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Review: Straight from the Donkey’s Mouth by Eleni Trataris Cotton

*Posted by [Subhamay Ray](https://www.bookreviewbook.com/author/bookreviewbook_me01nh/%22%20%5Co%20%22Posts%20by%20Subhamay%20Ray) on Sep 10, 2015 in*[*Book Review*](https://www.bookreviewbook.com/category/book-review/)*,*[*Non-fiction*](https://www.bookreviewbook.com/category/book-review/non-fiction/)*|*[*0 comments*](https://www.bookreviewbook.com/review-straight-from-the-donkeys-mouth-by-eleni-trataris-cotton/#respond)

Title: Straight From the Donkey’s Mouth
Author: Eleni Trataris Cotton
Genre: Travel
Publisher: Troubador Publishing Ltd
Release Date: November 14, 2014
Pages: 200



Although Eleni Trataris Cotton's *Straight from the Donkey's Mouth* is a work of fiction, it almost reads like a travelogue and gives a good view of the present day Greece and its problems.

The events of this amusing and delightful piece of fiction take place in Greece. The present reviewer, who is from India, cannot resist the temptation of pointing out what appeared to him striking similarities between India and Greece. Endless bureaucratic hassles, the culture of bribe and corruption, ‘the hurdles and harsh tax demands’, an inefficient educational system that compels the children to seek tuition outside the school, the death of an eleven-year-old boy from a motor cycle accident because he was riding his bike without wearing a helmet and there was no law-enforcing authority to ensure that he abides by the law — and many such events made me recall the uncanny similarity between India and Greece. So many times while reading the book I whispered to myself: ‘This is India’!

A young and idealistic British couple visits an Aegean island hoping to settle there and starting an English language school for the children of the island. The novel records their experiences as they struggle to set up their school. Peter and Serena’s story helps us to know Greece, its idyllic natural beauty, the openness, the sense of humour and the hilarious eccentricities of its villagers. But it also exposes Greece’s inefficient administration and government that once compels Peter to convey to Serena his disappointment about an environment where no one listens: ‘If the government continues like this, they will never have the people behind them and, quite frankly, I don’t believe that Greece will ever recover.’ Indeed, one of the pleasures of reading the novel is the sense of incredulity that seizes Peter and Serena when they encounter a bizarre event that they could not have experienced in their own country.

Juxtaposed with Peter and Serena’s story is that of Apollo and Hortensia, the two donkeys that complain forever against their cruel and overbearing owner. The donkeys speak to each other too, their observations are often hilarious, they express their own opinions about the state of affairs around them. Thus incidents and events are seen through the eyes of humans as well as that of the donkeys. When the donkeys’ owner Arsie plans to sell them and buy a tractor, Apollo observes, ‘His brain’s working overtime….. he smells money as we smell water’.

Although Eleni Trataris Cotton’s *Straight from the Donkey’s Mouth* is a work of fiction, it almost reads like a travelogue and gives a good view of the present day Greece and its problems. There is a point in the novel where Serena is sitting on her balcony surrounded by geraniums and she is ruminating: ‘Should we have come here? Should we stay or should we go back to the dear and predictable security of home?’ Then she observes a scene in which a few men are playing pranks with an old farmer and the genial humour of the scene tilts the scale in her mind in favour of staying in Greece: ‘The humour was infectious and Serena found herself chuckling with them, thinking how good it was to see grown men playing pranks like children. Yes, she thought with a heart bursting again with optimism, we were right to come here. We too will learn to live alongside the corruption.’

For all those who have an interest in present day Greece, *Straight from the Donkey’s Mouth* will prove to be an enjoyable and edifying read.

**[Trataris Cotton, Eleni; Straight from the Donkey’s Mouth: A Tail of a Greek Island, its People, their Politics – and their Donkeys!; Matador; Troubador Publishing Ltd.; UK]**