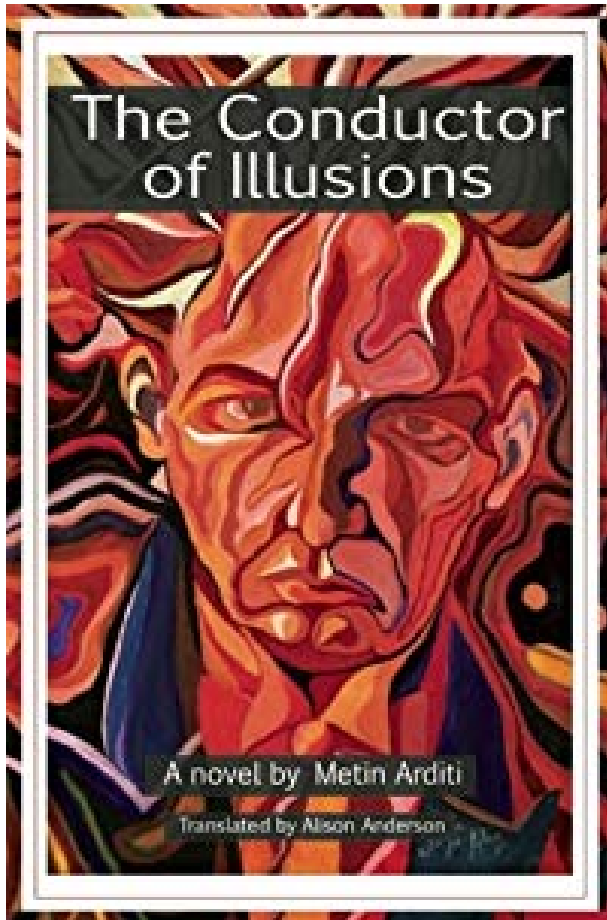


# The Conductor of Illusions



<b>Author:</b>	Metin Arditi
<b>ISBN10:</b>	1938901207
<b>Goodreads Rating:</b>	3.50
<b>Published:</b>	May 13th 2014 by Roaring Forties Press
<b>Genre:</b>	Uncategorized
<b>ISBN13:</b>	9781938901201
<b>Pages:</b>	360

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Alexis Kandilis is an international conductor at the height of his profession. He receives standing ovations at every concert and wildly enthusiastic reviews from the media. Yet, on a personal level he is deeply unfulfilled.

Mahler's haunting "Song on the Death of Children" plays over and over in his mind, bringing back ugly childhood memories he can't erase. A strange collection of not-quite-true friends and not really beloved family surrounds him: his mother, Clio, who forced him to abandon his dreams of composing for a more prestigious career as a conductor; his wife, Charlotte, whom he despises and frequently betrays; his bisexual friends Pavlina and Tatiana; Sacha, a young and talented Russian flutist; and Ted, his agent, who has booked—or overbooked—him for the next three seasons. They all provide some measure of reassurance, but it is easy to predict that Kandilis's glorious world will soon shatter. The media takes advantage of an altercation between Kandilis and a percussionist during a rehearsal to attack him, condemning not only his action but also his unorthodox methods. After a panic attack before a concert, he makes an unforgivable mistake during a performance, and as a result, he is denied the direction of the most prestigious performance of the decade. In his private life, things are also falling apart. Sacha introduces him to an exclusive poker club made up of multimillionaires, but his new rich friends begin to distance themselves from him as he becomes increasingly difficult, until even his manager recommends that he take some time off. Used to being a winner, Kandilis

starts gambling — and losing — heavily. His disintegration accelerates, and at last he enters a psychiatric hospital. He still has some friends he can count on, but even the most loyal among them can't protect him against himself. On his descent into hell, he discovers but cannot avoid the darkness that is in all hearts, including his own.