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The Hole In The Flag: A Romanian Exile's Story Of Return And Revolution



Synopsis

Book by Codrescu, Andrei

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Poet and National Public Radio commentator Codrescu (*Belligerence*) was born in Romania, left as a teenager and returned to observe the shocks and joys of revolution from December 1989 to January 1991. This report of his homecoming, jubilation and disenchantment makes an excellent companion volume to Codrescu's early memoir, *The Life and Times of an Involuntary Genius* . The first book was a lyric portrait of the artist as a raffish would-be poet in rural Transylvania; the one in hand is an equally sly but more worldly meditation on politics and personal history. The author opens on a note of sobriety, recounting the apparent end of despotism. The remainder of the book bears a more individual imprint, as Codrescu revisits scenes from his past, tries to look up old friends and offers thoughts on "cultural genocide." His outlook is summed up with the words, "I have never been able to abide either authority or bureaucrats. That is why I'm a poet." And thus, he finds enough still to rail against in Romania, questioning the veracity of the revolution itself as a series of "staged media events" possibly brought about by an elite conspiracy. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Codrescu has succeeded at a disconcerting task: writing a delightful book about a harrowing subject. After leaving Romania in his late teens and pursuing careers in the United States in poetry, academia, and journalism, Codrescu, with an assignment from National Public Radio, hurried back

to revolutionary Romania at Christmas 1989. In this limpid and lively account that both chronicles the changes that have taken place and recollects his own past, Codrescu brings a fine attentiveness to the common folk he encounters: travelers on the train, hotel porters and cabbies, students and policemen. He describes with skepticism the "game of mirrors" played by the revolutionaries (the apparent new good guys) and the terrorists (ostensibly the old bad guys). Wit and irony color nicely his observations on political society and, by extension, human nature. For an immediate and personal experience of the recent Romanian turmoil, this is a real tour de force. Recommended for public libraries.- James B. Street, Santa Cruz P.L., Cal.Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A most entertaining, witty, colorful, yet intelligent, articulate, and realistic account of the 1989 Romanian Anti-Communist Revolution. I highly recommend this book to anyone with the slightest interest in the topic.

Since I am going to Romania next week I wanted to read some background information and got this book. It is really enlightening and fit the bill for me.

When I visited Romania for a month in 1979, I saw a beautiful green land of geese and flowering apple trees, ghostly old Transylvanian hill towns where each charmingly-warped house had eyes. Ham, cheese, mamaliga (polenta) and tsuica marked my days and the warm reception by Romanian friends gave me memories forever. But even then, before the Dracula-Leader went totally bonkers, Romania bore Orwellian overtones. Charades ruled the roost. Bookstores sold stuff that nobody wanted to read. Shoe stores sold footwear that nobody wanted to buy. The news wasn't new. "Friendship with all countries" meant that everyone was suspect. The gypsies lived in junkyards on real desolation rows. Pollution covered the territory of a 'people's republic'. How glad I was that I had not been born Romanian. When, over ten years later, the "Romanian Revolution" occurred, I was both glad (Dracula had met his silver bullet) and horrified, when I heard that perhaps 60,000 people had been killed. Andrei Codrescu, a Romanian exile in the USA, felt a great burst of hope. His country would get out from under at last. He rushed, full of memories and dreams, back to Romania with an National Public Radio team. THE HOLE IN THE FLAG is the poetic, humorous, well-paced memoir of what he found, how he'd left it, with bits on adjusting in America, his old classmates, and his family. At first the reader shares all the stories, the rumors, the excitement, the sounds of battle. Later, in cooler times, Codrescu, like the rest of the world (or those who paid

attention), realized that he'd been had. The charades had not stopped. Romania had gone through yet another one. Was it a revolution ? How many had actually died and who had killed them ? Who were the new leaders ? How did the leader die ? What was Russia's role in all this ? When I returned to Romania in 1996, my friends, now deeply disillusioned, raised all these questions and supplied a few depressing answers. With both eyes open and equipped by Romanian life with a large supply of cynicism, Codrescu re-writes the story of the "Revolution" in the latter half of his book. This is top reporting, top writing. Only a poet could write about Ceausescu's Romania and the state of mind it created, because words might fail anyone else. I could easily give the book five stars for writing, but have given it four because, sadly, it is dated now. Perhaps readers will not find the events so relevant, but as a look at human nature, it will never go out of style. I doubt if Bob Dylan had ever seen or thought about Romania, but to quote him is to sum up the feeling you'll get from THE HOLE IN THE FLAG."Now at midnight, all the agents and the superhuman crew Come out and round up everyone that knows more than they do. They they bring them to the factory where the heart-attack machinels strapped across their shoulders and then the kerosene, Is brought down from the castles by insurance men who go Check to see that nobody is escaping from Desolation Row."

*with one minor change

It was about 2.25 am in the morning when I finished Codrescu's riveting memoir The Hole in the Flag which I found poignant, fey, hopeful and insightful. Sometimes I read a book which demands that it be devoured voraciously and this book falls into that category. For me, the Romanian revolution is still a cause of some mystification, but it is clear that it was more orchestration than spontaneous uprising. The current controversy with Mircea Dinescu and the debate over the availability of Securitate files, many of which have been pilfered and doctored no doubt. I found my discussions with locals in 2001 interesting but wondered whether the divisiveness was a smoke screen yet again. Codrescu's is a reflective and analytical look at Romania just after the Revolution, and his own struggle to comprehend and make sense of the maelstrom that followed is one of the strengths of the work. At turns, banal, burlesque, and brilliant the book is skilfully written and will appeal as much to the general reader as it does to the Romanianists. I heartily recommend this book.

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