



Accordion Crimes

By Annie Proulx

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Accordion Crimes By Annie Proulx

Rarely has a literary novel so captured the hearts and minds of readers across America and the world as E. Annie Proulx's "The Shipping News," winner of the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Now we have Proulx's new novel, "Accordion Crimes," a masterpiece of storytelling that spans a century and a continent. "Accordion Crimes" opens in 1890 in Sicily as an accordion maker completes his finest instrument and dreams of owning a music store in America. He and his eleven-year-old son, carrying little more than the accordion, voyage to the teeming, violent port of New Orleans. Within a year, the accordion maker is murdered by an anti-Italian lynching mob, but his instrument carries Proulx's story as it falls into the hands of various immigrants who carry it from Iowa to Texas, from Maine to Louisiana, looking for a decent life. The music is their last link with the past -- voice for their fantasies, sorrows and exuberance -- but it, too, is forced to change. Proulx's prodigious knowledge, heartbreaking characters and daring storytelling unite the sections of "Accordion Crimes" -- a stunning novel, exhilarating in its scope and originality.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Proulx found fertile, if rocky, soil for her first two novels (*Postcards* and *The Shipping News*) in the far northeastern corner of North America. In *Accordion Crimes* she ranges much further afield. The novel follows an accordion from the hands of its maker in Sicily in 1890 until it is flattened by a truck in Florida in 1996. In the intervening century it passes through the hands of a host of unlucky owners and their kin: Abelardo Relampago, who dies from the bite of a poisonous spider; Dolor Gagnon, decapitated by his own chain saw; Silvano, cut down in the jungles of Venezuela by an Indian's arrow.

From Publishers Weekly

America's ethnic minorities have rarely been rendered with the insight, intuition and unsentimental candor that Proulx brings to the large canvas of characters and reaches of landscape in this ambitious new work. The narrative has eight parts, each composed of short vignettes that depict the cultural baggage—the attitudes, behaviors and social conditioning—that immigrants brought with them, and the ways in which they joined, yet held aloof from, American society. Beginning in the late 1800s and ending 100 years later, the novel follows a vividly realized cast of characters, whose names are as colorful as their stories: Ludwig Messermacher, Abelardo Relampago Salazar, Dolor Gagnon, Onesiphore Malefoot, Hieronim Przybysz. Their common bond is ownership of a green button accordion, which was brought to these shores by a Sicilian immigrant and, after his death at the hands of a lynch mob, was transported back and forth across the continent by various combinations of inheritance, violence and bad luck. With mesmerizing skill, Proulx summons up the attitudes and speech of her characters, vigorously detailing a formidable number of settings, including New Orleans, Hornet, Texas, Random, Maine, Prank, Iowa, and Old Glory, Minnesota. She can evoke a teeming, fetid slum as clearly as she can a Montana ranch. An invariable characteristic of these immigrants and their families is the tendency to think of others as "Americans." In their own minds, they are still Italians or Germans or Norwegians or Poles or French Canadian or Cajuns. Almost without exception, they express ancient prejudices and newfound racism: the New Orleans natives hate the Italians, who hate the blacks; Iowa's Germans hate the Irish. What makes all this so spectacular is that Proulx is a master at incorporating potentially numbing detail and specificity—from the components of an accordion to the bloodlines of Appaloosas and the stages of a Polish funeral—into her vigorous prose. Traditional ethnic music—played by various characters during their brief ownership of the increasingly derelict accordion—is conveyed with impressive authority. The range of scenes, from a drunken birthday party that resembles an animated Booth cartoon to a brutal reaction to a civil rights sit-in at a lunch counter, bespeaks a brilliant imagination. Proulx makes grotesque accidents, bloody catastrophes and bizarre events seem an inescapable part of human existence. If eventually some sameness of mood occurs, and a resultant diminution of tension, this is balanced by the reader's interest in the accordion's odyssey and in the lives it touches en route. For this is a cautionary tale in which pride and greed and self-delusion vie with basic human needs for love, comfort and spiritual sustenance. BOMC dual main selection; author tour.

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From Library Journal

Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winner Proulx (*The Shipping News*, Audio Reviews, LJ 1/96) combines black humor with stark tragedy in this disturbing series of vignettes centered around the adventures of a small green accordion. The accordion is used by different men as a vehicle of creativity: the instrument for musical expression of the immigrant's dream. The accordion is also something of an evil talisman; its maker is lynched by a mob in 1890, thus beginning the instrument's odyssey through America. It passes through the possession of owners who die painfully of gangrene, snake and spider bites, and suicide. The

underlying theme is best stated by a character at the recording's beginning?" America is a place of lies and deceit" and is grimly underscored by violence and prejudice. Although this is depressing as social commentary, the author's use of description and detail is remarkably original. Edward Herrmann's reading offers the perfect inflection. Recommended. ?Jacqueline Seewald, Red Bank Regional H.S. Lib., N.J.
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rodney Alvarez:

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