

# Book festival Northern Arizona

## *A Sampler of Andrei Codrescu* Review by Thais Morgan

That wry, witty voice you've heard commenting on the funny foibles of American political and cultural life on National Public Radio belongs to Andrei Codrescu. Since the 1980s, he has delighted and bedeviled us with hilarious and troubling observations on everything from bodily scars to the scars of history, instant traditions to government gaffes. This and teaching at Louisiana State University are his day job; in flights of the imagination, he writes poetry, essays, novels, translations. As the variety of his work suggests, Andrei Codrescu is a WRITER par excellence.

Treat yourself to the wild but wise romp through eighteenth-century Europe in Codrescu's latest book, *Casanova in Bohemia* (2002). I laughed a lot at the antics of this aging but still mischievous reprobate as he pursues women (whom he not only desires but respects), while duping the credulous in the castles of power. Now a librarian, ever a lover of beauty and the pleasures of the senses, old Casanova's boundless JOIE DE VIVRE is inspired by Laura--assistant, Muse, nurse, and lover. "Part obscenity, part high learning," his conversations with the princes and paupers he meets are always hilarious, often literarily allusive. He speaks in gleeful exaggerations which seem pornographic or irreverent until you realize that his humor points to some very serious questions. How should one best live one's life? What is true happiness? Casanova's biggest fear is a quite modern one: the dead hand of ideology. Imposed by arbiters of the state or of fashion, bodiless and scentless idea(l)s are leading the men and women of the imaginatively flexible eighteenth century into the bloodshed of the French Revolution,, and beyond to feuding nationalisms and totalitarian straightjackets. Regretfully, Casanova recognizes that his enormous love of living itself is too individualized to change the course of history. Above all his frolics and follies looms the encroaching shadow of his mortality, which makes him a sympathetic figure for the reader almost despite himself.



Codrescu also edits *Exquisite Corpse* (available free at [www.corpse.org](http://www.corpse.org)), an interactive 'zine composed by diverse hands (literally! look at the photo montage on this website). "In pristine disdain of the mainstream," this innovative and ongoing project welcomes alternative views conveyed through all genres, written and visual. Each issue is pieced together collaboratively and spontaneously, like a "cadavre exquis" composed by the French surrealists. Spicy, racy, and a bit crazy, *Exquisite Corpse* (est. 1983) reflects Codrescu's interest in life both as lived and as thought. The most recent issue, "Cybercorpse 12," encourages writers and artists to explore the geographic, imagistic, historical, economic, and political presences of the Mississippi River. This invitation results in pieces about "frivolous, yet sacred" things, including a facetious (NOT!) proposal to dump blood-red dye into the river and erect signs along its banks saying "Tigris +/- or Euphrates." There is more than a little of Casanova's insatiable thirst for the immediate acts of living and his ironic, fine-tuned critical intellect in Codrescu. I can't wait to read this guy's poetry...

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