.” (During his reading at the Hamburg Harbour Front Festival, 2012)

“Literature, culture and education play decisive roles in times of crisis.” (Interview on SWR2, February 2013)

“The first thing that a writer must learn is to love his loneliness. While working, a writer is a very lonely person.” (Interview on SWR2, February 2013)

On the quirk of his novel character Inspector Haritos to seek help in his dictionary when he is at a loss:

“I think Haritos’ dictionary was a good idea, I have to admit it publicly now. I didn’t make it up out of thin air, but from being a translator and working as a translator for many years. When you are a translator you simply have to love dictionaries or you should get another job.” (Interview on SWR2, February 2013)

Quotes about Petros Markaris

“With his family man Haritos, Petros Markaris created a character that keeps at the centre between the poles of regression and megalomania. Greek life oscillates between these two extremes, expressively symbolized in the Haritos crime novels by the eternal traffic jams of the capital city and by the omnipotence of the media.” (*Die Zeit*, Tobias Gohlis, May 2007)

“Markaris proves himself a remarkably light-footed dancer between serious topics, thrills in the manner of American crime novels and pure entertainment. Just as his inspector sometimes deliberately obliterates clues so that his superiors are unable to sun themselves in the light of his successful investigations, he blurs the boundaries between E and U, as probably only an author with some wisdom is able to do.” (*Der Standard*, Sebastian Fasthuber, June 2006)

Bibliography

Publications in German translation

Hellas Channel. Ein Fall für Kostas Charitos. Zürich, 2000

Nachtfalter. Ein Fall für Kostas Charitos. Zürich, 2001

Live! Ein Fall für Kostas Charitos. Zürich, 2004

Balkan Blues. Geschichten. Zürich, 2005

Der Großaktionär. Ein Fall für Kostas Charitos. Zürich, 2007

Wiederholungstäter. Ein Leben zwischen Athens, Wien und Istanbul. Zürich, 2008

Die Kinderfrau. Ein Fall für Kostas Charitos. Zürich, 2009

Quer durch Athens. Eine Reise von Piräus nach Kifisia. Munich, 2010

Faule Kredite. Ein Fall für Kostas Charitos. Zürich, 2011

Zahltag. Ein Fall für Kostas Charitos. Zürich, 2012

Finstere Zeiten. Zur Krise in Greece. Zürich, 2012

Psomi, paideia, eleftheria (literally: Bread, Education, Liberty). *Ein Fall für Kostas Charitos.*
Zürich, in progress

Screenplays

The Suspended Step of the Stork, 1991 (with Theo Angelopoulos, Tonino Guerra and Thanassis Valtinos)

Ulysses' Gaze, 1995 (with Theo Angelopoulos, Tonino Guerra and Giorgio Silvagni)

Eternity and a Day, 1998 (with Theo Angelopoulos and Tonino Guerra)

Waiting for the Clouds, 2004 (with Yeşim Ustaoglu)

Translations from the German

Bernhard, Thomas: *Am Ziel*, 1995

Brecht, Bertolt: *Leben des Galilei*, 1970

Brecht, Bertolt: *Mutter Courage*, 1971

Brecht, Bertolt: *Geschichten vom Herrn Keuner*, 1978

Brecht, Bertolt: *Fatzer*, 1999

Brecht, Bertolt: *Gedichte*, 2000

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von: *Faust I und II*, 2001

Wedekind, Frank: *Frühlings Erwachen*

Weiss, Peter: *Die Ermittlung*, 1982

Awards

2005 Deutscher Krimipreis, third place in the International category for *Live!*

2011 Raymond Chandler Award at the Italian Film and Literature Festival Courmayeur Noir in Festival for his life's work

2012 VII Premio Pepe Carvalho for his Costas Haritos novels

2012 34th Fregene Prize for Journalism, Literature Scientific and Cultural Research in the category of International Prize