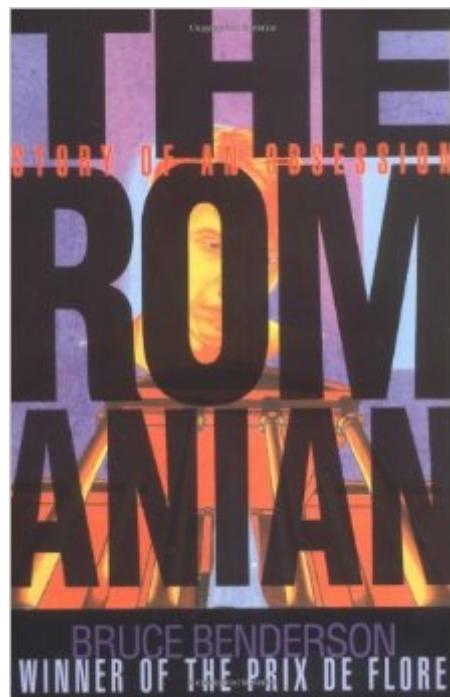


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The Romanian: Story Of An Obsession



Synopsis

Winner of the 2004 Prix de Flore; one of France's most distinguished literary prizes; a wildly romantic, true-life love story; History follows a trail of sputtering desire, often calling upon the delusions of lovers to generate the sparks. If it weren't for us, the world would suffer from a dismal lack of stories," writes Bruce Benderson in this brutally candid memoir. What astonishes and intrigues is Benderson's way of recounting, in the sweetest possible voice, things that are considered shocking, wrote Le Monde. What's so shocking? It's not just Benderson's job translating Céline Dion's saccharine autobiography, which he admits is driving him mad; but his unrequited love for an impoverished Romanian in cheap club-kid platforms with dollar signs in his squinting eyes, whom he meets while on a journalism assignment in Eastern Europe. Rather than retreat, Benderson absorbs everything he can about Romanian culture and discovers an uncanny similarity between his own obsession for the Romanian (named Romulus) and the disastrous love affair of King Carol II, the last king of Romania (1893-1953). Throughout, Benderson; absolutely free of bitterness, nastiness, or any desire to protect himself, wrote Le Monde; is sustained by little white codeine pills, a poetic self-awareness, a sense of humor, and an unwavering belief in the perfect romance, even as wild dogs chase him down Romanian streets.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Romanian" by Bruce Benderson is an excellent book, better, I think, than the ponderous sex-at-a-distance "Death in Venice" by Thomas Mann. The subject matter is the same, however: a

fully grown adult mature homosexual male, who has an out-of-control obsession with a much younger male. In "Death in Venice," the object of the obsession is virtually out-of-reach, and all the better because of it. In "Romanian" the target of the obsession is not only within-reach, but becomes an integral part (for a few months) in the life of the author. As in most love-pairings in real life and in fiction, one of the members of the dyad loves more than the other. In "Romanian" this fact is painfully present throughout the autobiographical novel, as middle-aged Bruce pursues an impossible love with mid-20s Romulus. Benderson's story (as Mann's) is all about the main character, an openly gay man (in real life and fiction) who brazenly and pitifully fixes and focuses his life on the unachievable conquest of the younger male. In neither book is there a satisfying union. But, is this not a predictable end that always results from the implausible and unattainable? Yes, there's a bit too much not-so-interesting history of the Romanian people, their tragic national story and their unfortunate history of weird royal rule. The author draws an apt parallel between his own life (especially his relationship with his mother) and that of the fateful Romanian Royal family of King Carol and his mistress (and his mother). Part of the genius of the book is in this uncanny though self-serving similarity and the lessons that the author draws thereby.

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