



Autumn in Peking

Boris Vian , Paul Knobloch (Translator)

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Boris Vian was a jack of all trades - although unfortunately his name was Boris and "Boris of all trades" never took off as a turn of phrase. But nevertheless Vian was a great songwriter, playwright, singer, jazz critic and, of course novelist so it should have been Boris instead of Jack. Vian's 1947 novel Autumn in Peking (L'Automne a Pekin) is perhaps Vian's most slapstick work, with an added amount of despair in its exotic recipe for a violent cocktail drink.

The story takes place in the imaginary desert called Exopotamie where all the leading characters take part in the building of a train station with tracks that go nowhere. Houses and buildings are destroyed to build this unnecessary structure - and in Vian's world waste not, make not.

In Alistair Rolls' pioneering study of Vian's novels, "The Flight of the Angels," he expresses that Exopotamie is a thinly disguised version of Paris, where after the war the city started changing its previous centuries of architecture to something more modern. Yes, something dull to take the place of what was exciting and mysterious.

Vian, in a mixture of great humor and unequal amount of disgust, introduces various 'eccentric' characters in this 'desert' adventure, such as Anne and Angel who are best friends; and Rochelle who is in love and sleeps with Anne, while Angel is madly in love with her.

Besides the trio there is also Doctor Mangemanche; the archeologist Athanagore Porphyrogenite, his aide, Cuivre; and Pipo - all of them in a locality similar to Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, where there is a tinge of darkness and anything is possible, except for happiness.

Autumn in Peking Details

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From Reader Review *Autumn in Peking* for online ebook

Marcus Mennes says

Autumn in Peking – Boris Vian

A few years ago I met a thirty something Frenchman in a youth hostel in Bariloche, Argentina and he confessed to me he had read everything by Boris Vian – including many works yet to be translated into English – but had read them a long time ago, during his University years, and that he hasn't revisited them since. Vian represents a period author for my French friend; specifically young adulthood. Similar to say Kurt Vonnegut, Jack Kerouac, Ayn Rand, or Hermann Hesse for young readers in the U.S. (if indeed these are still viable youth magnets today...?). I know when I was 19 years old I carried around a rumpled paperback of Hesse's "Narcissus and Goldmund" in my back pocket as I strode across the college green. As a young man I was drawn to tales of vagabonds traveling the open road, as well as works of a jaded literary humor, i.e. "Catcher in the Rye" "The Crying of Lot 49" "Cat's Cradle" etc.

I didn't discover Vian until my late 20's, and, I suppose as I am currently still immature for my age, I can state with sincere confidence how much I continue to appreciate and enjoy entering the hip, weird, edgy world of Boris Vian's fictions. The publisher Tam Tam Books has made it their mission to bring Vian to the English speaking world, and their efforts deserve our gratitude:

<http://www.tamtambooks.com/>

<http://tamtambooks-tosh.blogspot.com/>

Although Paul Knobloch conjures admirable magic with his inspired, fun, readable translation, a work like "Autumn in Peking" with the author's idiosyncratic wordplay, fantasy and innuendo, questions the validity of literary translation, at least on a linguistic level. In his preface the translator admits "Translation is a tricky business, and translating Vian can be downright daunting." The story itself with its otherworldly setting and absurd events translates well, and the Tam Tam edition is a fantastic romp. Vian's imagination lives in translation, and since I'm someone that doesn't read French, I can only speculate as to the depth and nuance present in the original text.

I'll try to avoid cheap comparisons in this review, but the single work Vian's "Autumn in Peking" most reminds me of isn't a book at all, but Terry Gilliam's film "Brazil." It's large, imaginative, subversive, slapstick...pick your adjective, the book is that clever. For the Vian newbie, I'd recommend beginning with his surrealistic masterpiece "Foam of the Daze" but for the adept, the Vian veteran, or just someone that enjoys a challenging work of imaginative writing, "Autumn in Peking" is a fascinating, extended belly laugh of a book...

Andrea Poulain says

Conocido por sus trabajos surrealistas, en *El otoño en Pekín*, una serie de personajes variopintos y extraños se reúnen en el desierto de Exopotamia, donde ha nacido el loco proyecto de construir un ferrocarril. Por supuesto, hablando de Vian y de surrealismo, ni el otoño, ni Pekín tienen que ver con todo el libro. De hecho

casi nada tiene que ver con nada, como bien lo anuncia la contraportada. Sin embargo, aun surrealista, Vian nos habla del amor, del deseo y un poco de la explotación. Un libro entretenido, aunque me temo que no a la altura del libro anterior de Vian que leí, La espuma de los días. Interesante y vertiginoso. Lo recomiendo, por supuesto, a menos de que no tolere el surrealismo. Entonces, ni siquiera cometes el error de acercarte a él.

Raúl says

Fantástico. Hay que poseer mucha imaginación para crear un mundo como el descrito en esta obra. Escrito con lenguaje culto, pero con gran espontaneidad, lleva lo absurdo, más allá que cualquier predecesor. Me ha hecho gracia las citas absolutamente fuera de lugar, que encabezan los capítulos...

Dominique says

Non, Boris Vian n'a pas écrit que "j'irai cracher sur vos tombes". Le récit ne se passe pas à Pékin, mais est bien dans le style de Boris Vian : loufoque, absurde, acerbe, hilarant, burlesque et enchanteur. Ce livre n'est pas d'une lecture aisée si l'on ne veut pas perdre l'essentiel du fil des événements.

Une de ses citations a depuis toujours retenu mon attention : "Les prix littéraires sont remis dans l'indifférence générale par des collègues de vieux gâteaux qui ont rangé leur révolte au vestiaire depuis bien longtemps". Elle ne s'applique d'ailleurs pas qu'aux écrivains, mais est tout aussi valable pour les politiciens, les acteurs, les cinéastes, les musiciens, les penseurs et les hommes en général....

Un grand écrivain méconnu (il a fait l'objet de multiples censures), musicien de jazz hors-pair, acteur, poète et peintre. Ami de Raymond Quenau, JP Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir et Camus. Tout est dit

Rosa Ramôa says

"Outono em Pequim" é uma espécie de manifesto criativo contra o racionalismo!!!

É a definição de surrealismo*

É o desprezo pela lógica e pelos padrões estabelecidos...

É irreal...

É imaginação sem limites...

É arte e poesia...

É anarquia?

É o homem e a natureza interpretados à não luz da razão!

É o sonho, o inconsciente e a imaginação!

É corrosão...cheia e vazia!

É sobre coisas tão importantes que não servem para nada*

Nicoleta says

Absurd și adevărat.

Crimele par firești, totuși omorăm în fiecare zi, dar nu ne asumăm responsabilitatea pentru ele.

Homosexualii sunt văzuți ca limitați, impunându-și singuri limitarea. Femeile frumoasele se consumă repede. Dacă iubești o femeie ar trebui să o lași înainte să o consumi de tot. Beaudelaire zicea că a iubi o femeie inteligentă e ca pederastia.

Munca e inutilă, multa hârțogărie și injustiție în plai.

Christina Zolotarova says

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Eldonfoil TH*E Whatever Champion says

5 stars for the first 30 pages, but then I don't know, feels like I'm in part cartoon, part American movie. None of the characterizations, conflicts, banter, and absurd predicaments got to me like the A and B vignettes early on. Vian has his moments of wicked irony, but it's tough to sustain given the singular, snappy tone spread across the set up and wide cast of characters on Exopotamie.

3.5 stars.

João Carlos says

5 Estrelas Surrealistas

Ilustração by Ievgen Kharuk

”Outono em Pequim é um romance do escritor francês **Boris Vian** (1920 – 1959), publicado originalmente em 1947, com uma reedição em 1956. A minha edição, comprada em 1990, é das **“Publicações Dom Quixote”** com tradução da escritora **Luísa Neto Jorge**.

Na contracapa da segunda edição francesa de **”Outono em Pequim”** podia ler-se o seguinte aviso fundamental: **”Esta obra não trata, naturalmente, nem do Outono, nem da China. Qualquer relação com estas coordenadas espaciais e temporais seria uma mera coincidência involuntária.”**

”Outono em Pequim” começa com quatro capítulos preliminares – A, B, C e D – que “introduzem” quase todas as personagens da “história”, a que se segue a 1ª PASSAGEM (que no caso específico refere: **“É oportuno, nesta altura, fazermos uma breve pausa, porque isto vai passar a ter coesão e a dividir-se em capítulos normais.”** (pág. 57)) – no total são quatro capítulos “PASSAGEM” (cada PASSAGEM é uma interrupção na estrutura do romance onde o narrador efectua alguns comentários, quase sempre irónicos, sobre a “história” ou as “histórias”) e três capítulos “ANDAMENTO” (com subcapítulos “REUNIÃO”).

Ilustração by **Ievgen Kharuk**

”Outono em Pequim” é um romance que começa com um título que não tem nenhuma relação com a “história”, que exige uma profunda cumplicidade do leitor, com cerca de trinta personagens, sumariamente caracterizadas, onde, normalmente, os sentimentos estão ausentes; algumas das relações entre as várias personagens são evocadas apenas no nível sexual; com uma linha narrativa fragmentada que se vai unificando com as “histórias” e os dramas, relacionados com a construção de uma linha de caminho-de-ferro no deserto, da Exopotâmia,

Boris Vian efectua uma brilhante reflexão sobre inúmeras temáticas, desde o funcionamento arbitrário e injusto das grandes empresas e dos projectos “faraónicos”, que se revelam sem nenhuma utilidade; ridicularizando algumas profissões, médicos e engenheiros; elaborando uma profunda e interessante reflexão sobre o amor, sobre o ciúme e o desgaste das relações amorosas, sobre a amizade e o ódio, sobre o desespero e a incompreensão, sobre a homossexualidade, sobre o assassinio e o suicídio.

Ilustração by **Ievgen Kharuk**

”Outono em Pequim” é livro brilhante, simultaneamente, realista e surreal, com personagens verdadeiramente originais, sobre um “tempo” e um lugar imaginário, a “Exopotâmia”, sobre o absurdo e o ilógico, numa linguagem criativa, inventiva, original e inimitável.

Boris Vian (1920 – 1959)

Sara Jesus says

Esta uma história que não se passa nem no Outono nem em Pequim. É um jornada de vários heróis e anti heróis como Amadis, Ângelo, o Ana, o Silvio, o Cláudio Leão, o abade Joãzinho e muitos outros. Todos embarcam numa aventura para a Expotania.

Amadis pretendente construir um caminho de ferro, Ângelo é o engenheiro, Silvio é o cozinheiro e o arqueólogo e o Cláudio Leão é um assassino.

Ao longa da viagem, alguns morrem misteriosamente e o calor do deserto começa a dar dores de cabeça .

Nate D says

Almost-surrealist Boris Vian's narratives are subject to utter mutability and unpredictability. At any moment, anything may happen, any however casual phrase has the power to spin off (via a tangential nuance of meaning) a totally unexpected plot thread, which will then prove integral to all that follows. However, anyone can write an insane and utterly unforeseeable text (see any number of mid-grade automatic texts by actual surrealists); Boris Vian's unique talent is for making his unpredictability tie together into a congruent and memorable story as a whole, in which all individually bizarre moments have a logical (in retrospect) place.

....And then I kept reading and the disappointingly atrocious gender politics began. Ugh, come on Boris Vian, do you really believe all this stuff? I was ready to like you -- perhaps even love you -- just on the strength of Heartsnatcher and the surprisingly decent Mood Indigo film adaptation, but this is trying. The plot also seems rather less directed, as well, which would be less of an issue if you weren't already annoying me. Or maybe you're just messing with me? You claim that Rochelle is the protagonist, yet she isn't even a half-formed character, she's the worst kind of female-as-object/prize, with the added insult of becoming irrevocably tarnished by being in a relationship for a few months, and apparently represents all of womenkind in limited scope of vision. Let's not even discuss Angel's "inevitable" decisions, but he has to be one of the most repugnant characters that we could seemingly be expected to identify with. Seriously problematic.

And all this despite some really strange and lovely scenes worked in throughout. The black area is a fantastically ambiguous conception, and the descriptions and linguistic switchbacks are stellar. I have to commend the publisher and translator for getting this into English at all, but I don't have to love the troublingly broken vision it seems to expounding, though.

Flamyoi says

Roman non terminé

Attirée par le titre prometteur, je suis tombée de haut en n'arrivant pas à aller plus loin que la moitié du roman. Le surréalisme est moins présent que dans l'Ecume des jours, mais ça ne rend pas l'histoire plus intéressante ou compréhensible pour autant. Je voulais le terminer pour avoir une idée de la fin, mais je ne suis pas sûre que cela s'arrange et je n'ai pas envie de perdre mon temps.

Sviatoslav says

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Sol Rezza says

Este libro me lo regaló mi madre cuando estaba entrando en la adolescencia. Me dijo:- si todavía no has leído nada de Boris Vian, este es el primer libro que debes leer.

Así lo recomiendo.

Sandra says

E' il secondo Vian che leggo.

Appena lette le prime pagine l'atmosfera, il linguaggio, le tematiche "vianesche" sono emerse e mi hanno catturato ancora una volta.

Sembrava che nulla fosse cambiato.

Ci sono i temi cari allo scrittore: l'amore, la morte, la forte critica sociale e religiosa, affrontati nella solita maniera "surreale" di Vian.

Invece, procedendo nella lettura, tutto è diverso rispetto a "la schiuma dei giorni".

Là l'amore tra Chloè e Colin è un amore totalizzante e profondo che riempie la vita (seppur caduco, come tutto).

Qua, invece, percepisci un'atmosfera di inutilità e di negatività che non salva i personaggi nè i sentimenti.

A partire dall'inutilità del titolo del libro, che nulla ha a che spartire con l'autunno nè con Pechino; poi la trama: si parte per costruire una ferrovia in Exopotamia, un luogo desertico dove non vive nessuno. A che serve?

Nessun personaggio della storia emerge positivamente.

A partire dai personaggi femminili, che in "la schiuma dei giorni" sono delineati con dolcezza.

Le donne sono rappresentate da Rochelle, donna "amata" da due uomini, Anne e Angel. Rochelle ha scelto Anne, ma non è una scelta felice. Rochelle è sciupata, giorno dopo giorno, dal sesso con Anne. Lui "la sfascia. La demolisce".

Rochelle "ama" Anne, o meglio, "fa l'amore" con lui, ma andrebbe a letto anche con Angel.

Anne "ama" Rochelle, ma ritiene che le donne non sono indispensabili, nè fisicamente nè intellettualmente, perchè sono troppo limitate. E, dopo averla sciupata, se ne vuole liberare.

Angel "ama" Rochelle, ma sostiene che "le donne non hanno nient'altro per attirare un uomo. Solo il loro corpo."

Non si salva nessuno.

L'unico personaggio che mi ha fatto simpatia è l'abate Petitjean, un buffo prete che recita "singolari" preghiere e non dimentica la sua umanità.

Il sapore che rimane al termine del libro è quello della sconfitta e dell'inutilità del vivere.

Gli dò tre stelle solo perchè è Vian.

Ernesto Briz says

Me parece mágica la realidad que construye Vian en el libro, pero de muy difícil lectura y comprensión. Doy esta nota porque reconozco la dificultad del artificio. He leído sobre treinta o cuarenta páginas y he saltado directamente al final lo que también dice que necesitaba saber el final aunque ciertamente me he quedado un poco igual. Buscaré en su bibliografía.

Dolmar says

He empezado la obra como si, a la velocidad de la luz, sorteara miles de obstáculos en una carrera muy divertida. Ese desquicio se frenó poco a poco, dando paso a una risa más tranquila y apreciando cierta crítica social, detrás de esas escenas tan estrafalarias. No hay detalle que a Vian se le haya escapado. La he encontrado perfecta, 5 estrellas.

Tosh says

Although I am the publisher of this masterpiece, I still feel I can write about it - because I came upon it as a reader. I think Vian's "Autumn in Peking" is one of the great novels of French literature. it's hysterical for one thing, and on the other I find it moving in how Vian portrays his characters struggling to get the train tracks down... For what purpose?

??? ?????? says

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Jason says

Is there a statue of Boris Vian somewhere? There right proper oughter be. Say I, Pook J. Arbuckle III. Boris Vian was a supreme polymath and renaissance man. Originally an engineer and learn'd man of science, he became a writer both of literature (under his own name and, more successfully whilst he was alive, the nom de guerre Vernon Sullivan) and music. Not only did he write and perform popular songs (generally of an insubordinate and irreverent nature), influencing Serge Gainsbourg and countless others, he was passionate about jazz, wrote about it, played the trumpet, and kept company w/ many a mid-century jazz luminary. It might be tempting to frame his novels as the wild flights of a gifted soloist, and though there would be truth of a sort to be found in so doing, it hardly gives you an adequate sense of what Boris the novelist is up to. (I would strongly recommend not trying to compare AUTUMN IN PEKING to jazz.) It was literary giant (and all around good time) Raymond Queneau who first secured Vian publication under the flag of Gallimard. This should and does tell you something. Vian and Queneau are something not unlike Art Deco peas in a hallucinated pod. Both are represented by works full of extremely brainy and entirely literary comic antics. While Queneau tends to lean a little more in the direction of the brain and the conceptual game, Vian tends to lean to the belly laughs (but only just). Both writers strike me as having had an inestimable (and under-discussed) influence on the esteemed American postmodernists (so-called or whatever). Reading Vian I especially think of Pynchon at his most anarchist and Robert Coover at his most mischievous. The myriad non-sequitur epigraphs peppered throughout AUTUMN IN PEKING may cause you to be reminded of those

in GRAVITY'S RAINBOW ("What?" quoth Richard Milhous Nixon). Not only the epigraphs here are quasi-dadaist. There's that title. No, the book does not take place in Peking nor is Peking ever mentioned. Autumn? I believe we are well beyond consideration of earth seasons. While he struggled to maintain much of a profile in his lifetime, Vian was subsequently loved by the eager-to-drop-the-fuck-out kids of May '68. AUTUMN IN PEKING is wild, irreverent story-smashing of a rebellious nature, to be sure, but it goes a little further than that. This is steadfastly an up-with-slackers / down-with-bosses deal we have here. Loafers, unite! The book takes place in a fictional desert called Exopotamie (a Deleuze and Guattari-approved "smooth" space if e'er there was one) where for no good reason a railroad is to be built that presumably will connect nothing to nothing. We are not only dealing w/ the absurd here, but mockery of the whole universe of human industry. Anarchist shit, right and proper. AUTUMN IN PEKING is also nakedly fatalist in its assessment of sex relations, which won't in the least hamper its connecting w/ despondent young men beyond the reaches of hope (hey there kids of May '68 and way way beyond!). Beyond the the reaches of hope, that is, and in the market for some belly laughs. Merry hijinks await. Merry hijinks w/ teeth. Prophylactics unnecessary.
