



Train to Trieste

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An incandescent love story—a thrilling debut novel—that moves from Romania to America, from the Carpathian Mountains to Chicago, from totalitarianism to freedom, and from passionate infatuation to profound understanding.

In the summer of 1977, seventeen-year-old Mona Manoliu falls in love with Mihai, a mysterious, green-eyed boy who lives in Brasov, the romantic mountain city where she spends her summers. She can think of nothing, and no one, else. But life under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu is difficult. Hunger and paranoia infect everyone; fear, too. And one day, Mona sees Mihai wearing the black leather jacket favored by the secret police. Could he be one of them?

As food shortages worsen, as more and more of her loved ones disappear in “accidents,” Mona comes to understand that she must leave Romania. She escapes in secret—narrowly avoiding the police—through Yugoslavia to Italy, and then to Chicago, a city she calls “fit for my hunger.” But she leaves without saying a final good-bye to Mihai. And though she struggles to bury her longing for the past—she becomes a doctoral student, marries, has children—she finds herself compelled to return to her country, determined to learn the truth about her one great love.

Seductive, suspenseful, intensely evocative, and told in an astonishingly original, poetic voice, *Train to Trieste* is a force of language and emotion, as acutely observed as it is impossible to put down.

Train to Trieste Details

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From Reader Review Train to Trieste for online ebook

Lance Greenfield says

One feels that there is a LOT of the author in this book. She brings out both the beauty and the ugliness of Romania. During the years leading up to the 1989 revolution, there was a justifiable culture of distrust amongst friends combined with a strengthening of family bonds. This is brought out so well by the writing of Domnica Radulescu. Eventually, the contrasts with American society, and its very different values, are brought to the fore, and you'll come to truly understand the meaning of the Romanian word, "dor."

Having many Romanian friends, but having only been to Bucharest on my numerous business visits to that vast country, the descriptions in this book serve to reinforce the message of those friends: I must travel to the Carpathian Mountains, or down to the Black Sea coast, if I am ever to fully appreciate their land.

This is an absorbing story which is brilliantly narrated.

Chrissie says

The beginning and the end were the weakest parts of this book. I wasn't captured by the young romance of the beginning nor the final explanation of all the events summarized at the end. Still, I really enjoyed my time spend with this book. Life in Romania under Nicolae Ceausescu in the 1980s, the perils of emigration and life as a Romanian emigrant, all are perceptively described, emotionally and intellectually. I felt I was there experiencing the main character's confusion, weariness, worries, anger and joys. I truly felt the author captured real life experiences. This is a book about how life really is, and it is not often that a book of fiction captures this so genuinely. The characters are real; they do what people really do. This does not feel like a book of fiction! And there are many wonderful lines.

After reading this book I feel I understand life under Ceausescu. Do you want to understand this Romanian experience, then read this book. The audiobook narration by Yelena Shmulenson was excellent.

Kathrina says

Wow.

This was exactly the book I was searching for -- a book that brings the beauty of the Romanian landscape, the consciousness of the contemporary Romanian with all the poetic perspective that comes so naturally through the language, with an American sensibility to honestly portray the harrowing daily trials of life under tyranny, and wraps it all up with an uncharacteristic dollop of hope. I use the word "uncharacteristic" because there are so few Romanian authors brave enough (American enough?) to evoke hope in their writing. After forty years of communist suppression, Romanians still don't even feel comfortable talking with an American about the daily specific fears, sacrifices, and pain of life under Ceausescu, or the unstable years following his execution. Not that people didn't have these fears, but it had been illegal for so long to express them. Poets and writers became accustomed to using their language, rich with metaphor and poetry, to

express their thoughts indirectly. Radulescu is one of only a few authors I've so far discovered who is disclosing the inner consciousness of the contemporary Romanian honestly, staring into the face of contemporary history, unflinchingly placing herself within it.

Her bittersweet love story had me crying in public as I read. Her chapters on her experience as a political exile, her identification with refugees of all nationalities, her ability to "miss" a country she'd only ever read about, her refusal to seek out other Romanians in exile, and her troubled marriage all shed valuable insight I hadn't considered before. Radulescu calls this a novel, but it's so fluent and naked, I can't help but think it's almost all memoir.

I've heard she's about to publish a second book, *Black Sea Twilight*, but I can't find it yet on any American sites. Sign me up for that release; I'll go anywhere Radulescu takes me.

Eugene says

Magnificent! A novel, but when one "knows" the story so intimately, the telling of it has a power magnified by experience...one feels this is a story author Radulescu has experienced.

17 year old Mona Manoliu lives in Romania under the crushing dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu. While living in Bucharest, her family summers in the Carpathian mountain town of Brasov, where young Mona falls in love with Mihai, a mysterious older boy. But events conspire to force Mona to flee the country; from Trieste, to Rome, to Chicago, she must become a refugee and forge a new life. This she does, but thoughts of Romania are never far away. The years go by, and after the fall of Ceaucescu, she returns to that land to seek her own past, and finally some closure.

So poetically told, it mesmerized me. In this time of xenophobia and hate politics, it is important to read about how it is to be on "the other side."

Jen says

A teenager named Mona & her parents are living in Romania during the communist regime.

Her father is secretly working against the regime and he is putting his family in a lot of danger. Therefore, they arrange to have Mona escape to the U.S.

Once she gets to the U.S. she lives with various people and has various jobs. However, she is always thinking of her long lost love, Mihai.

She gets married in the U.S. to a guy named Tom and they have 2 boys. Her parents also come to live in the U.S.

They tell her that Mihai died, and she falls apart. Her marriage to Tom has not been good and she starts regretting ever coming to the U.S.

She goes back to Romania and she receives the shock of her life!

This book was good, but it was slow moving.

Sandra says

I really enjoyed this story of a young girl, and the journey she takes to better her life. A page-turner, deeply moving, and suspenseful, during a time of war and politics in her country. A wonderful debut!

From Amazon:

In the summer of 1977, seventeen-year-old Mona Manoliu falls in love with Mihai, a green-eyed boy who lives in Brasov, the romantic mountain city where she spends her summers. But under the Ceausescu dictatorship, paranoia infects everyone; soon Mona begins to suspect that Mihai is part of the secret police. As food shortages worsen and her loved ones begin to disappear, Mona realizes that she too must leave. Over the next twenty years, she struggles to bury her longing for the past, yet she eventually finds herself compelled to return, determined to learn the truth about her one great love.

Adam says

Living in Ceausescu's Romania must have been like an endless bad dream. Only, it was not a dream; it was reality. The story in this novel follows its protagonist, a young lady, from Romania, where she is involved in a not so simple amorous relationship with a young man, who might or might not be working for the secret police, to Yugoslavia, then Italy, and finally to the USA.

Fleeing Romania and beginning a new life in the USA is not simple. Endless dream-like flashbacks to the life she has left behind add to the difficulties that the heroine has to surmount.

This superb, fast-moving novel successfully highlights the psychological traumas of both living in an insane dictatorship and also adapting to life as a refugee.

Michael says

The protagonist discovers love as a teenager in the repressive Romania of Ceaucescu and then flees the demons (real and imagined) that haunt her to find a new life in America. Although she gains a mature sense of self, she remains nostalgic for the land she has left and the life and love she has lost by leaving. Her appreciation for the land and its people infuses her passion for her lover with a chthonic power which imprints itself on her soul as an innate releasing mechanism that abides until her return to the Carpathians, following the overthrow of the dictator. One senses that there is much of the author's own love for Romania in the work, and that gives rise to almost poetic caresses in her descriptions of the land and its natives. Although framed by hard political realities, this is a love story told with passion and without illusions.

Kirsty says

I am not at all a fan of romance novels, but *Train to Trieste* appealed to me for the Romania stop on my Around the World in 80 Books challenge, due to the political and social commentary which it promised. I find Romania fascinating, and cannot wait to visit in the next couple of years.

I found that the scene was set well here, with many small details about the world around protagonist Mona nestling into the narrative. As a character, however, she irritated me greatly. She has been crafted as a typical silly, giddy teenager, who has no cares apart from wanting her own way in life and love. She is selfish and self-centered, and her moods swing from one extreme to another in the space of just one or two paragraphs.

Train to Trieste feels rather overwritten in places, but still manages to feel too simplistic for an historical novel. It is therefore difficult to pinpoint the target audience which Radulescu was aiming this particular novel at; it is not on the same level as a lot of historical fiction, which made me think that maybe it was a young adult novel, but similarly it deals with some quite adult themes, and lots of jumping into bed. The prose is highly repetitive; Mona tells us, for instance, that her dress is 'blue' three times, and 'gauzy' twice, in the space of a page. *Train to Trieste* is far more involved with Mona's love life and obsessions than it is with the political climate of Romania in the 1970s, which I feel is a real shame. It reminded me largely of Pam Jenoff's novels, which I find rather fluffy, in that the love affairs of the protagonists always greatly overshadow the historical context.

Bobbi says

Train to Trieste draws the reader into Romania, into the head and heart of Mona, the young Romanian narrator. As the difficult life under Ceausescu's dictatorship creeps into every life, sometimes ending in tragic ways, Mona realizes she must escape. But what of her love for Mihai, shared to the reader with all the sensations of young certain/uncertain lust and everythingness. Through her escape and new life in Chicago, all is shared with a poetry and prose that paints incredible pictures of both Mona's soul and all the scenes and people around her. What a treat to experience an unfamiliar (to me) place and time in such an intimately told and thrilling story.

Colleen Stone says

I put off reading this book for a long time because its cover looked too 'mushy' and its title seemed appropriate to a romance. Still, the subject of life in Communist Romania in the 1970s was interesting and something I knew little more about than what I had read in newspapers and seen on the news at the time. and there was nothing else tempting to read near at hand.

This is an intelligent book with the ring of authenticity in terms of its historical detail but it's also a romance - and while I think it has a lot to recommend it to the right reader, that reader is most definitely not me!

If you have a soul that hungers to slowly feed on passion and poetry, willing to linger in beautifully crafted descriptive passages that reach to the soul of a person, a people and a country and can wait for the plot to get around to its point in its own sweet time, then you should enjoy this book. I can't be certain, but I think it may lay bare the soul of the Romanian people. There is something of a musical quality to the book - all gypsy violins and tragic dirges.

But if, like me, you are looking for some historical detail wrapped around a fast paced, twist filled plot, you will not be a big fan. I also felt the main character was too gloomy and brooding. I came to care about her, but I didn't like her one bit. The denouement was good, but I had to wait too long for it.

metaphor says

I am leaving behind everything except myself.

*

Then I am terrified that I will be overcome by memories...

*

In order not to lose myself in this city of strangers, I carry a country inside my head. My parents' memories become my own, as if I had lived their childhoods, their adolescence and I have collected the memories of my aunts and uncles, too, and my cousins, and the memories of characters in books I've read.

*

I knew I was on my native soil. I felt it in the way dawn filtered through the tall, symmetrical fir trees. In the way sunflowers swayed in the warm-cool summer air that caressed my face through the open window. I knew it from the smell of wet tree bark, pine resin, and the and the unique scent of the flower called queen of the night that opened up at dusk and filled the air with its dizzying fragrance until dawn all summer long. I knew it because all my limbs felt the right size, and because I could hear the echoes of my name, my laughter and moans stuck for ever in the valleys. I came back avid for the smells and tastes of my childhood.

Liviu says

Very disappointing book - as someone who lived through the period described in the book in Romania, I found the atmosphere very inaccurate - focused on the ultra-dramatic miseries of the privileged rather than the day to day numbing hell of 5 hour food lines for milk and bread, lack of water, electricity and so on that afflicted regular people.

Living under Ceausescu's regime was hell but not for the reasons of the book - unless of course you were part of the privileged who wanted more...

Also the style of the book is way overwrought like shouting.

Two stars for the try.

Elizabeth says

An excellent book to read as I've just returned from Romania and a tour of Ceausescu's palace, an 80 room mansion he hid from his own people while draining the national treasury and starving the citizens. This book clearly follows the author's own life and portrays with telling details the drudgery and despair of living in a police state. I would have liked fewer dreams, but other than that I found it moving and compelling.

Pamela Pickering says

Although I found the author's writing style a little hard to read, I still found myself being pulled into Mona's story. Probably like most of us out there, I've read very little fiction about Romania so I really have no baseline to compare it to. The author is very knowledgeable about Romania during the 1970s through 1980s and I found the story very informative. Although another reviewer has panned this book stating the story was more of a person's of privilege (unlike most Romanians during that time) I don't think it should be panned because of this. It was the life the author knew, and if this life is one of privilege, it certainly shows how bad things were in Romania.

The book was rating a strong 4 stars for me. Unfortunately there were so many dream sequences that by the time I was about 2/3 of the way through it became really irritating and I would say to myself, "Really? Again?." Also, **(view spoiler)** I felt there was this big build up towards the ending which ended with a mild thud--sort of like a pebble hitting a dirt path.
