



New Orleans, Mon Amour: Twenty Years of Writings from the City

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For two decades *NPR* commentator Andrei Codrescu has been living in and writing about his adopted city, where, as he puts it, the official language is dreams. How apt that a refugee born in Transylvania found his home in a place where vampires roam the streets and voodoo queens live around the corner; where cemeteries are the most popular picnic spots, the ghosts of poets, prostitutes, and pirates are palpable, and in the French Quarter, no one ever sleeps.

Codrescu's essays have been called "satirical gems," "subversive," "sardonic and stunning," "funny," "gonzo," "wittily poignant," and "perverse"—here is a writer who perfectly mirrors the wild, voluptuous, bohemian character of New Orleans itself. This retrospective follows him from newcomer to near native: first seduced by the lush banana trees in his backyard and the sensual aroma of coffee at the café down the block, Codrescu soon becomes a Window Gang regular at the infamous bar Molly's on Decatur, does a stint as King of Krewe de Vieux Carré at Mardi Gras, befriends artists, musicians, and eccentrics, and exposes the city's underbelly of corruption, warning presciently about the lack of planning for floods in a city high on its own insouciance. Alas, as we all now know, Paradise is lost.

New Orleans, Mon Amour is an epic love song, a clear-eyed elegy, a cultural celebration, and a thank-you note to New Orleans in its Golden Age.

New Orleans, Mon Amour: Twenty Years of Writings from the City Details

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Juli says

Andrei lives here not only because he loves it here, but because he belongs here. He once told me that the great tragedy of his life was that he could not hire a "scribe" to follow him around and record his life for him, so that one part of him always had to remain separate from his actions so that he could record it later. Reading this book is a lot like having the privilege of Andrei Codrescu as your personal scribe whilst you shamle through life in the quarter; it's messy, dirty, literate and slightly drunk with love (and other stuff) - it reminds me why nowhere else will ever be home again.

pennyg says

I first heard Andrei Codrescu on NPR reciting his poetry and essays in his lovely thick eastern European accent. If you love New Orleans or think you will love it, you will love viewing the city through the eyes of this self described bohemian poet from Transylvania, Romania.

The city can drive a sober minded person insane, but it feeds the dreamer.

A poet's love story to his adopted home, at times it is laugh out loud funny, at times moving, and at times brutally honest all delivered with his customary dry wit. Particularly poignant on this 10 year anniversary, the last few chapters are essays devoted to Katrina and its aftermath. If I ever get to New Orleans I plan to sit myself down in one of those cafe/bars beignet and espresso/martini in hand hoping Mr. Codrescu will drop by.

Andrew says

I'm an eternal enthusiast for both belles-lettres and sultry tropical ports, so this was a natural shoe-in for me. Granted, there are a lot of repeated ideas and themes (as one expects from a collection of several decades of material), and more than a few lazy New Orleans cliches (good god, I never want to here the words "voodoo" or "gumbo" again), but there is enough great prose for Codrescu to more or less break even in my book.

Emily says

I highly recommend that you go to New Orleans. But if you can't, just read this book. Actually, even if you CAN go to New Orleans, read this book anyway. That's how I read it - while I was traveling to NOLA. And, boy, was Codrescu right about "synchronicity" - it felt like every time I read about something in the book, I'd encounter it in some way in real life. Like every thing in NOLA is somehow aligned.

Or as Codrescu puts it...

"With varying degrees of skill, dozens of writers have stumbled on the same secrets or mysteries of New

Orleans, on the vibrational reality that lies like gossamer over its physical features and permeates even the most casual visitor with a strange sense of something invisible."

Corene says

Excellent collection of essays by the long time NPR commentator, columnist and poet. He covers New Orleans from the mid-80s through the Katrina aftermath, with evocative descriptions, saucy history and personal experiences. Highly recommended to anyone with an interest in the Big Easy.

Georg'ann says

I miss hearing Andrei Codrescu on NPR, so I was delighted to find this book at the library when I was searching for books on New Orleans. (I've got a trip there in December) Finishing it today, while at a dental lab (don't ask - long story) almost spoiled my enjoyment of the book. Reading with background noises of drills and machinery is not my favorite way to read. That aside, I enjoyed to the end his distinctive voice and weirdly evocative language, the strange stories and funny tidbits about his beloved New Orleans. I loved the essay on cemeteries. The essays are pulled together from other published works of his, and together, they paint a picture that has definitely gotten me ready for NOLA.

Mike says

This book is a charming collection of vignettes about New Orleans. The author clearly loves his adopted city, though he does not attempt to gloss over the poverty and corruption ... to do so would be unfair as they have lived there much longer than he.

New Orleans is dead. Like most dead things it decomposes, or in other words is eaten by things much smaller than itself. These tiny feasts are a parade, the decadent formula by which the burden of pain and loss become something we can bear. All of us humans who live in cities decompose our home — it is only in the suburbs that the frigid dream of perfection thwarts our natural urge to feast.

Here in Chicago we don't remember the great fire as a time when the city was lost. I hope New Orleans finds its way to a similar rebirth.

Maggie says

Beautiful writing, but towards the end Codrescu bordered on elitism. I get that New Orleans has a rich culture all its own, but Codrescu treated New Orleans as the greatest place on earth and anyone who doesn't live there is seen as a boring, uncultured zombie.

Mark Proudfoot says

lyrical vignettes from an investigative poet

Jared Millet says

Even though I grew up in Louisiana and lived most of my life there, I never really had any love for or desire to visit New Orleans. For the first time, I've read a book that makes me think I might have been missing out. However, it should be noted that Andrei Codrescu (LA's Transylvanian poet-in-residence & NPR commentator) has the luxury of living the Bohemian life, at least according to his writing. If I had ever moved to New Orleans, I have no doubt that I would have spent most of my time bussing tables and cleaning up the vomit and other bodily fluids of aforementioned Bohemians.

New Orleans, Mon Amour is a collection of Codrescu's essays on the city from the twenty years up to, and including, Katrina. The essays do get a little repetitive after a while, but they give an interesting perspective from a person who is (at least at first) an outsider, but never a tourist. Codrescu celebrates the life, food, music, culture, and ghosts of New Orleans without letting you forget about the crime, corruption, and poverty from which it all sprung.

Nicole says

Finished *New Orleans, Mon Amour: Twenty Years of Writings From The City* by Andrei Codrescu. Each story engages me to some new idea; ideas of description, ideas of place, ideas of people and living. What a city! To take coffee with Codrescu in the cemetery, to share a story in bar or cafe, to smell the trees and food and history that makes New Orleans a place of mythology, a place where Dylan can call home, a place I hear on the radio's morning news.

I read the majority of it when down in México. I really identified with his succinct commentary on tourism that sprinkled throughout.

“Vacations are desperate things even if you are not old and tired. I have always felt keenly the unbearable pathos of tourism, the lonely masses of the twentieth century shuffling through each others' cities in small, insulated units looking for innocence. It's in there somewhere, riddled with the holes the clock punched in it.”

And nothing made me smile more than coming across this story after hearing the folks at the casa I was staying at re-affirm one more time their belief in 'synchronicity' (please couldya at least call it by its name). We choose to see the connections we want to see. From *Against Synchronicity*:

“We, the people of this Earth who are neither rich nor particularly good-looking, like synchronicity. Synchronicity makes us feel important. When synchronicity happens, we believe that the universe has not forgotten us after all...But a close look reveals something quite unsettling. Everything is synchronous, there is nothing that doesn't rhyme with something else, no matter how strange or unlikely. Synchronicity rules chaos with an iron hand, and it is only the merciful defense of some kind of brain filter that keeps us from going mad seeing how it all fits together.”

And when a woman was lamenting the onset of electricity to the area I was staying at, I recalled this passage from *Prosperity and the Devil*:

“The maniac next door has been banging on my wall for six months now. He’s rebuilding a nineteenth-century house the nineteenth-century way, which is to say with little iron scrapers and chisels. If guys like this had their way, we’d do everything like we did in the nineteenth century. Wars with trenches and bayonets. Boiling laundry on the woodstove. Nice epidemics of incurable TB. Nostalgia is masochism and masochism is something masochists love to share.”

The man makes me smile and think.

Stewart says

My fondness for New Orleans is great. I lived in southeast Louisiana for six years in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and I visited the Crescent City, ate at its great restaurants, and listened to its music many times. Despite moving away from the state in 1981, I almost yearly visit my mother, brother, and sister in Baton Rouge with side trips to New Orleans, an hour away.

Thus I looked forward to reading the impressions of the city by the Romanian-born writer and NPR commentator Andrei Codrescu from 1985 to post-Katrina. I tremendously enjoyed this compilation of short and long essays on the city. I especially liked the longer pieces; the two-page transcriptions from his NPR commentaries were a little too slight.

His descriptions and observations are acute. This about the above-ground cemeteries: "New Orleans cemeteries look like vast bakeries quietly holding the ancestral loaves." On Louisiana's relentless hot and humid summers: "The first summer I spent here, in 1985, I was sure that my brains were boiling, and it it weren't for the cool barrooms where I scribbled nonsense, I would have surely evaporated."

In the late 1980s, Codrescu went from being in the crowd during a Mardi Gras parade to being on a float with the Mystic Korpse of Komatose, part of the Krewe de Vieux Carre. He describes throwing beads, doubloons, and medallions to carnival crowds in the French Quarter but running out of throwaways before the conclusion of the parade.

Codrescu does not present merely a Tourist Bureau view of New Orleans. He writes about the high crime rate, the corruption of its city government and especially of its police department, and the prejudices and gun-toting of many of its residents. He criticizes the city government and its residents for their failures to prepare the city adequately for a major hurricane.

But he also affectionately describes the city's many virtues, its "exaltation of the flesh," and being a unique city in the United States: "It's an environment for a specific life-form, a dreamy, lazy, sentimental, musical one, prey to hallucinations (not visions), tolerant, indolent, and gifted at storytelling. This goes against the very grain of American civilization as we know it. We lie incongruously in the way of the thrifty, Puritan America ..."

For someone who is familiar with New Orleans, these essays will bring back memories and recognition. For those unlucky few who have never been there, this book may finally push them to go.

Alex says

Since I was heading to Nola for Mardi Gras I wanted to read something topical about the city. New Orleans, Mon Amour, was written by fellow Romanian and poet Andrei Codrescu, and is a compilation of all the writing he has done over the years about his adopted home. The longer essays were excellent. Through entertaining anecdotes and poetic prose Codrescu provides a surrealist picture of a surreal city. The stories seem too wild to be true, but after being there, I realized that nothing is too wild to be true in New Orleans.

The problem with the book was that the majority of it was one or two page non-sequiters that are loosely about the city. Taken individually each of these is highly readable and poignant, but as part of a compilation they tended to drag and repeat.

Lucinda McIntyre says

This book is the best description of New Orleans that I have ever found. If you know New Orleans, every word of this will ring true. If you do not know New Orleans - this might help - but you may think Codrescu is making things up or exaggerating - which he is not. It is perfect that a poet should write about New Orleans - because mere prose cannot do justice to this amazing, mess of a city. (This is not a book of poetry - but his turn of phrase is so beautiful and spot on time and again.) It will make you laugh, break your heart for what has been so broken by Katrina, and make you desperately wish you were there. Makes me wonder why I ever left - - oh yeah - because it is a crazy place - but still my favorite spot on the planet.

Martha Helena says

The stories were well written, easy to follow. That said, it didn't captivate me and I didn't feel it gave a real sense of New Orleans.
