



## Accordion Crimes

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In the highly acclaimed novels POSTCARDS (1992) and THE SHIPPING NEWS (1993), E. Annie Proulx showed how individuals are frustrated and destroyed by their own frailties and by an indifferent and malevolent fate. ACCORDION CRIMES is even darker than those works, primarily because it extends this lesson in life's miseries across the span of a century and applies it to dozens of different people.

The protagonist of the novel and, significantly, the character that survives longest is an accordion, crafted in Sicily and brought to the United States by its maker. When he is killed by an anti-Italian mob, the accordion passes to a black Louisianian, who is also murdered, then to a German immigrant who has settled in Iowa. Later it goes to Texas, to Maine, back to Louisiana, then to Chicago, Illinois, and to Montana. Its existence ends in Mississippi, when some children throw it onto the highway to be crushed by an eighteen-wheeler.

Even then, the accordion fares better than its owners. If they are not murdered by their fellow human beings, they are destroyed either by nature, often in an untimely fashion (killed, for example, by the venom of a spider or a rattlesnake), or by their own needs and desires. Examples of the latter include the German Hans Beutle, who dies after an operation to restore his virility, or the French Canadian Dolor Gagnon, who kills himself when he has to give up his music.

Although there is much sadness in ACCORDION CRIMES, there are also scenes of celebration, set to the sound of accordion music. Whether it is used to play polkas or zydeco, Basque or Mexican folk songs, the accordion reminds immigrants of their past and makes a difficult present bearable. In its ethnic neutrality, the accordion provides a model for this new country, whose people must learn to accept and appreciate their very diversity.

## Sources for Further Study

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