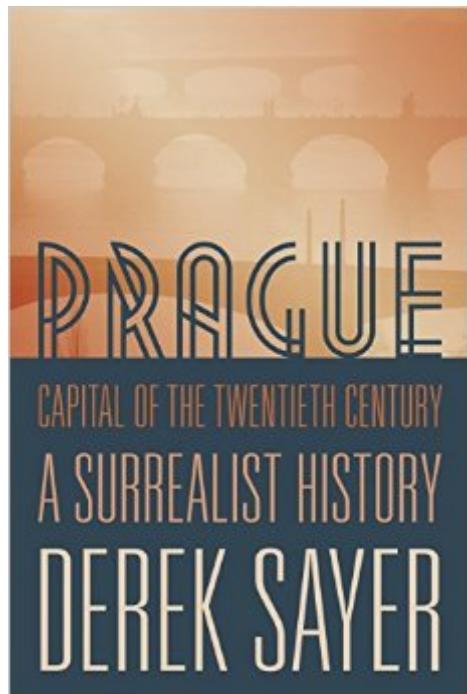


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Prague, Capital Of The Twentieth Century: A Surrealist History



Synopsis

Setting out to recover the roots of modernity in the boulevards, interiors, and arcades of the "city of light," Walter Benjamin dubbed Paris "the capital of the nineteenth century." In this eagerly anticipated sequel to his acclaimed *Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History*, Derek Sayer argues that Prague could well be seen as the capital of the much darker twentieth century. Ranging across twentieth-century Prague's astonishingly vibrant and always surprising human landscape, this richly illustrated cultural history describes how the city has experienced (and suffered) more ways of being modern than perhaps any other metropolis. Located at the crossroads of struggles between democratic, communist, and fascist visions of the modern world, twentieth-century Prague witnessed revolutions and invasions, national liberation and ethnic cleansing, the Holocaust, show trials, and snuffed-out dreams of "socialism with a human face." Yet between the wars, when Prague was the capital of Europe's most easterly parliamentary democracy, it was also a hotbed of artistic and architectural modernism, and a center of surrealism second only to Paris. Focusing on these years, Sayer explores Prague's spectacular modern buildings, monuments, paintings, books, films, operas, exhibitions, and much more. A place where the utopian fantasies of the century repeatedly unraveled, Prague was tailor-made for surrealist André Breton's "black humor," and Sayer discusses the way the city produced unrivaled connoisseurs of grim comedy, from Franz Kafka and Jaroslav Hasek to Milan Kundera and Václav Havel. A masterful and unforgettable account of a city where an idling flaneur could just as easily be a secret policeman, this book vividly shows why Prague can teach us so much about the twentieth century and what made us who we are.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mr. Sayer's earlier book on Czech history is a classic, but it stops at the most interesting point. The flowering of surrealism in Prague is an untold story in the west, one that allows us to see "modernism" in a new light. Mr. Sayer's book is a key piece of historical writing for understanding how the 20th century developed and suggests how this century might be different. Can't recommend this book highly enough.

Precious writing style. Author is enamored of his own accumulated knowledge of Prague, but not very good at communicating about it. It's overly detailed and full of references and names, that are known only to those already with an intricate knowledge of the period and area, without putting them in cultural context for the non-initiated.. Chapters are long and rambling, and at any given point one finds oneself asking, "what is the subject of this chapter, anyway". In its own way, overwhelmingly comprehensive coverage of the period. Good pictures.

Jindřich Átyrský is in this book, so it's a rare find. I read it while I took the train in to Berlin from Prague.

Very nice account of Prague, useful work of cultural studies in a historical perspective.

Steered me to some interesting places to see in Prague but the prose is so turgid it is hard to read for more than a page or two without turning away to do something else.

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