

Stalin

Andrei Codrescu

1984

Nobody dies like Stalin did. He didn't just die, he took the world with him.

My world, at any rate. I was eight years all when it happened. They told us at school. All the kids cried. Our teachers cried. It was a lament. You should've heard it: it was the parting of the waters, the tearing of the veils, the weeping by the shores of Babylon.

I went home on back alleys so nobody'd see me whimpering. Stalin had been everything to me. In all the pictures on the wall and in the school books he was surrounded by adoring children. He smiled on us from above, kind, understanding, protective.

For me, personally, he was father, pure and simple, because I didn't have one of my own. I had his portrait on my little nightstand table and every night before I went to sleep, I told him a prayer my grandmother had taught me:

Our Father who Art in Heaven
Hallowed by Thy Name
Thy Kingdom Come
They Will be Done

After that I slept securely under the shadow of his mustache.

When I got home from school, my stepfather and a man I didn't know were sitting at the kitchen table with their back to the door. I slipped in unnoticed and hid under the table. I was too upset to talk.

"I'm glad the sonofabitch is dead!" my stepfather said.

"Amen!" said the other one.

My world was right there and then shattered and lost forever.

Later, I watched the people cry and tear their hair publicly on the streets, but I somehow knew that it was all a show. They were just using the occasion to grieve, weep, and cry for other sorrows. Stalin was just an excuse to mourn for the world. And I suspected fraud about the whole race of fathers, leaders, and men larger than life,

There are no fathers, I decided, only mustaches which scatter in the wind, hair by hair, which vanish, disappear, betray, and leave you alone at night.

The Ted K Archive

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<web.archive.org/.../corpse.org/archives/issue_9/stage_screen/codrescu.htm>,
<youtube.com>, <fifthestate.org> & <depaul.digication.com>

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