

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 8 years old when it happened. At school all the kids had been crying and I'd been crying the most. For us, Stalin was that saintly fatherly figure that smiled from above surrounded by adoring children. For me, personally, he was father, pure and simple, because I didn't have one of my own. On my little night stand table I had his portrait and I slept securely under the shadow of his moustache. I was devastated.

I came home from school and saw my stepfather and another man sitting soberly at the kitchen table. Unnoticed, I slipped into the room and hid, too upset to talk. "I'm glad the sonofabitch is dead," the man said, and my stepfather concurred. My innocent world was 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, that they were 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 later decided, only moustaches which scatter in the wind, hair by hair, which vanish, disappear, betray and leave you alone at night.

FE note: Andrei Codrescu's writing last appeared in the FE in 1967 (we never lose a writer). He was born in Transylvania, Romania, and came to the U.S. in 1966. He presently edits the poetry review *Exquisite Corpse*. See next issue's "News & Reviews" column for more on Andrei's work. This poem was read following the death of Soviet Premier Yuri Andropov.

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